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JAN VEDDER'S WIFE

BY
AMELIA E. BARR

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CHAPTER I.

JAN'S WEDDING.

“Eastward, afar, the coasts of men
were seen
Dim, shadowy, and spectral; like a still
Broad land of spirits lay the vacant sea
Beneath the silent heavens—here and
there,
Perchance, a vessel skimmed the
watery waste,
Like a white-winged sea-bird, but it
moved
Too pale and small beneath the veil of
space.
There, too, went forth the sun
Like a white angel, going down to visit
The silent, ice-washed cloisters of the
Pole.”

—RICHTER'S "TITAN."

More than fifty years ago this thing happened: Jan Vedder was betrothed to Margaret Fae. It was at the beginning of the Shetland summer, that short interval of inexpressible beauty, when the amber sunshine lingers low in the violet skies from week to week; and the throstle and the lark sing at midnight, and the whole land has an air of enchantment, mystic, wonderful, and far off.

In the town of Lerwick all was still, though it was but nine o'clock; for the men were at the ling-fishing, and the narrow flagged street and small quays were quite deserted. Only at the public fountain there was a little crowd of women and girls, and they sat around its broad margin, with their water pitchers and their knitting, laughing and chatting in the dreamlike light.

“Well, and so Margaret Fae marries at last; she, too, marries, like the rest of the world.”

“Yes, and why not?”

“As every one knows, it is easier to begin that coil than to end it; and no one has ever thought that Margaret would marry Jan—he that is so often at the dance, and so seldom at the kirk.”

“Yes, and it is said that he is not much of a man. Magnus Yool can wag him here; and Nicol Sinclair send him there, and if Suneva Torr but cast her nixie-eyes on him, he leaves all to walk by her side. It is little mind of his own he hath; besides that, he is hard to deal with, and obstinate.”

“That is what we all think, Gisla; thou alone hast uttered it. But we will say no more of Jan, for oft ill comes of women's talk.”

The speakers were middle-aged women who had husbands and sons in the fishing fleet, and they cast an anxious glance toward it, as they lifted their water pitchers to their heads, and walked slowly home together, knitting as they went. Lerwick had then only one street of importance, but it was of considerable length, extending in the form of an amphitheater along the shore, and having numberless little lanes or closes, intersected by stairs, running backward to an eminence above the town. The houses were generally large and comfortable, but they were built without the least regard to order. Some faced the sea, and some the land, and the gable ends projected on every side, and at every conceivable angle. Many of their foundations were drilled out of the rock upon the shore, and the smooth waters of the bay were six feet deep at the open doors or windows.

The utmost quiet reigned there. Shetland possessed no carts or carriages, and only the clattering of a shelty's gallop, or the song of a drunken sailor disturbed the echoes. The whole place had a singular, old-world look, and the names over the doors carried one back to Norseland and the Vikings. For in these houses their children dwelt, still as amphibious as their forefathers, spending most of their lives upon the sea, rarely sleeping under a roof, or warming themselves at a cottage fire; a rugged, pious, silent race, yet subject, as all Norsemen are, to fits of passionate and uncontrollable emotion.

Prominently among the Thorkels and Halcros, the Yools and Traills, stood out the name of Peter Fae. Peter had the largest store in Lerwick, he had the largest fish-curing shed, he was the largest boat owner. His house of white stone outside the town was two stories high, and handsomely furnished; and it was said that he would be able to leave his daughter Margaret £10,000; a very large fortune for a Shetland girl. Peter was a Norseman of pronounced type, and had the massive face and loose-limbed strength of his race, its faculty for money-getting, and its deep religious sentiment. Perhaps it would be truer to say, its deep Protestant sentiment, for Norsemen have always been Protestants; they hated the Romish church as soon

as they heard of it.

If the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American wishes to see whence came the distinguishing traits of his race, let him spend a few weeks among the Shetland Norsemen, for they have pre-eminently those qualities we are accustomed to pride ourselves upon possessing—the open air freshness of look, the flesh and blood warmth of grip, the love of the sea, the resolute earnestness of being and doing, the large, clear sincerity of men accustomed to look stern realities in the face.

Peter's wife, Thora, was also of pure Norse lineage, and in many an unrecognized way her ancestors influenced her daily life. She had borne four sons, but, in the expressive form of Shetland speech, "the sea had got them;" and her daughter Margaret was the sole inheritor of their gathered gold. Thora was a proud, silent woman, whose strongest affections were with her children in their lonely sea graves. In her heart, deeper down than her faith could reach, lay a conviction that the Faes and Thorkels who had sailed those seas for centuries had "called" her boys to them. And she was always nursing an accusation against herself for a rite which she had observed for their welfare, but which she was now sure had been punished by their death. For often, when they had been tossing on the black North Sea, she had gone to the top of the hill, and looking seaward she had raised from the past the brown-sailed ships, and the big yellow-haired men tugging at their oars; and in her heart there had been a supplication to their memory, which Peter, had he known it, would have denounced, with the sternest wrath, as neither more nor less than a service to Satan.

But what do we know of the heart nearest to our own? What do we know of our own heart? Some ancestor who sailed with Offa, or who fought with the Ironsides, or protested with the Covenanters, or legislated with the Puritans, may, at this very hour, be influencing us, in a way of which we never speak, and in which no other soul intermeddles.

Thora had one comfort. Her daughter was of a spirit akin to her own. Peter had sent her to Edinburgh, hoping that she would bring back to his northern home some of those lowland refinements of which he had a shadowy and perhaps exaggerated idea. But Margaret Fae's character was not of that semi-fluid nature which can easily be run into new molds. She had looked with distrust and dislike upon a life which seemed to her artificial and extravagant, and had come back to Shetland with every Norse element in her character strengthened and confirmed.

What then made her betroth herself to Jan Vedder? A weak, wasteful man, who had little but his good-natured, pleasant ways and his great beauty to recommend him. And yet the wise and careful Margaret Fae loved him; loved him spontaneously, as the brook loves to run, and the bird loves to sing.

"But bear in mind, husband," said Thora, on the night of the betrothal, "that this thing is of thy own doing. Thou hired Jan Vedder, when thou couldst well have hired a better man. Thou brought him to thy house. Well, then, was there any wonder that ill-luck should follow the foolish deed?"

"Wife, the lad is a pleasant lad. If he had money to even Margaret's tocher, and if he were more punctual at the ordinances, there would be no fault to him."

"So I think, too. But when a man has not religion, and has beside empty pockets, then he is poor for both worlds. It seems, then, that our Margaret must marry with a poor man. And let me tell thee, it was a little thing moved thee, for because Jan had a handsome face, and a bright smile, thou liked him."

"Many a sore heart folks get who set liking before judgment. But if there is good in the lad, then to get married will bring it out."

"That is as it may be. Often I have seen it bring out ill. Can any one tell if a man be good or ill, unless they dwell under the same roof with him? Abroad, who is so pleasant as Ragon Torr? But at home, every body there has to look to his wishes."

At this point in the conversation, Margaret entered. She was a tall, straight girl, with a finely-featured, tranquil face, admirably framed in heavy coils of hair that were yellow as dawn. Her complexion was exquisite, and her eyes blue, and cool, and calm. She was still and passionless in manner, but far from being cold at heart; nevertheless, her soul, with the purity of crystal, had something also of its sharp angles; something which might perhaps become hard and cutting. She carried herself loftily, and walked with an air of decision. Peter looked at her steadily and said:

"Now, thou hast done ill, Margaret. When a young girl marries, she must face life for herself; and many are the shoulders that ask for burdens they can not bear."

"Yes, indeed! And it is all little to my mind," added the mother. "I had spoken to thee for thy cousin Magnus Hay; and then here comes this Jan Vedder!"

"Yes, he comes!" and Margaret stood listening, the pink color on her cheeks spreading to the tips of her ears, and down her white throat. "Yes, he comes!" and with the words, Jan stood in the open door. A bright, handsome fellow he was! There was no one in all the Islands that was half so beautiful.

"Peter," he cried joyfully, "here has happened great news! The 'Sure-Giver' is in the harbor with all her cargo safe. She came in with the tide. All her planks and nails are lucky."

"That is great news, surely, Jan. But it is ill luck to talk of good luck. Supper is ready sit down with us."

But Thora spoke no word, and Jan looked at Margaret with the question in his eyes.

"It means this, and no more, Jan. I have told my father and mother that thou would make me thy wife."

"That is what I desire, most of all things."

"Then there is little need of long talk. I betroth myself to thee here for life or death, Jan Vedder; and my father and my mother they are the witnesses;" and as she spoke, she went to Jan, and put her hands in his, and Jan drew her proudly to his breast and kissed her.

Thora left the room without a glance at the lovers. Peter stood up, and said angrily: "Enough, and more than enough has been said this night. No, Jan; I will not put my palm against thine till we have spoken together. There is more to a marriage than a girl's 'Yes', and a wedding ring."

That was the manner of Jan's betrothal; and as he walked rapidly back into the town, there came a feeling into his heart of not being quite pleased with it. In spite of Margaret's affection and straightforward decision, he felt humiliated.

"It is what a man gets who woos a rich wife," he muttered; "but I will go and tell Michael Snorro about it." And he smiled at the prospect, and hurried onward to Peter's store.

For Michael Snorro lived there. The opening to the street was closed; but the one facing the sea was wide open; and just within it, among the bags of feathers and swans' down, the piles of seal skins, the barrels of whale oil, and of sea-birds' eggs, and the casks of smoked geese, Michael was sitting. The sea washed the warehouse walls, and gurgled under the little pier, that extended from the door, but it was the only sound there was. Michael, with his head in his hands, sat gazing into the offing where many ships lay at anchor. At the sound of Jan's voice his soul sprang into his face for a moment, and he rose, trembling with pleasure, to meet him.

In all his desolate life, no one had loved Michael Snorro. A suspicion that "he was not all there," and therefore "one of God's bairns," had insured him, during his long orphanage, the food, and clothes, and shelter, necessary for life; but no one had given him love. And Michael humbly acknowledged that he could not expect it, for nature had been cruelly unkind to him. He was, indeed, of almost gigantic size, but awkward and ill-proportioned. His face, large and flat, had the whiteness of clay, except at those rare intervals when his soul shone through it; and no mortal, but Jan Vedder, had ever seen that illumination.

It would be as hard to tell why Michael loved Jan as to say why Jonathan's soul clave to David as soon as he saw him. Perhaps it was an unreasonable affection, but it was one passing the love of woman, and, after all, can we guess how the two men may have been spiritually related? There was some tie of which flesh and blood knew not between them.

"Michael, I am going to be married."

"Well, Jan—and what then?"

"It will be with me as others; I shall have children, and grow rich, and old, and die."

"Who is it, Jan?"

"Margaret Fae."

"I thought that. Well, thou art sunshine, Jan, and she is like a pool of clear water. If the sun shines not, then the water will freeze, and grow cold and hard."

"Thou dost not like women, Michael."

"Nay, but I trust them not. Where the devil can not go, he sends a woman. Well, then, he will find no such messenger for me. He must come himself. That is well; the fight will be easier."

"When I am married I shall sail my own boat, and thou shalt be always with me, Michael. We will feel the fresh wind blowing in the canvas, and the salt spindrift in our faces, and the boat going as if she were a solan flying for the rock."

"Is that thy thought, then? Let me tell thee that thou art counting thy fish while they are swimming. Until Peter Fae's hands are full of earth, he will not part with one gold piece. Make up thy mind to that."

"Margaret will have her tocher."

"That will be seen; but if thou wants money, Jan, there it is in my chest, and what greater joy can I have than to see it in thy hand—all of it? It would be thy grace to me."

Then Jan rose up and laid his arm across Michael's shoulder; and Michael's lifted face caught the glow of Jan's bending one and the men's souls spoke to each other, though their lips never parted.

The next day proved Michael right. Peter did not name Margaret's tocher. He said he would give Margaret a house with all needful plenishing; and he promised also to pay all the wedding expenses. But there was no word of any sum of ready money; and Jan was too proud in his poverty to ask for his right. He did, indeed, suggest that when he was a house-holder he should have more wages. But Peter would not see the justice of any such addition. "I give thee all thou art worth, and I will not give thee a Scotch merk more," he answered roughly. "When it comes to a question of wage, Jan, the son and the stranger are the same to me." And when Jan told his friend what had been promised, Michael said only: "Well, then, thou wilt have the woman also."

The twelfth of August is "the fisherman's foy" in Shetland, and the great feast of the Islands. It

was agreed, therefore, that the marriage should take place at that time. For there would be at least two hundred fishing vessels in Brassy Sound at that time, and with most of the fishermen Peter either had had business, or might have in the future.

"For three days we will keep the feast for all who choose to come," he said; and so, when the procession formed for the church, nearly six hundred men and women were waiting to follow Jan and his bride. Then Jan led her to the front of it, and there was a murmur of wonder and delight. Her dress was of the richest white satin, and her heavy golden ornaments—the heirlooms of centuries—gave a kind of barbaric splendor to it. The bright sunlight fell all over her, and added to the effect; and Jan, with a bridegroom's pardonable pride, thought she looked more than mortal.

Going to the church, the procession preserved the gravity of a religious rite; but on the return, some one touched lightly the strings of a violin, and, in a moment, hundreds of voices were chanting:

"It is often that I have said it: In the night thou art my dream, and my waking thought in the morning.

"I loved thee always; not for three months, not for a year, but I loved thee from the first, and my love shall not wither, until death part us.

"Oh, my beloved! My wife! Dearer to me than the light of the day! Closer to me than my hands and feet! Nothing but death shall part thee and me, forever!"

The singing opened their hearts; then came the feast and the dance, that endless active dance which is the kind of riot in which grave races give vent to the suppressed excitement of their lives. It did not please Margaret; she was soon weary of the noise and commotion, and heartily glad when, on the eve of the third day, she was called upon to give the parting toast:

"Here's to the men who cast the net, and the long line," she cried, lifting the silver cup above her head. "And may He hold His hand about them all, and open the mouth of the gray fish!"

"And here's to the bride," answered the oldest fisher present, "and may God give her a blessing in both hands!"

Then they separated, and some went to their homes in Lerwick and Scalloway, and others sailed to Ireland and Scotland, and even Holland; but Peter knew that however much the feast had cost him, it was money put out at good interest, and that he would be very likely to find it again at the next fishing season.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE CLOUD IN THE SKY.

"All the flowers of Love and Happiness blow double."

As it happened that year the peerie, or Indian summer, was of unusual length and beauty. The fine weather lingered until the end of October. These weeks were full of joy to Margaret and to Jan, and in them Jan showed himself in many a charming light. He played well upon the violin, and as long as love was his theme Margaret understood him. He recited to her stirring stories from the Sagas, and she thought only how handsome he looked with his flashing eyes, and flushing face. She never reflected, that the soul which could put life into these old tales was very likely to be a soul akin to the restless adventurous men of which they told. Her home and her love were sufficient for her happiness, and she expected that Jan would measure his desires by the same rule.

But in a few weeks Jan began to weary a little of a life all love-making. Many things, laid aside for a time, renewed their influence over him. He wished to let the romance and exaggeration of his married position sink into that better tenderness which is the repose of passion, and which springs from the depths of a man's best nature. But Margaret was not capable of renunciation, and Jan got to be continually afraid of wounding her sensibilities by forgetting some outward token of affection. He tried to talk to her of his projects, of his desire to go to sea again, of his weariness of the store. She could understand none of these things. Why should he want to leave her? Had he ceased to love her? Her father was happy in the store. It offended her to hear a word against it. Yet she thought she loved Jan perfectly, and would have deeply resented Michael Snorro's private verdict against her—that she was a selfish woman.

One morning, as the first snow was beginning to fall, a big Dutch skipper in his loose tunic and high cap, and wooden clogs, came stalking into Peter's store, and said, "Well, here at last comes 'The North Star.' Many of us thought she would come no more."

Jan was packing eggs, but he signed to Michael to take his place, and in a few minutes he was among the crowd watching her arrival. She came hurrying in, with all her sails set, as if she were fleeing from the northern winter behind her. Her stout sides were torn by berg and floe, her decks covered with seal skins and jawbones of whales, and amidships there was a young polar bear growling in a huge cask. Her crew, weather-beaten and covered with snow and frost, had the strange look of men from lands unknown and far off. Jan had once sailed in her, and her first mate was his friend. It was like meeting one from the dead. Proudly and gladly he took him to his home. He wanted him to see his beautiful wife. He was sure Margaret would be delighted to welcome a man so brave, and so dear to him.

On the contrary, it was a deep offense to her. Christian Groat, in his sheepskin suit, oily and storm-stained, unkempt and unshorn, seemed strangely out of place in her spotless room. That he had fought with the elements, and with the monsters of the deep, made him no hero in her eyes. She was not thrilled by his adventures upon drifting floes, and among ice mountains reeling together in perilous madness. The story made Jan's blood boil, and brought the glistening tears into his big blue eyes; but Margaret's pulses beat no whit quicker. Christian Groat was only a vulgar whaler to her, and that Jan should bring him to her hearth and table made her angry.

Jan was hurt and humiliated. The visit from which he had hoped so much, was a pain and a failure. He walked back into the town with his friend, and was scarcely able to speak. Margaret also was silent and grieved. She thought Jan had wronged her. She had to make a clean cushion for the chair in which the man had sat. She persisted for days in smelling whale oil above the reek of the peat, above even the salt keenness of the winter air. Her father had never done such a thing; she could not understand Jan's thoughtlessness about her.

For two days she was silent, and Jan bore it very well, for he, too, was hurt and angry. On the third he spoke to his wife, and little by little the coolness wore away. But an active quarrel and some hard words had perhaps been better, for then there might have followed some gracious tears, and a loving reconciliation. As it was, the evenings wore silently and gloomily away. Margaret sat, mechanically knitting, her beautiful face wearing an expression of injury and resignation that was intolerably annoying to a man of Jan's temper. But though she said nothing to her husband during these unhappy hours, the devil talked very plainly in her place.

"Why," he asked Jan, "do you stay beside a sulky woman, when there are all your old companions at Ragon Torr's? There, also, is the song and the tale, and the glass of good fellowship. And who would be so heartily welcome as Jan Vedder?"

Jan knew all this well. But as he did not care to make his wife unhappy, he determined to deceive her. It was snowing, and likely to snow; Margaret would not come down to the store in such weather. So he said to her, "Michael Snorro hath a fever. He can not work. That is a bad business, for it is only I that can fill his place. The work will keep me late, wait not for me." To himself he said: "To leave her alone a few nights, that will be a good thing; when I stay next at my own hearth, she may have something to say to me."

Margaret's nature was absolutely truthful. She never doubted Jan's words. In that love of self which was a miserable omnipresence with her, she was angry with Snorro for being sick and thus interfering in her domestic life, but she fully believed her husband's statement.

Jan spent two evenings at Ragon Torr's, but on the third morning his conscience smote him a little. He looked at Margaret, and wished she would ask, "Wilt thou come home early to-night?" He would gladly have answered her, "I will come at whatever hour thou desirest." But, unfortunately, Margaret was at that moment counting her eggs, and there were at least two missing. She was a woman who delighted in small economies; she felt that she was either being wronged by her servant, or that her fowls were laying in strange nests. At that moment it was a subject of great importance to her; and she never noticed the eager, longing look in Jan's eyes.

When he said at last. "Good-by to thee, Margaret;" she looked up from her basket of eggs half reproachfully at him. She felt that Jan might have taken more interest in her loss. She had not yet divined that these small savings of hers were a source of anger and heart-burning to him. He knew well that the price of her endless knitting, her gathered eggs, wool, and swans' down, all went to her private account in Lerwick Bank. For she had been saving money since she was a child six years old, and neither father, mother, nor husband knew how much she had saved. That was a thing Margaret kept absolutely to herself and the little brown book which was in her locked drawer. There had been times when Jan could have opened it had he desired; but he had been too hurt and too proud to do so. If his wife could not voluntarily trust him, he would not solicit her confidence. And it had never struck Margaret that the little book was a hidden rock, on which every thing might yet be wrecked. It was there, though the tide of daily life flowed over it, and though it was never spoken of.

All that day Jan was sulky and obstinate, and Peter came near quarreling with him more than once. But Peter thought he knew what was the matter, and he smiled grimly to himself as he remembered Margaret's power of resistance. Perhaps a fellow-feeling made him unusually patient, for he remembered that Thora had not been brought to a state of perfect obedience until she had given him many a day of active discomfort. He watched Jan curiously and not without sympathy, for the training of wives is a subject of interest even to those who feel themselves to have been quite successful.

During the first hours of the day Jan was uncertain what to do. A trifle would have turned him either way, and in the afternoon the trifle came. A boat arrived from Kirkwall, and two of her

crew were far-off cousins. The men were in almost as bad condition as Christian Groat. He would not risk soiling Margaret's chair-cushions again, so he invited them to meet him at Ragon Torr's. As it happened Margaret had an unhappy day; many little things went wrong with her. She longed for sympathy, and began to wish that Jan would come home; indeed she was half inclined to go to the store, and ask him if he could not.

She opened the door and looked out. It was still snowing a little, as it had been for a month. But snow does not lie in Shetland, and the winters, though dreary and moist, are not too cold for the daisy to bloom every where at Christmas, and for the rye grass to have eight or ten inches of green blade. There was a young moon, too, and the Aurora, in a phalanx of rosy spears, was charging upward to the zenith. It was not at all an unpleasant night, and, with her cloak and hood of blue flannel, a walk to the store would be easy and invigorating.

As she stood undecided and unhappy, she saw a man approaching the house. She could not fail to recognize the large, shambling figure. It was Michael Snorro. A blow from his mighty hand could hardly have stunned her more. She shut the door, and sat down sick at heart. For it was evident that Snorro was not ill, and that Jan had deceived her. Snorro, too, seemed to hesitate and waver in his intentions. He walked past the house several times, and then he went to the kitchen door.

In a few minutes Elga Skade, Margaret's servant, said to her, "Here has come Michael Snorro, and he would speak with thy husband." Margaret rose, and went to him. He stood before the glowing peats, on the kitchen hearth, seeming, in the dim light, to tower to the very roof. Margaret looked up with a feeling akin to terror at the large white face in the gloom above her, and asked faintly, "What is't thou wants, Snorro?"

"I would speak with Jan."

"He is not come yet to his home. At what hour did he leave the store?"

At once Snorro's suspicions were aroused. He stood silent a minute, then he said, "He may have gone round by thy father's. I will wait."

The man frightened her. She divined that he distrusted and disapproved of her; and she could ask nothing more. She left him with Elga, but in half an hour she became too restless to bear the suspense, and returned to the kitchen. Snorro gave her no opportunity to question him. He said at once, "It is few houses in Shetland a man can enter, and no one say to him, 'Wilt thou eat or drink?'"

"I forgot, Snorro. I am troubled about Jan. What wilt thou have?"

"What thou hast ready, and Elga will get it for me."

A few minutes later he sat down to eat with a calm deliberation which Margaret could not endure. She put on her cloak and hood, and calling Elga, said, "If he asks for me, say that I spoke of my father's house."

Then she slipped out of the front door, and went with fleet steps into the town. The street, which was so narrow that it was possible to shake hands across it, was dark and empty. The shops were all shut, and the living rooms looked mostly into the closes, or out to the sea. Only here and there a lighted square of glass made her shrink into the shadow of the gables. But she made her way without hindrance to a house near the main quay. It was well lighted, and there was the sound and stir of music and singing, of noisy conversation and laughter within it.

Indeed, it was Ragon Torr's inn. The front windows were uncurtained, and she saw, as she hurriedly passed them, that the main room was full of company; but she did not pause until within the close at the side of the house, when, standing in the shadow of the outbuilt chimney, she peered cautiously through the few small squares on that side. It was as she suspected. Jan sat in the very center of the company, his handsome face all aglow with smiles, his hands busily tuning the violin he held. Torr and half a dozen sailors bent toward him with admiring looks, and Ragon's wife Barbara, going to and fro in her household duties, stopped to say something to him, at which every body laughed, but Jan's face darkened.

Margaret did not hear her name, but she felt sure the remark had been about herself, and her heart burned with anger. She was turning away, when there was a cry of pleasure, and Suneva Torr entered. Margaret had always disliked Suneva; she felt now that she hated and feared her. Her luring eyes were dancing with pleasure, her yellow hair fell in long, loose waves around her, and she went to Jan's side, put her hand on his shoulder, and said something to him.

Jan looked back, and up to her, and nodded brightly to her request. Then out sprang the tingling notes from the strings, and clear, and shrill, and musical, Suneva's voice picked them up with a charming distinctness:

"Well, then, since we are welcome to
Yool,
Up with it, Lightfoot, link it awa',
boys;
Send for a fiddler, play up the Foula
reel,
And we'll skip it as light as a maw,
boys."

Then she glanced at the men, and her father and mother, and far in the still night rang out the

stirring chorus:

“The Shaalds of Foula will pay for it a’!
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa’.”

Then the merry riot ceased, and Suneva’s voice again took up the song—

“Now for a light and a pot of good
beer,
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa’,
boys!
We’ll drink a good fishing against the
New Year,
And the Shaalds of Foula will pay for
it a’, boys.

CHORUS:

“The Shaalds of Foula will pay for it a’;
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa’.”

Margaret could bear it no longer, and, white and stern, she turned away from the window. Then she saw Michael Snorro standing beside her. Even in the darkness she knew that his eyes were scintillating with anger. He took her by the arm and led her to the end of the close. Then he said:

“Much of a woman art thou! If I was Jan Vedder, never again would I see thy face! No, never!”

“Jan lied to me! To me, his wife! Did thou think he was at my father’s? He is in Ragon Torr’s.”

“Thou lied to me also; and if Jan is in Ragon Torr’s, let me tell thee, that thou sent him there.”

“I lied not to thee. I lie to no one.”

“Yea, but thou told Elga to lie for thee. A jealous wife knows not what she does. Did thou go to thy father’s house?”

“Speak thou no more to me, Michael Snorro.” Then she sped up the street, holding her breast tightly with both hands, as if to hold back the sobs that were choking her, until she reached her own room, and locked fast her door. She sobbed for hours with all the passionate abandon which is the readiest relief of great sorrows that come in youth. In age we know better; we bow the head and submit.

When she had quite exhausted herself, she began to long for some comforter, some one to whom she could tell her trouble. But Margaret had few acquaintances; none, among the few, of whom she could make a confidant. From her father and mother, above all others, she would keep this humiliation. God she had never thought of as a friend. He was her Creator, her Redeemer, also, if it were his good pleasure to save her from eternal death. He was the Governor of the Universe; but she knew him not as a Father pitying his children, as a God tender to a broken heart. Was it possible that a woman’s sharp cry of wounded love could touch the Eternal? She never dreamed of such a thing. At length, weary with weeping and with her own restlessness, she sat down before the red peats upon the hearth, for once, in her sorrowful preoccupation, forgetting her knitting.

In the meantime, Snorro had entered Torr’s, and asked for Jan. He would take no excuse, and no promises, and his white, stern face, and silent way of sitting apart, with his head in his hands, was soon felt to be a very uncomfortable influence. Jan rose moodily, and went away with him; too cross, until they reached the store, to ask, “Why did thou come and spoil my pleasure, Snorro?”

“Neil Bork sails for Vool at the midnight tide. Thou told me thou must send a letter by him to thy cousin Magnus.”

“That is so. Since Peter will do nothing, I must seek help of Magnus. Well, then, I will write the letter.”

When it was finished, Jan said, “Snorro, who told thee I was at Torr’s?”

“Thou wert not at home. I went there, first.”

“Then thou hast made trouble for me, be sure of that. My wife thought that thou wast ill.”

“It is a bad wife a man must lie to. But, oh, Jan! Jan! To think that for any woman thou would tell the lie!”

Then Jan, being in that garrulous mood which often precedes intoxication, would have opened his whole heart to Michael about his domestic troubles; but Michael would not listen to him. “Shut thy mouth tight on that subject,” he said angrily. “I will hear neither good nor bad of Margaret Vedder. Now, then, I will walk home with thee, and then I will see Neil Bork, and give him thy letter.”

Margaret heard their steps at the gate. Her face grew white and cold as ice, and her heart hardened at the sound of Snorro’s voice. She had always despised him; now, for his interference with her, she hated him. She could not tolerate Jan’s attachment to a creature so rude and simple. It was almost an insult to herself; and yet so truthfully did she judge his heart, that she

was quite certain Michael Snorro would never tell Jan that she had watched him through Ragon Torr's window. She blushed a moment at the memory of so mean an action, but instantly and angrily defended it to her own heart.

Jan came in, with the foolish, good-natured smile of alcoholic excitement. But when he saw Margaret's white, hard face, he instantly became sulky and silent. "Where hast thou been, Jan?" she asked. "It is near the midnight."

"I have been about my own business. I had some words to send by Neil Bork to my cousin Magnus. Neil sails by the midnight tide."

She laughed scornfully. "Thy cousin Magnus! Pray, what shall he do for thee? This is some new cousin, surely!"

"Well, then, since thy father keeps thy tocher from me, I must borrow of my own kin."

"As for that, my father hath been better to thee than thou deservest. Why didst thou lie to me concerning Snorro? He has had no fever. No, indeed!"

"A man must ask his wife whether he can speak truth to her, or not. Thou can not bear it. Very well, then, I must lie to thee."

"Yet, be sure, I will tell the truth to thee, Jan Vedder. Thou hast been at Ragon Torr's, singing with a light woman, and drinking with—"

"With my own kin. I advise thee to say nothing against them. As for Suneva, there is no tongue in Lerwick but thine will speak evil of her—she is a good girl, and she hath a kind heart. And now, then, who told thee I was at Torr's?"

He asked the question repeatedly, and instead of answering it, Margaret began to justify herself. "Have I not been to thee a good wife? Has not thy house been kept well, and thy meals ever good and ready for thee? Has any thing, great or little, gone to waste?"

"Thou hast been too good. It had been better if thou had been less perfect; then I could have spoken to thee of my great wish, and thou would have said, as others say, 'Jan, it would be a joy to see thee at the main-mast, or casting the ling-lines, or running into harbor before the storm, with every sail set, as though thou had stolen ship and lading.' Thou would not want me to chaffer with old women about geese-feathers and bird-eggs. Speak no more. I am heavy with sleep."

And he could sleep! That was such an aggravation of his offense. She turned sometimes and looked at his handsome flushed face, but otherwise she sat hour after hour silent and almost motionless, her hands clasped upon her knee, her heart anticipative of wrong, and with a perverse industry considering sorrows that had not as yet even called to her. Alas! alas! the unhappy can never persuade themselves that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

CHAPTER III.

JAN'S OPPORTUNITY.

"Thou broad-billowed sea,
Never sundered from thee,
May I wander the welkin below;
May the splash and the roar
Of the waves on the shore
Beat the march to my feet as I go;
Ever strong, ever free,
When the breath of the sea,
Like the fan of an angel, I know;
Ever rising with power,
To the call of the hour,
Like the swell of the tides as they
flow."

—BLACKIE.

The gravitation of character is naturally toward its weakest point. Margaret's weakest point was an intense, though unconscious, selfishness. Jan's restless craving for change and excitement made him dissatisfied with the daily routine of life, lazy, and often unreasonable. His very blessings became offenses to him. His clean, well-ordered house, made him fly to the noisy freedom of Ragon Torr's kitchen. Margaret's never-ceasing industry, her calmness, neatness and deliberation, exasperated him as a red cloth does a bull.

Suneva Torr had married Paul Glumm, and Jan often watched her as he sat drinking his ale in Torr's kitchen. At home, it is true, she tormented Glumm with her contrary, provoking moods; but then, again, she met him with smiles and endearments that atoned for every thing. Jan thought it would be a great relief if Margaret were only angry sometimes. For he wearied of her constant serenity, as people weary of sunshine without cloud or shadow.

And Margaret suffered. No one could doubt that who watched her face from day to day. She made no complaint, not even to her mother. Thora, however, perceived it all. She had foreseen and foretold the trouble, but she was too noble a woman to point out the fulfillment of her prophecy. As she went about her daily work, she considered, and not unkindly, the best means for bringing Jan back to his wife and home, and his first pride in them.

She believed that the sea only could do it. After all, her heart was with the men who loved it. She felt that Jan was as much out of place counting eggs, as a red stag would be if harnessed to a plow. She, at least, understood the rebellious, unhappy look on his handsome face. When the ling fishing was near at hand, she said to Peter: "There is one thing that is thy duty, and that is to give Jan the charge of a boat. He is for the sea, and it is not well that so good a sailor should go out of the family."

"I have no mind to do that. Jan will do well one day, and he will do as ill as can be the next. I will not trust a boat with him."

"It seems to me that where thou could trust Margaret, thou might well trust nineteen feet of keel, and fifty fathom of long lines."

Peter answered her not, and Thora kept silence also. But at the end, when he had smoked his pipe, and was lifting the Bible for the evening exercise, he said: "Thou shalt have thy way, wife; Jan shall have a boat, but thou wilt see evil will come of it."

"Thou wert always good, Peter, and in this thing I am thinking of more than fish. There is sorrow in Margaret's house. A mother can feel that."

"Now, then, meddle thou not in the matter. Every man loves in his own way. Whatever there is between Jan and Margaret is a thing by itself. But I will speak about the boat in the morning."

Peter kept his word, and kept it without smallness or grudging. He still liked Jan. If there were trouble between him and Margaret he regarded it as the natural initiation to married life. Norse women were all high-spirited and wished to rule; and he would have despised Jan if he had suspected him of giving way to Margaret's stubborn self-will. Though she was his own daughter, he did not wish to see her setting an example of wifely supremacy.

So he called Jan pleasantly and said, "I have saved for thee 'The Fair Margaret.' Wilt thou sail her this season, Jan? She is the best boat I have, as thou well knows. Fourteen hundred hooks she is to carry, and thou can hire six men to go with thee."

It made Peter's eyes feel misty to see the instantaneous change in Jan's face. He could not speak his thanks, but he looked them; and Peter felt troubled, and said, almost querulously, "There, that will do, son Jan; go now, and hire the men thou wants."

"First of all, I should like Snorro."

Peter hesitated, but he would not tithe his kindness, and he frankly answered, "Well, then, thou shalt have Snorro—though it will go hard with me, wanting him."

"But we will make it go well with thee on the sea, father."

"As for that, it will be as God pleases. A man's duty is all my claim on thee. Margaret will be glad to see thee so happy." He dropped his eyes as he spoke of Margaret. He would not seem to watch Jan, although he was conscious of doing so.

"A woman has many minds, father. Who knows if a thing will make her happy or angry?"

"That is a foolish saying, Jan. A wife must find her pleasure in the thing that pleases her husband. But now thou wilt have but little time; the boat is to be tried, and the hooks and lines are to go over, and the crew to hire. I have left all to thee."

This pleased Jan most of all. Only a bird building its first nest could have been as happy as he was. When at night he opened the door of his house, and went in with a gay smile, it was like a resurrection. The pale rose-color on Margaret's cheek grew vivid and deep when he took her in his arms, and kissed her in the old happy way. She smiled involuntarily, and Jan thought, "How beautiful she is!" He told her all Peter had said and done. He was full of gratitude and enthusiasm. He did not notice for a few moments that Margaret was silent, and chillingly unresponsive. He was amazed to find that the whole affair displeased her.

"So, then, I have married a common fisherman after all," she said bitterly; "why, Suneva Torr's husband has a bigger boat than thine."

It was an unfortunate remark, and touched Jan on a very raw place. He could not refrain from answering, "He hath had better luck than I. Ragon Torr gave Glumm Suneva's tocher, and he has bought his own boat with it."

"Why not? Every one knows that Glumm is a prudent man. He never gets on his feet for nothing."

Jan was inexpressibly pained and disappointed. For a moment a feeling of utter despair came over him. The boat lay upon his heart like a wreck. He drank his tea gloomily, and the delicately-browned fish, the young mutton, and the hot wheat cakes, all tasted like ashes in his mouth.

Perhaps, then, Margaret's heart smote her, for she began to talk, and to press upon Jan's acceptance the viands which had somehow lost all their savor to him. Her conversation was in like case. She would not speak of the boat, since they could not agree about it; and no other subject interested Jan. But, like all perfectly selfish people, she imagined, as a matter of course, that whatever interested her was the supreme interest. In her calm, even voice, she spoke of the spring house-cleaning, and the growth of her pansies and tulip bulbs, and did not know that all the time Jan was thinking of his boat, heaving on the tide-top, or coming into harbor so heavy with fish that she would be—in Shetland phrase—*lippering* with the water.

But, after all, the week of preparation was a very happy week to Jan and Snorro; and on the sixteenth of May they were the foremost of the sixty boats that sailed out of Lerwick for the ling ground. There was a great crowd on the pier to see them off—mothers, and wives, and sweethearts; boys, sick and sad with longing and envy; and old men, with the glamor of their own past in their faces. Among them was Suneva, in a bright blue dress, with blue ribbons fluttering in her yellow hair. She stood at the pier-head and as they passed poured a cup of ale into the sea, to forespeak good luck for the fleet. Jan would have dearly liked to see his wife's handsome face watching him, as he stood by the main-mast and lifted his cap to Peter. Margaret was not there.

She really felt very much humiliated in Jan's position. She had always held herself a little apart from the Lerwick women. She had been to Edinburgh, she had been educated far above them, and she was quite aware that she would have a very large fortune. Her hope had been to see Jan take his place among the merchants and bailies of Lerwick. She had dreams of the fine mansion that they would build, and of the fine furniture which would come from Edinburgh for it. Margaret was one of those women to whom a house can become a kingdom, and its careful ordering an affair of more importance than the administration of a great nation. When she chose Jan, and raised him from his humble position, she had no idea that he would drift back again to the fishing nets.

For the first time she carried her complaint home. But Thora in this matter had not much sympathy with her. "The sea is his mother," she said; "he loved her before he loved thee; when she calls him, he will always go back to her."

"No man in Shetland hath a better business to his hand; and how can he like to live in a boat, he, that hath a home so quiet, and clean, and comfortable?"

Thora sighed. "Thou wilt not understand then, that what the cradle rocks the spade buries. The sea spoke to Jan before he lay on his mother's breast. His father hath a grave in it. Neither gold nor the love of woman will ever keep them far apart; make up thy mind to that."

All this might be true, but yet it humiliated Margaret. Besides, she imagined that every wife in Lerwick was saying, "Not much hold has Margaret Vedder on her husband. He is off to sea again, and that with the first boat that sails." Yet if success could have reconciled her, Jan's was wonderful. Not unfrequently "The Fair Margaret" took twenty score ling at a haul, and every one was talking of her good luck.

During these days Jan and Snorro drew very close to each other. When the baits were set most of the men went to sleep for three hours; but Snorro always watched, and very often Jan sat with him. And oh, the grand solemnity and serenity of these summer nights, when through belts of calm the boats drifted and the islands in a charmed circle filled the pale purple horizon before them. Most fair then was the treeless land, and very far off seemed the sin and sorrow of life. The men lay upon the deck, with a pile of nets or their folded arms for a pillow, and surely under such a sky, like Jacob of old, they dreamed of angels.

Snorro and Jan, sitting in the soft, mystical light, talked together, dropping their voices involuntarily, and speaking slowly, with thoughtful pauses between the sentences. When they were not talking, Snorro read, and the book was ever the same, the book of the Four Gospels. Jan often watched him when he thought Jan asleep. In that enchanted midnight glow, which was often a blending of four lights—moonlight and twilight, the aurora and the dawning—the gigantic figure and white face, bending over the little book, had a weird and almost supernatural interest. Then this man, poor, ugly, and despised, had an incomparable nobility, and he fascinated Jan.

One night he said to him, "Art thou never weary of reading that same book, Snorro?"

"Am I then ever weary of thee, my Jan? And these are the words of One who was the first who loved me. Accordingly, how well I know his voice." Then, in a fervor of adoring affection, he talked to Jan of his dear Lord Christ, "who had stretched out his arms upon the cross that he might embrace the world." And as he talked the men, one by one, raised themselves on their elbows and listened; and the theme transfigured Snorro, and he stood erect with uplifted face, and looked, in spite of his fisher's suit, so royal that Jan felt humbled in his presence. And when he had told, in his own simple, grand way, the story of him who had often toiled at midnight with the fishers on the Galilean sea, as they toiled upon the Shetland waters, there was a great silence, until Jan said, in a voice that seemed almost strange to them: "Well, then, mates, now we will look to the lines."

All summer, and until the middle of October, Jan continued at sea; and all summer, whether fishing for ling, cod, or herring, "The Fair Margaret" had exceptionally good fortune. There were many other fishers who woke, and watched, and toiled in their fishing, who did not have half her "takes." "It is all Jan's luck," said Glumm, "for it is well known that he flings his nets and goes to sleep while they fill."

"Well, then, 'it is the net of the sleeping fisherman takes:' that is the wise saying of old times"—and though Snorro did not think of it, the Shetland proverb was but the Norse form of the Hebrew faith: "He giveth his beloved in their sleep."

Still, in spite of his success, Jan was not happy. A married man's happiness is in the hands of his wife, and Margaret felt too injured to be generous. She was not happy, and she thought it only just that Jan should be made to feel it. He had disappointed all her hopes and aspirations; she was not magnanimous enough to rejoice in the success of his labors and aims. Besides, his situation as the hired skipper of a boat was contemptible in her eyes; her servant was engaged to a man in the same position. Another aggravating circumstance was that her old schoolmate, the minister's niece (a girl who had not a penny piece to her fortune) was going to marry a rich merchant from Kirkwall. How she would exult over "Margaret Vedder who had married a common fisherman." The exultation was entirely imaginary, but perhaps it hurt as much as if it had been actually made.

Success, too, had made Jan more independent: or perhaps he had grown indifferent to Margaret's anger, since he found it impossible to please her. At any rate, he asked his friends to his house without fear or apology. They left their footmarks on her floors, and their fingermarks upon her walls and cushions, and Jan only laughed and said, "There was, as every one knew, plenty of water in Shetland to make them clean again." Numberless other little things grieved and offended her, so little that, taken separately, they might have raised a smile, but in the aggregate they attained the magnitude of real wrongs.

But, happy or miserable, time goes on, and about the middle of October even the herring fishing is over. Peter was beginning to count up his expenses and his gains. Jan and Snorro were saying to one another, "In two days we must go back to the store." That is, they were trying to say it, but the air was so full of shrieks that no human voice could be heard. For all around the boat the sea was boiling with herring fry, and over them hung tens of thousands of gulls and terns. Marmots and guillemots were packed in great black masses on the white foam, and only a mad human mob of screaming women and children could have made a noise comparable. Even that would have wanted the piercing metallic ring of the wild birds' shriek.

Suddenly Snorro leaped to his feet. "I see a storm, Jan. Lower and lash down the mast. We shall have bare time."

Jan saw that the birds had risen and were making for the rocks. In a few minutes down came the wind from the north-east, and a streak of white rain flying across the black sea was on top of "The Fair Margaret" before the mast was well secured. As for the nets, Snorro was cutting them loose, and in a few moments the boat was tearing down before the wind. It was a wild squall; some of the fishing fleet went to the bottom with all their crews. "The Fair Margaret," at much risk of loss, saved Glumm's crew, and then had all she could manage to raise her mizzen, and with small canvas edge away to windward for the entrance of Lerwick bay.

Jan was greatly distressed. "Hard to bear is this thing, Snorro," he said; "at the last to have such bad fortune."

"It is a better ending than might have been. Think only of that, Jan."

"But Peter will count his lost nets; there is nothing else he will think of."

"Between nets and men's lives, there is only one choice."

Peter said that also, but he was nevertheless very angry. The loss took possession of his mind, and excluded all memory of his gains. "It was just like Jan and Snorro," he muttered, "to be troubling themselves with other boats. In a sudden storm, a boat's crew should mind only its own safety." These thoughts were in his heart, though he did not dare to form them into any clear shape. But just as a drop or two of ink will diffuse itself through a glass of pure water and defile the whole, so they poisoned every feeling of kindness which he had to Jan.

"What did I tell thee?" he said to Thora, bitterly. "Jan does nothing well but he spoils it. Here, at the end of the season, for a little gust of wind, he loses both nets and tackle."

"He did well when he saved life, Peter."

"Every man should mind his own affairs. Glumm would have done that thing first."

"Then Glumm would have been little of a man. And thou, Peter Fae, would have been the first to tell Glumm so. Thou art saying evil, and dost not mean it."

"Speak no more. It is little a woman understands. Her words are always like a contrary wind."

Peter was very sulky for some days, and when at last he was ready to settle with Jan, there was a decided quarrel. Jan believed himself to be unfairly dealt with, and bitter words were spoken on both sides. In reality, Peter knew that he had been hard with his son, harder by far than he had ever intended to be; but in his heart there had sprung up one of those sudden and unreasonable dislikes which we have all experienced, and for which no explanation is possible. It was not altogether the loss of the nets—he did not know what it was—but the man he liked, and praised, and was proud of one week, he could hardly endure to see or speak to the next.

"That ends all between thee and me," said Peter, pushing a little pile of gold toward Jan. It was a third less than Jan expected. He gave it to Margaret, and bade her "use it carefully, as he might be able to make little more until the next fishing season."

"But thou wilt work in the store this winter?"

"That I will not. I will work for no man who cheats me of a third of my hire."

"It is of my father thou art speaking, Jan Vedder; remember that. And Peter Fae's daughter is thy wife, though little thou deservest her."

"It is like enough that I am unworthy of thee; but if I had chosen a wife less excellent than thou it had perhaps been better for me."

"And for me also."

That was the beginning of a sad end; for Jan, though right enough at first, soon put himself in the wrong, as a man who is idle, and has a grievance, is almost sure to do. He continually talked about it. On the contrary, Peter held his tongue, and in any quarrel the man who can be silent in the end has the popular sympathy. Then, in some way or other, Peter Fae touched nearly every body in Lerwick. He gave them work, or he bought their produce. They owed him money, or they expected a favor from him. However much they sympathized with Jan, they could not afford to quarrel with Peter.

Only Michael Snorro was absolutely and purely true to him; but oh, what truth there was in Michael! Jan's wrongs were his wrongs; Jan's anger was but the reflection of his own.

He watched over him, he sympathized with him, he loved him entirely, with a love "wonderful, passing the love of woman."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESOLATED HOME.

"For we two, face to face,
God knows are further parted
Than were a whole world's space
Between."

"Lost utterly from home and me,
Lonely, regretful and remote."

Jan now began to hang all day about Ragon Torr's, and to make friends with men as purposeless as himself. He drank more and more, and was the leader in all the dances and merry-makings with which Shetlanders beguile their long winter. He was very soon deep in Torr's debt, and this circumstance carried him the next step forward on an evil road.

One night Torr introduced him to Hol Skager, a Dutch skipper, whose real cargo was a contraband one of tea, brandy, tobacco and French goods. Jan was in the very mood to join him, and Skager was glad enough of Jan. Very soon he began to be away from home for three and four weeks at a time. Peter and Margaret knew well the objects of these absences, but they would have made themselves very unpopular if they had spoken of them. Smuggling was a thing every one had a hand in; rich and poor alike had their venture, and a wise ignorance, and deaf and dumb ignoring of the fact, was a social tenet universally observed. If Jan came home and brought his wife a piece of rich silk or lace, or a gold trinket, she took it without any unpleasant curiosity. If Peter were offered a cask of French brandy at a nominal price, he never asked any embarrassing questions. Consciences tender enough toward the claims of God, evaded without a scruple the rendering of Cæsar's dues.

So when Jan disappeared for a few weeks, and then returned with money in his pocket, and presents for his friends, he was welcomed without question. And he liked the life; liked it so well that when the next fishing season came round he refused every offer made him. He gained more with Hol Skager, and the excitement of eluding the coast guard or of giving them a good chase, suited Jan exactly. The spirit of his forefathers ruled him absolutely, and he would have fought for his cargo or gone down with the ship.

Snorro was very proud of him. The morality of Jan's employment he never questioned, and Jan's happy face and fine clothing gave him the greatest pleasure. He was glad that he had escaped Peter's control; and when Jan, now and then, went to the store after it was shut, and sat an hour with him, no man in Shetland was as proud and happy as Michael Snorro. Very often Jan brought him a book, and on one occasion it was the wondrous old "Pilgrim's Progress," full of wood-cuts. That book was a lifelong joy to Snorro, and he gave to Jan all the thanks and the credit of it. "Jan brought him every thing pleasant he had. He was so handsome, and so clever, and so good, and yet he loved him—the poor, ignorant Snorro!" So Snorro reasoned, and accordingly he loved his friend with all his soul.

At Jan's house many changes were taking place. In the main, Margaret had her house very much to herself. No one soiled its exquisite cleanliness. The expense of keeping it was small. She was saving money on every hand. When Jan came home with a rich present in his hand, it was easy

to love so handsome and generous a man, and if Jan permitted her to love him in her own way, she was very glad to do so. The tie between man and wife is one hard to break. What tugs it will bear for years, we have all seen and wondered at; and during this interval if there were days when they were wretched, there were many others when they were very happy together. The conditions rested mainly with Margaret. When she could forget all her small ambitions and disappointments, and give to her husband the smile and kiss he still valued above every thing, then Jan was proud and happy and anxious to please her. But Margaret was moody as the skies above her, and sometimes Jan's sunniest tempers were in themselves an offense. It is ill indeed with the man who is bound to misery by the cords of a woman's peevish and unreasonable temper.

For a year and a half Jan remained with Hol Skager, but during this time his whole nature deteriorated. Among the Shetland fishermen mutual forbearance and mutual reliance was the rule. In position the men were nearly equal, and there was no opportunity for an overbearing spirit to exercise itself. But it was very different with Skager's men. They were of various nationalities, and of reckless and unruly tempers. The strictest discipline was necessary, and Jan easily learned to be tyrannical and unjust, to use passionate and profane language, to drink deep, and to forget the Sabbath, a day which had been so sacred to him.

In his own home the change was equally apparent. Margaret began to tremble before the passions she evoked; and Jan to mock at the niceties that had hitherto snubbed and irritated him. Once he had been so easy to please; now all her small conciliations sometimes failed. The day had gone by for them. The more she humbled herself, the less Jan seemed to care for her complaisance. To be kind too late, to be kind when the time for kindness is passed by, that is often the greatest injury of all.

At the end of eighteen months Jan and Skager quarreled. Skager had become intimate with Peter Fae, and Peter was doubtless to blame. At any rate, Jan was sure he was, and he spent his days in morose complaining, and futile threats of vengeance—futile, because the poor man's wrath always falls upon himself. When Peter heard them he could afford to say contemptuously—"It is well known that Jan Vedder has a long tongue and short hands;" or, "Between saying and doing the thing is a great way."

In a few weeks even Ragon Torr got weary of Jan's ill-temper and heroics. Besides, he was in his debt, and there seemed no prospect of speedy work for him. Upon the whole, it was a miserable winter for the Vedders. Jan made very little. Sometimes he killed a seal, or brought in a bag of birds, but his earnings were precarious, and Margaret took care that his table should be in accordance. She had money, of course, but it was her own money, and a thing with which Jan had no right. She ate her meager fare of salt fish and barley bread with a face of perfect resignation; she gave up her servant and made no complaints, and she did think it a most shameful injustice that, after all, Jan should be cross with her. It did not strike her, that good meal, even though she had procured it from her own private hoard, might have been a better thing than the most saintly patience. There is much said about the wickedness of doing evil that good may come. Alas! there is such a thing as doing good that evil may come.

One afternoon in early spring Jan saw a flock of wild swans soaring majestically on their strong wings toward a lake which was a favorite resting place with them. He took his gun and followed after. They were gathered in the very middle of the lake; his dog could not swim so far, neither could his shot reach them. It seemed as if every promise mocked him. Sulky and disappointed, he was returning home when he met the Udaller Tulloch. He was jogging along on his little rough pony, his feet raking the ground, and his prehistoric hat tied firmly on the back of his head.

But in spite of his primitive appearance he was a man of wealth and influence, the banker of the island, liked and trusted of all men—except Peter Fae. With Peter he had come often in conflict; he had superseded him in a civil office, he had spoken slightly of some of Peter's speculations, and, above all offenses, in a recent kirk election he had been chosen Deacon instead of Peter. They were the two rich men of Lerwick, and they were jealous and distrustful of each other.

"Jan Vedder," said Tulloch, cheerily, "I would speak with thee; come to my house within an hour."

It was not so fine a house as Peter's, but Jan liked its atmosphere. Small glass barrels of brandy stood on the sideboard; there was a case of Hollands in the chimney corner; fine tobacco, bloaters, and sturgeons' roes were in comfortable proximity. A bright fire of peats glowed on the ample hearth, and the Udaller sat eating and drinking before it. He made Jan join him, and without delay entered upon his business.

"I want to sell 'The Solan,' Jan. She is worth a thousand pounds for a coaster; or, if thou wishes, thou could spoil Skager's trips with her. She is half as broad as she is long, with high bilge, and a sharp bottom; the very boat for these seas—wilt thou buy her?"

"If I had the money, nothing would be so much to my liking."

"Well, then, thy wife brought me £50 yesterday; that makes thy account a little over £600. I will give thee a clear bill of sale and trust thee for the balance. 'Tis a great pity to see a good lad like thee going to waste. It is that."

"If I was in thy debt, then thou would own a part of me. I like well to be my own master."

"A skipper at sea doth what he will; and every one knows that Jan Vedder is not one that serves."

Remember, thou wilt be skipper of thy—own—boat!”

Jan’s eyes flashed joyfully, but he said, “My wife may not like I should use the money for this purpose.”

“It is a new thing for a man to ask his wife if he can spend this or that, thus or so. And to what good? Margaret Vedder would speak to her father, and thou knows if Peter Fae love thee—or not.”

These words roused the worst part of Jan’s nature. He remembered, in a moment, all the envy and wonder he would cause by sailing out of harbor skipper of his own boat. It was the very temptation that was irresistible to him. He entered into Tulloch’s plan with all his heart, and before he left him he was in a mood to justify any action which would further his desire.

“Only give not thy thoughts speech, Jan,” said Tulloch at parting; “and above all things, trust not thy plans to a woman. When will thou tell me ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

“To-morrow.”

But Jan was not the man to hold counsel with his own soul. He wanted human advice and sympathy, and he felt sure of Snorro. He went straight to him, but the store was still open, and Peter Fae was standing in the door, three of his neighbors with him. He looked at Jan scornfully and asked—“Well, how many swans did thou get?”

“I have been after a purchase, Peter Fae.”

“Good. How wilt thou pay for it, then?”

“I will take my own to pay for it.”

Peter laughed, and turning away, answered, “Why, then, do I speak to thee? Only God understands fools.”

This conversation irritated Jan far more than many an actual wrong had done. “I have indeed been a fool,” he said to Snorro, “but now I will look well to what concerns my own interest.”

Then he told Michael of Tulloch’s offer, and added, “At last, then, I have the sum of my wife’s savings, and I will show her she has been saving for a good end. What dost thou think, Snorro?”

“I think the money is thine. All thine has been hers, or she had not saved so much; all hers ought then to be thine. But it is well and right to tell her of Tulloch’s offer to thee. She may like to give thee as a gift what else thou must take without any pleasure.”

Jan laughed; it was an unpleasant laugh, and did not at all brighten his face, but he resolved to a certain extent on taking Snorro’s advice. It was quite midnight when he reached his home, but Margaret was sitting by a few red peats knitting. She was weeping, also, and her tears annoyed him.

“Thou art ever crying like a cross child,” he said. “Now what art thou crying for?”

“For thy love, my husband. If thou would care a little for me!”

“That is also what I say. If thou would care a little for me and for my well-doing! Listen, now! I have heard where I can buy a good boat for £600. Wilt thou ask thy father for so much of thy tocher? To have this boat, Margaret, would make me the happiest man in Shetland. I know that thou can manage it if thou wilt. Dear wife, do this thing for me. I ask thee with all my heart.” And he bent toward her, took the knitting away, and held her hands in his own.

Margaret dropped her eyes, and Jan watched her with a painful interest. Did she love him or her £600 better? Her face paled and flushed. She looked up quickly, and her lips parted. Jan believed that she was going to say—“I have £600, and I will gladly give it to thee.” He was ready to fold her to his breast, to love her, as he had loved her that day when he had first called her “wife.” Alas! after a slight hesitation, she dropped her pale face and answered slowly—“I will not ask my father. I might as well ask the sea for fresh water.”

Jan let her hands fall, and stood up. “I see now that all talk with thee will come to little. What thou wants, is that men should give thee all, and thou give nothing. When thou sayest, ‘thy love, husband,’ thou means ‘thy money, husband;’ and if there is no money, then there is ever sighs and tears. Many things thou hast yet to learn of a wife’s duty, and very soon I will give thee a lesson I had done well to teach thee long since.”

“I have borne much from thee, Jan, but at the next wrong thou does me, I will go back to my father. That is what I shall do.”

“We will see to that.”

“Yes, we will see!” And she rose proudly, and with flashing eyes gathered up her knitting and her wool and left the room.

The next morning Jan and Tulloch concluded their bargain. “The Solan” was put in thorough order, and loaded with a coasting cargo. It was supposed that Tulloch’s nephew would sail her, and Jan judged it wisest to show no interest in the matter. But an hour after all was ready, he drew the £600 out of Tulloch’s bank, paid it down for the boat, and sailed her out of Lerwick harbor at the noon-tide. In ten minutes afterward a score of men had called in Peter Fae’s store and told him.

He was both puzzled and annoyed. Why had Tulloch interfered with Jan unless it was for his, Peter’s, injury? From the secrecy maintained, he suspected some scheme against his interests.

Snorro, on being questioned, could truthfully say that Jan had not told him he was to leave Lerwick that morning; in fact, Jan had purposely left Snorro ignorant of his movements. But the good fellow could not hide the joy he felt, and Peter looked at him wrathfully.

It was seldom Peter went to see his daughter, but that evening he made her a call. Whatever she knew she would tell him, and he did not feel as if he could rest until he got the clue to Jan's connection with Tulloch. But when he named it to Margaret, he found she was totally ignorant of Jan's departure. The news shocked her. Her work dropped from her hand; she was faint with fear and amazement. Jan had never before left her in anger, without a parting word or kiss. Her father's complaints and fears about Tulloch she scarcely heeded. Jan's behavior toward herself was the only thought in her mind. Peter learned nothing from her; but his irritation was much increased by what he considered Margaret's unreasonable sorrow over a bad husband. He could not bear a crying woman, and his daughter's sobs angered him.

"Come thou home to thy mother," he said, "when thy eyes are dry; but bring no tears to my house for Jan Vedder."

Then Margaret remembered that she had threatened Jan with this very thing. Evidently he had dared her to do it by this new neglect and unkindness. She wandered up and down the house, full of wretched fears and memories; love, anger, pride, each striving for the mastery. Perhaps the bitterest of all her thoughts toward her husband arose from the humiliating thought of "what people would say." For Margaret was a slave to a wretched thralldom full of every possible tragedy—she would see much of her happiness or misery through the eyes of others.

She felt bitterly that night that her married life had been a failure; but failures are generally brought about by want of patience and want of faith. Margaret had never had much patience with Jan; she had lost all faith in him. "Why should she not go home as her father told her?" This question she kept asking herself. Jan had disappointed all her hopes. As for Jan's hopes, she did not ask herself any questions about them. She looked around the handsome home she had given him; she considered the profitable business which might have been his on her father's retirement or death; and she thought a man must be wicked who could regard lightly such blessings. As she passed a glass she gazed upon her own beauty with a mournful smile and thought anew, how unworthy of all Jan had been.

At daybreak she began to put carefully away such trifles of household decoration as she valued most. Little ornaments bought in Edinburgh, pieces of fancy work done in her school days, fine china, or glass, or napery. She had determined to lock up the house and go to her father's until Jan returned. Then he would be obliged to come for her, and in any dispute she would at least have the benefit of a strong position. Even with this thought, full as it was of the most solemn probabilities, there came into her niggardly calculations the consideration of its economy. She would not only save all the expenses of housekeeping, but all her time could be spent in making fine knitted goods, and a great many garments might thus be prepared before the annual fair.

This train of ideas suggested her bank book. That must certainly go with her, and a faint smile crossed her face as she imagined the surprise of her father and mother at the amount it vouched for—that was, if she concluded to tell them. She went for it; of course it was gone. At first she did not realize the fact; then, as the possibility of its loss smote her, she trembled with terror, and hurriedly turned over and over the contents of the drawer. "*Gone!*" She said it with a quick, sharp cry, like that of a woman mortally wounded. She could find it nowhere, and after five minutes' search, she sat down upon her bedside, and abandoned herself to agonizing grief.

Yes, it was pitiable. She had begun the book with pennies saved from sweeties and story-books, from sixpences, made by knitting through hours when she would have liked to play. The ribbons and trinkets of her girlhood and maidenhood were in it, besides many a little comfort that Jan and herself had been defrauded of. Her hens had laid for it, her geese been plucked for it, her hands had constantly toiled for it. It had been the idol upon the hearthstone to which had been offered up the happiness of her youth, and before which love lay slain.

At first its loss was all she could take in, but very quickly she began to connect the loss with Jan, and with the £600 he had asked her to get for him at their last conversation. With this conviction her tears ceased, her face grew hard and white as ice. If Jan had used her money she was sure that she would never speak to him, never see him again. At that hour she almost hated him. He was only the man who had taken her £600. She forgot that he had been her lover and her husband. As soon as she could control herself she fled to her father's house, and kneeling down by Peter's side sobbed out the trouble that had filled her cup to overflowing.

This was a sorrow Peter could heartily sympathize with. He shed tears of anger and mortification, as he wiped away those of his daughter. It was a great grief to him that he could not prosecute Jan for theft. But he was quite aware that the law recognized Jan's entire right to whatever was his wife's. Neither the father nor daughter remembered how many years Jan had respected his wife's selfishness, and forgiven her want of confidence in him; the thing he had done was an unpardonable wrong.

Thora said very little. She might have reminded Peter that he had invested all her fortune in his business, that he always pocketed her private earnings. But to what purpose? She did not much blame Jan for taking at last, what many husbands would have taken at first, but she was angry enough at his general unkindness to Margaret. Yet it was not without many forebodings of evil she saw Peter store away in an empty barn all the pretty furniture of Margaret's house, and put the key of the deserted house in his pocket.

"And I am so miserable!" wailed the wretched wife, morning, noon, and night. Her money and

her husband supplied her with perpetual lamentations, varied only by pitiful defenses of her own conduct: "My house was ever clean and comfortable! No man's table was better served! I was never idle! I wasted nothing! I never was angry! And yet I am robbed, and betrayed, and deserted! There never was so miserable a woman—so unjustly miserable!" etc.

"Alas! my child," said Thora, one day, "did you then expect to drink of the well of happiness before death? This is the great saying which we all forget: *There*—not here—*there* the wicked cease from troubling; *there* the weary are at rest. *There* God has promised to wipe away all tears, but not here, Margaret, *not here*."

CHAPTER V.

SHIPWRECK.

"A man I am, crossed with adversity."

"There is some soul of goodness in
things evil;
Would men observingly distill it out."

No man set more nakedly side by side the clay and spirit of his double nature than Jan Vedder. No man wished so much and willed so little. Long before he returned from his first voyage, he became sorry for the deception he had practiced upon his wife, and determined to acknowledge to her his fault, as far as he saw it to be a fault. He was so little fond of money, that it was impossible for him to understand the full extent of Margaret's distress; but he knew, at least, that she would be deeply grieved, and he was quite willing to promise her, that as soon as The Solan was clear of debt, he would begin to repay her the money she prized so much.

Her first voyage was highly successful, and he was, as usual, sanguine beyond all reasonable probabilities; quite sure, indeed, that Tulloch and Margaret could both be easily paid off in two years. Surely two years was a very short time for a wife to trust her husband with £600. Arguing, then, from his own good intentions, and his own hopes and calculations, he had persuaded himself before he reached Lerwick again that the forced loan was really nothing to make any fuss about, that it would doubtless be a very excellent thing, and that Margaret would be sure to see it as he did.

The Solan touched Lerwick in the afternoon. Jan sent a message to Tulloch, and hastened to his home. Even at a distance the lonely air of the place struck him unpleasantly. There was no smoke from the chimneys, the windows were all closed. At first he thought "Margaret is gone for a day's visit somewhere—it is unlucky then." But as he reached the closed gate other changes made themselves apparent. His Newfoundland dog, that had always known his step afar off, and came bounding to meet him, did not answer his whistle. Though he called Brenda, his pet seal, repeatedly, she came not; she, that had always met him with an almost human affection. He perceived before his feet touched the threshold how it was: Margaret had gone to her father's, or the animals and poultry would have been in the yard.

His first impulse was to follow her there and bring her home, and he felt in his pocket for the golden chain and locket he had brought her as a peace-offering. Then he reflected that by the time he could reach Peter's house it would be the tea-hour, and he did not intend to discuss the differences between Margaret and himself in Peter's presence. Thora's good influence he could count upon; but he knew it would be useless either to reason with or propitiate Peter. For fully five minutes he stood at his bolted door wondering what to do. He felt his position a cruel one; just home from a prosperous voyage, and no one to say a kind word. Yes, he could go to Torr's; he would find a welcome there. But the idea of the noisy room and inquisitive men was disagreeable to him. Snorro he could not see for some hours. He determined at last that the quiet of his own lonely home was the best place in which to consider this new phase of affairs between him and his wife, and while doing so he could make a cup of tea, and wash and refresh himself before the interview.

He unfastened the kitchen shutter and leaped in. Then the sense of his utter desolation smote him. Mechanically he walked through the despoiled, dusty, melancholy rooms. Not a stool left on which he could sit down. He laughed aloud—that wretched laugh of reckless sorrow, that is far more pitiful than weeping. Then he went to Torr's. People had seen him on the way to his home, and no one had been kind enough to prevent his taking the useless, wretched journey. He felt deeply wounded and indignant. There were not half a dozen men or women in Lerwick whose position in regard to Jan would have excused their interference, but of that he did not think. Every man and woman knew his shame and wrong. Some one might have warned him. Torr shook his head sympathetically at Jan's complaints, and gave him plenty of liquor, and in an hour he had forgotten his grief in a drunken stupor.

The next morning he went to Peter's house to see his wife. Peter knew of his arrival, and he had informed himself of all that had happened in Torr's room. Jan had, of course, spoken hastily and passionately, and had drunk deeply, and none of his faults had been kept from Margaret. She had expected him to come at once for her, to be in a passion probably, and to say some hard things, but she also had certainly thought he would say them to her, and not to strangers. Hour after hour she watched, sick with longing and fear and anger, hour after hour, until Peter came in, stern and dour, and said:

"Get thee to thy bed, Margaret. Jan Vedder has said words of thee this night that are not to be forgiven, and he is now fathoms deep in Torr's liquor. See thou speak not with him—good nor bad," and Peter struck the table so angrily, that both women were frightened into a silence, which he took for consent.

So when Jan asked to see his wife, Thora stood in the door, and in her sad, still way told him that Peter had left strict orders against his entering the house.

"But thou, mother, wilt ask Margaret to come out here and speak to me? Yes, thou wilt do that," and he eagerly pressed in Thora's hand the little present he had brought. "Give her this, and tell her I wait here for her."

After ten minutes' delay, Thora returned and gave him the trinket back. Margaret wanted her £600 and not a gold locket, and Jan had not even sent her a message about it. His return had brought back the memory of her loss in all its first vividness. She had had a dim hope that Jan would bring her money with him, that he had only taken it to frighten her; to lose this hope was to live over again her first keen sorrow. In this mood it was easy for her to say that she would not see him, or speak to him, or accept his gift; let him give her back her £600, that was the whole burden of her answer.

Jan put the unfortunate peace-offering in his pocket, and walked away without a word. "He will trouble thee no more, Margaret," said Thora, quietly. Margaret fancied there was a tone of reproach or regret in the voice. It angered her anew, and she answered, "It is well; it were better if he had never come at all." But in her heart she expected Jan to come, and come again, until she pardoned him. She had no intention of finally casting him off. She meant that he should suffer sufficiently to insure his future good behavior. She had to suffer with him, and she regarded this as the hardest and most unjust part of the discipline. She, who had always done her duty in all things.

It is true she had permitted her father to dismantle their home, but she had had a distinct reason for that, and one which she intended to have told Jan, had he come back under circumstances to warrant the confidence. In fact she had begun to dislike the house very much. It was too small, too far away from her mother, and from the town; besides which, Peter had the very house she longed for vacant, and she hoped so to manage her father, as to make the exchange she wished. Perhaps, too, she was a little bit superstitious. No one had ever been lucky in the house in which she and Jan had lived. She sometimes felt angry at her father for thrusting it upon them. Even Elga Skade's love affairs had all gone wrong there, and the girl was sure some malicious sprite had power within its walls to meddle and make trouble. Elga had left her, influenced entirely by this superstition, and Margaret had brooded upon it, until it had obtained some influence over her; otherwise, she would not have permitted her father to dismantle the unhappy home without a protest.

As it was, with all its faults she was beginning to miss the independence it gave her. No married woman ever goes back to the best of homes, and takes the place of her maidenhood. Her new servant, Trolle Bork, had warned her often of this. "When Bork was drowned," she said, "I went back to my parents, but I did not go back to my home. No, indeed! There is a difference, even where there is no unkindness. Thy own home is a full cup. Weep, if thou must weep, at thy own fireside."

After Margaret's refusal to see Jan, he went back to his boat, and employed himself all day about her cargo, and in settling accounts with Tulloch. It was very late when he went to see Snorro. But Snorro was waiting for him. Now that things had come to a crisis he was ready to hear all Jan's complaints; he believed him in all things to have done right.

"Thou hast asked her once, Jan," he said; "that was well and right. Thou shalt not go again. No, indeed! Let her come and tell thee she is sorry. Then thou can show her a man's heart, and forgive her freely, without yea or nay in the matter. What right had she to pull thy house to pieces without thy knowledge? Come, now, and I will show thee the place I have made for thee when thou art in Lerwick."

There was a big loft over Peter's store, with a narrow ladder-like stair to it. It was full of the lumber of thirty years and tenanted by a colony of Norway rats, who were on the most familiar terms with Snorro. Many of them answered to their names, none were afraid to eat from his hand; one old shrewd fellow, gray with age, often crept into Snorro's bosom, and in the warmth, lay hour after hour, watching with wise, weird eyes the quiet face it trusted as it bent over a book.

There was a corner in this garret with a window looking seaward, and here Snorro had cleared a small space, and boarded it up like a room. A bed of down and feathers, with a cover of seal-skins occupied one side; two rude seats, a big goods-box turned up for a table, and some shelves full of the books Jan had brought him, completed its furniture.

"See here, Jan, I have been fifteen years with Peter Fae, and no feet but mine have ever entered this loft. Here thou canst be at peace. My dear Jan, lie thee down, and sleep now."

Jan was glad to do it. He put the gold locket on Snorro's table, and said, "Thou keep it. I bought it for her, and she sent it back to me."

"Some day she will be glad of it. Be thou sure of that."

During the summer Jan made short and quick voyages, and so he spent many an hour in this little retreat talking with Snorro, for he had much to annoy and trouble him. We do not get over living sorrows as easily as dead ones. Margaret in her grave would have lost the power to wound him, and he would gradually have ceased to lament her. But Margaret weeping in her father's house; Margaret praying in the kirk for strength to bear his neglect and injustice; Margaret throwing open the Bluebeard chamber of their home, and discussing its tragedy with his enemies; this was a sorrow there was no forgetting. On his return from every voyage he sent her the money he had made, and some little token of his love with it. She always sent both back without a word. She understood from them that Jan would come no more in person, and that she would have to make the next advance, either by voice or letter. Many times she had declared she would never do this, and the declaration even in her tenderest hours, bound her to her self-inflicted loneliness and grief. So on Snorro's rude table the pretty womanly trinkets accumulated, and Snorro looked at them with constantly gathering anger.

One morning in October he heard a thing that made his heart leap. The physician of the town hurried into the store, and cried, "Peter Fae, here hath come a little man to thy house. A handsome lad he is, indeed. Now then, go and see him."

"What of my daughter, Doctor?"

"She will do well enough."

Snorro lifted never an eyelash, but his face glowed like fire. Jan, then, had a son! Jan's son! Already he loved the child. Surely he would be the peacemaker. Now the mother and father must meet. He had almost forgiven Margaret. How he longed for Jan to come back. Alas! when he did, Margaret was said to be dying; Peter had not been at his store for three days.

The double news met Jan as soon as he put his foot on the quay. "Thou hast a son, Jan." "Thy wife is dying." Jan was nearly distraught. With all a man's strength of feeling, he had emotions as fervent and vivid as a woman: he forgot in a moment every angry feeling, and hastened to his wife. Peter opened the door; when he saw Jan, he could have struck him. He did what was more cruel, he shut the door in his face, and drew the bolt passionately across it.

Jan, however, would not leave the vicinity. He stopped the doctor, and every one that came and went. In a few hours this became intolerable to Peter. He ordered him to go away, but Jan sat on a large stone by the gate, with his head in his hands, and answered him never a word. Then he sent Thora to him. In vain Jan tried to soften her heart. "Margaret is unconscious, yet she mourns constantly for thee. Thou art my child's murderer," she said sternly. "Go thy ways before I curse thee."

He turned away then and went down to the seaside, and threw himself, in an agony of despair, upon the sand and the yellow tangle. Hour after hour passed; physical exhaustion and mental grief produced at length a kind of lethargy, that oblivion, rather than sleep, which comes to souls which have felt till they can feel no longer.

Just at dark some one touched him, and asked sternly, "Art thou drunk, Jan Vedder, to-day? To-day, when thy wife is dying?"

"It is with sorrow I am drunk." Then he opened his eyes and saw the minister standing over him. Slowly he rose to his feet, and stood stunned and trembling before him.

"Jan! Go to thy wife. She is very ill. At the last she may want thee and only thee."

"They will not let me see her. Do thou speak to Peter Fae for me."

"Hast thou not seen her—or thy son?"

"I have not been within the door. Oh, do thou speak for me!"

"Come with me."

Together they went back to Peter's house. The door was locked, and the minister knocked. "Who is there?"

"It is I, and Jan Vedder. Peter, unbolt the door."

"Thou art God's minister and ever welcome; but I will not let Jan Vedder cross my door-stone."

"Thou wilt let us both in. Indeed thou wilt. I am amazed at thee, Peter. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Art thou going to strive against God? I say to thee, unbolt the door, unbolt it quick, lest thou be too late. If thou suffer not mercy to pass through it, I tell thee there are those who will pass through it, the door being shut."

Then Peter drew the bolt and set the door wide, but his face was hard as iron, and black as midnight.

"Jan," said the minister, "thy wife and child are in the next room. Go and see them, it will be good for thee. Peter, well may the Lord Christ say, 'I come as a thief in the night'; and be sure of this, he will break down the bars and burst open the doors of those who rise not willingly to let him in."

In Shetland at that day, and indeed at the present day, the minister has almost a papal

authority. Peter took the reproof in silence. Doctor Balloch was, however, a man who in any circumstances would have had influence and authority among those brought in contact with him, for though he spared not the rod in the way of his ministry, he was in all minor matters full of gentleness and human kindness. Old and young had long ago made their hearts over to him. Besides, his great learning and his acquaintance with the tongues of antiquity were regarded as a great credit to the town.

While Jan was in his wife's presence, Doctor Balloch stood silent, looking into the fire: Peter gazed out of the window. Neither spoke until Jan returned. Then the minister turned and looked at the young man. It was plain that he was on the verge of insensibility again. He took his arm and led him to a couch. "Lie down, Jan;" then turning to Peter he said, "Thy son has had no food to-day. He is faint and suffering. Let thy women make him some tea, and bring him some bread and meat."

"I have said that he shall not eat bread in my house."

"Then thou hast said an evil and uncharitable thing. Unsay it, Peter. See, the lad is fainting!"

"I can not mend that. He shall not break bread in my house."

"Then I say this to thee. Thou shalt not break bread at thy Lord's supper in His house. No, thou shalt not, for thou would be doing it unworthily, and eating damnation to thyself. What saith thy Lord Christ? If thine enemy hunger, feed him. Now, then, order the bread and tea for Jan Vedder."

Peter called a woman servant and gave the order. Then, almost in a passion, he faced the minister, and said, "Oh, sir, if thou knew the evil this man hath done me and mine!"

"In such a case Christ's instructions are very plain—'Overcome evil with good.' Now, thou knowest thy duty. If thou sin, I have warned thee—the sin is on thy own head."

Jan heard nothing of this conversation. The voices of the two men were only like spent waves breaking on the shores of his consciousness. But very soon a woman brought him a basin of hot tea, and he drank it and ate a few mouthfuls. It gave him a little strength, he gathered himself together, opened the door, and without speaking went out into the night. The minister followed, watching him carefully, until he saw Michael Snorro take him in his big arms, and carry him to a pile of seal-skins. Then he knew that he was in good hands.

Poor Jan! He was utterly spent and miserable. The few minutes he had passed at Margaret's side, had brought him no comfort. He heard her constantly muttering his name, but it was in the awful, far-distant voice of a soul speaking through a dream. She was unconscious of his presence; he trembled in hers. Just for a moment Thora had allowed him to lift his son, and to press the tiny face against his own. Then all was darkness, and a numb, aching sorrow, until he found himself in Snorro's arms.

Many days Margaret Vedder lay between life and death, but at length there was hope, and Jan sailed again. He went away very miserable, though he had fully determined it should be his last voyage if Margaret wished it so. He would see her on his return, he would tell her how sorry he was, he would sell The Solan and give back the £600; he would even humble himself to Peter, and go back to the store, if there were no other way to make peace with Margaret. He felt that no personal sacrifice would be too great, if by it he could win back his home, and wife, and son. The babe had softened his heart. He told himself—oh, so often—"Thou art a father;" and no man could have had a sweeter, stronger sense of the obligations the new relation imposed. He was so sure of himself that he could not help feeling equally sure of Margaret, and also of Peter. "For the child's sake, they will forgive me, Snorro, and I'll do well, yes, I will do well for the future."

Snorro had many fears, but he could not bear to throw cold water on Jan's hopes and plans for reformation. He did not believe that his unconditional surrender would be a good foundation for future happiness. He did not like Jan's taking the whole blame. He did not like his giving up The Solan at Margaret's word. Neither Peter Fae, nor his daughter, were likely to exalt any one who humbled himself.

"It is money in the hand that wins," said Snorro, gloomily, "and my counsel is, that thou bear thyself bravely, and show her how well The Solan hath done already, and how likely she is to clear herself and pay back that weariful £600 before two years have gone away. If she will have it, let her have it. Jan, how could she give thee up for £600! Did she love thee?"

"I do believe she did—and does yet, Snorro."

"Only God, then, understands women. But while thou art away, think well of this and that, and of the things likely to follow, for still I see that forethought spares afterthought and after-sorrow."

With words like these ringing in his ears, Jan again sailed The Solan out of Lerwick. He intended to make a coasting voyage only, but he expected delay, for with November had come storm and cold, fierce winds and roaring seas. Edging along from port to port, taking advantage of every tide and favorable breeze, and lying to, when sailing was impossible, six weeks were gone before he reached Kirkwall in the Orkneys. Here he intended to take in his last cargo before steering for home. A boat leaving Kirkwall as he entered, carried the news of The Solan's arrival to Lerwick, and then Snorro watched anxiously every tide for Jan's arrival.

But day after day passed and The Solan came not. No one but Snorro was uneasy. In the winter, in that tempestuous latitude, boats were often delayed for weeks. They ran from shelter to

shelter in constant peril of shipwreck, and with a full cargo a good skipper was bound to be prudent. But Snorro had a presentiment of danger and trouble. He watched night after night for Jan, until even his strength gave way, and he fell into a deep sleep. He was awakened by Jan's voice. In a moment he opened the door and let him in.

Alas! Alas, poor Jan! It was sorrow upon sorrow for him. The Solan had been driven upon the Quarr rocks, and she was a total wreck. Nothing had been saved but Jan's life, even that barely. He had been so bruised and injured that he had been compelled to rest in the solitary hut of a coast-guardsmen many days. He gave the facts to Snorro in an apathy. The man was shipwrecked as well as the boat. It was not only that he had lost every thing, that he had not a penny left in the world, he had lost hope, lost all faith in himself, lost even the will to fight his ill fortune any longer.

CHAPTER VI.

MARGARET'S HEART.

"Do not drop in for an after-loss.
Ah, do not, when my heart hath scap'd this
sorrow,
Come in the rereward of a conquered woe."

—SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS, XC.

"Man is his own star, and the soul that
can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all
fate.
Nothing to him falls early, or too late."

—FLETCHER'S "HONEST MAN'S FORTUNE."

Jan, the sole survivor of The Solan, had brought the news of his own misfortune, but there was no necessity to hasten its publication. Nothing could be gained by telling it at once, and no one could be helped, so Snorro advised him to sleep all the following day. Jan hardly needed the advice. In a few minutes he sank into a dreamless lethargic sleep, which lasted nearly twenty-four hours. When he awoke from it, he said, "I will see Tulloch, and then I will sleep again, Snorro."

"Let me go for thee."

"Nay, then he will think that I am a coward. I must tell my own tale; he can but be angry."

But Tulloch took his loss with composure. "Thou did the best that could be done, Jan," he answered, when Jan had told the story of the shipwreck; "wind and wave are not at thy order."

"Thou wilt say that for me? It is all I ask. I did my best, Tulloch."

"I will say it; and in the spring I will see about another boat. I am not afraid to trust thee."

Jan looked at him gratefully, but the hope was too far off to give much present comfort to him. He walked slowly back to the retreat Snorro had made for him, wondering how he was to get the winter over, wondering if Margaret would see him, wondering how best to gain her forgiveness, longing to see her face but not daring to approach her without some preparation for the meeting. For though she had come back to life, it had been very slowly. Snorro said that she never left the house, that she was still wan and weak, and that on the rare occasions when he had been sent to Peter's house, she had not spoken to him.

After his interview with Tulloch, he fell into a sound sleep again. When he awoke the day was well begun, and Peter was at the store. Looking through the cracks in the rude flooring, he could see him carefully counting his cash, and comparing his balance. Snorro, for a wonder, was quite idle, and Peter finally looked at him, and said fretfully:

"There is this and that to do. What art thou standing still for?"

"A man may stand still sometimes. I feel not like work to-day."

"Art thou sick, then?"

"Who can tell? It may be sickness."

He stood thoughtfully by the big fire and moved not. Peter went on with his figures in a fidgety way. Presently Tulloch entered. The banker's visits were rare ones, and Peter was already

suspicious of them. But he laid down his pen, and with scrupulous civility said, "Good morning to thee, Tulloch—Deacon Tulloch, I should say. Wilt thou buy or sell aught this morning?"

"Good morning, Fae. I came to thee for news. Where is thy son Jan staying?"

Peter's face darkened. "I know nothing at all about Jan Vedder. If he is at sea, he is out of thy world; if he is in harbor, he will be at Ragon Torr's, or on board The Solan."

"The Solan hath gone to pieces on the Quarr Rocks."

Just for a moment a thrill of sinful triumph made Peter's brown face turn scarlet, but he checked it instantly. "I heard not that," he said gravely.

"Only Jan escaped—ship and crew went to the bottom."

Peter shut his mouth tight, he was afraid to trust himself to speak.

"But Jan did his very best, no man could have done more. I saw him last night. He is ill and broken down by his trouble. Put out thy hand to him. Thou do that, and it will be a good thing, Fae."

"Thou mind thy own affairs, Deacon Tulloch."

"Well then it is my affair to tell thee, that there is a time for anger and a time for forgiveness. If Jan is to be saved, his wife can now do it. At this hour he is sick and sore-hearted, and she can win him back, she can save him now, Fae."

"Shall I lose my child to save Jan Vedder? What is it to thee? What can thou know of a father's duty? Thou, who never had child. Deacon thou may be, but thou art no Dominie, and I will order my household without thy word, thus or so. Yes, indeed I will!"

"Just that, Fae. I have spoken for a good man. And let me tell thee, if Margaret Vedder is thy daughter, she is also Jan's wife; and if I were Jan, I would make her do a wife's duty. If all the women in Shetland were to run back to their fathers for a little thing that offended them, there would be an end of marrying."

Peter laughed scornfully. "Every one knows what well-behaved wives old bachelors have."

"Better to be a bachelor, than have a wife like poor Jan Vedder has."

"Thou art talking of my daughter. Wilt thou mind thy own affairs?"

"I meant well, Fae. I meant well. Both thee and I have much need of heaven's mercy. It will be a good thing for us to be merciful. I am willing to help and trust Jan again. Thou do so too. Now I will say 'good morning', for I see thou art angry at me."

Peter was angry, intensely angry. Under the guise of Christian charity, Tulloch had come into his store and insulted him. Peter would believe in no other motive. And yet he was scarcely just to Tulloch, for his intentions had first and mainly been sincerely kind ones; but the tares are ever among the wheat, and it was true enough that before the interview was over Tulloch had felt a personal pleasure in his plain speaking.

Very soon there was a little crowd in Fae's store. It was a cold, blustering day, and its warmth and company made it a favorite lounging place. Jan's misfortune was the sole topic of conversation, and Jan's absence was unfavorably criticised. Why did he not come among his fellows and tell them how it had happened? Here were good men and a good ship gone to the bottom, and he had not a word to say of the matter. They were all curious about the wreck, and would have liked to pass the long stormy day in talking it over. As it was, they had only conjectures. No one but Tulloch had seen Jan. They wondered where he was.

"At Torr's, doubtless," said Peter, harshly.

"It is likely. Jan ever flew to the brandy keg for comfort."

"It is like he had been there before he steered for the Quarr Rocks."

"It did not need brandy. He was ever careless."

"He was foolhardy more than careless."

"I never thought that he knew the currents and the coast, as a man should know it who has life and goods to carry safe."

"He had best be with his crew; every man of it was a better man than he is."

Snorro let them talk and wonder. He would not tell them where Jan was. One group succeeded another, and hour after hour Snorro stood listening to their conversation, with shut lips and blazing eyes. Peter looked at him with increasing irritability.

"Art thou still sick, Snorro?" he asked at length.

"Not I."

"Why, then, art thou idle?"

"I am thinking. But the thought is too much for me. I can make nothing of it."

Few noticed Snorro's remark, but old Jal Sinclair said, "Tell thy thought, Snorro. There are wise men here to read it for thee; very wise men, as thou must have noticed."

Snorro caught something in the old man's face, or in the inflection of his voice, which gave him an assurance of sympathy, so he said: "Well, then, it is this. Jan Vedder is evidently a very bad

man, and a very bad sailor; yet when Donald Twatt's boat sunk in the Vor Ness, Jan took his bonnet in his hand, and he put his last sovereign in it, and he went up and down Lerwick till he had got £40 for Twatt. And he gave him a suit of his own clothes, and he would hear no word wrong of him, and he said, moreover, that nothing had happened Twatt but what might happen the best man and the best sailor that ever lived when it would be God's own time. I thought that was a good thing in Jan, but no one has spoke of it to-day."

"People have ever thought thee a fool, Snorro. When thou art eighty years old, as Jal Sinclair is, perhaps thou wilt know more. Jan Vedder should have left Twatt to his trouble; he should have said, 'Twatt is a drunken fellow, or a careless, foolhardy fellow; he is a bad sailor, a bad man, and he ought to have gone to the bottom.'" Then there was a minute's uncomfortable silence, and the men gradually scattered.

Peter was glad of it. He had no particular pleasure in any conversation having Jan for a topic, and he was burning and smarting at Tulloch's interference. It annoyed him also to see Snorro so boldly taking Jan's part. His indignant face and brooding laziness was a new element in the store, and it worried Peter far beyond its importance. He left unusually early, and then Snorro closed the doors, and built up the fire, and made some tea, and broiled mutton and bloaters, and set his few dishes on the box which served him for a table. Jan had slept heavily all day, but when Snorro brought the candle near, he opened his eyes and said, "I am hungry, Snorro."

"I have come to tell thee there is tea and meat waiting. All is closed, and we can eat and talk, and no one will trouble us."

A Shetlander loves his tea, and it pleased Snorro to see how eagerly Jan drank cup after cup. And soon his face began to lose its weary, indifferent look, and he ate with keen relish the simple food before him. In an hour Jan was nearly like himself once more. Then he remembered Margaret. In the extremity of his physical weakness and weariness, he had forgotten every thing in sleep, but now the delay troubled him. "I ought to have seen my wife to-day, Snorro; why did thou let me sleep?"

"Sleep was the first thing, and now we will see to thy clothes. They must be mended, Jan."

Jan looked down at the suit he wore. It was torn and shabby and weather-stained, and it was all he had. But Snorro was as clever as any woman with the needle and thread. The poor fellow, indeed, had never had any woman friend to use a needle for him, and he soon darned, and patched, and washed clean what the winds and waves had left of Jan's once handsome suit of blue.

As he worked they talked of the best means of securing an interview with Margaret, for Jan readily guessed that Peter would forbid it, and it was finally decided that Snorro should take her a letter, as soon as Peter was at the store next day. There was a little cave by the seaside half way between the town and Peter's house, and there Jan was to wait for Snorro's report.

In the meantime Peter had reached his home. In these days it was a very quiet, somber place. Thora was in ill health, in much worse health than any one but herself suspected, and Margaret was very unhappy. This evening Thora had gone early to bed, and Margaret sat with her baby in her arms. When her father entered she laid him in the cradle. Peter did not like to have it in any way forced upon his notice, and Margaret understood well enough that the child was only tolerated for her sake. So, without any of those little fond obtrusive ways so natural to a young mother, she put the child out of the way, and sat down to serve her father's tea.

His face was dark and angry, his heart felt hard to her at that hour. She had brought so much sorrow and shame on him. She had been the occasion of so many words and acts of which he was ashamed. In fact, his conscience was troubling him, and he was trying to lay the whole blame of his cruelty and injustice on her. For some time he did not speak, and she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to ask him any questions. At length he snapped out, "Jan Vedder came back to Lerwick yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"I said yesterday. Did thou think he would run here to see thee the first moment? Not he. He was at Tulloch's last night. He will have been at Torr's all day, no doubt."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears, and Peter looked angrily at her.

"Art thou crying again? Now listen, thou art not like to see him at all. He has thrown thy £600 to the bottom of the sea—ship, cargo, and crew, all gone."

"Jan? Father, is Jan safe?"

"He is safe enough. The devil holds his own from water. Now, if he does come to see thee, thou shalt not speak with him. That is my command to thee."

Margaret answered not, but there was a look upon her face, which he understood to mean rebellion.

"Bring me the Bible here." Then as he turned to the place he wanted, he said: "Now, Margaret, if thou art thinking to disobey thy father, I want thee to hear in what kind of company thou wilt do so;" and he slowly read aloud:

"'Backbiters—haters of God—despiteful—proud—boasters—inventors of evil things—*disobedient to parents;*' dost thou hear, Margaret? '*disobedient to parents*—without understanding—covenant breakers—without natural affection—implacable—unmerciful.'"

"Let me see him once, father? Let me see him for half an hour."

"Not for one moment. Disobey me if thou dares."

"He is my husband."

"I am thy father. Thy obligation to me began with thy birth, twenty years before thou saw Jan Vedder. Between man and wife there may be a divorce, between father and daughter there can be no bill of separation. The tie of thy obedience is for life, unless thou wilt take the risk of disobeying thy God. Very well, then, I say to thee, thou shalt not speak to Jan Vedder again, until he has proved himself worthy to have the care of a good woman. That is all I say, but mind it! If thou disobey me, I will never speak to thee again. I will send thee and thy child from my sight, I will leave every penny I have to my two nephews, Magnus and Thorkel. That is enough. Where is thy mother?"

"She is in pain, and has gone to bed."

"It is a sick house, I think. First, thou wert like to die, and ever since thy mother hath been ill; that also is Jan Vedder's doing, since thou must needs fret thyself into a fever for him." Then he took his candle and went to his sick wife, for he thought it best not to weaken his commands by any discussion concerning them.

Margaret did what most mothers would have done, she lifted her child for consolation. It was a beautiful child, and she loved it with an idolatrous affection. It had already taught her some lessons strange enough to Margaret Vedder. For its sake she had become conciliating, humble, patient; had repressed her feelings of mother-pride, and for the future good of her boy, kept him in a corner as it were. She had never suffered him to be troublesome, never intruded him upon the notice of the grandfather whom some day doubtless he would completely conquer. Ah, if she had only been half as unselfish with Jan! Only half as prudent for Jan's welfare!

She lifted the boy and held him to her breast. As she watched him, her face grew lovely. "My child!" she whispered, "for thee I can thole every thing. For thy sake, I will be patient. Nothing shall tempt me to spoil thy life. Thou shalt be rich, little one, and some day thee and I will be happy together. Thy father robbed thee, but I will not injure thee; no, indeed, I will not!"

So, after all, Jan's child was to be the barrier between him and his wife. If Jan had chosen to go back to the class from which she had taken him, she would at least save her child from the suffering and contempt of poverty. What she would have done for his father, she would do for him. Yes, that night she fully determined to stand by her son. It might be a pleasure for her to see Jan, and even to be reconciled to him, but she would not sacrifice her child's inheritance for her own gratification. She really thought she was consummating a grand act of self-denial, and wept a few pitiful tears over her own hard lot.

In the morning Peter was unusually kind to her. He noticed the baby, and even allowed her to lay it in his arms while she brought him his seal-skin cloak and woolen mufflers. It was a dangerous advance for Peter; he felt his heart strangely moved by the sleeping child, and he could not avoid kissing him as he gave him back to his mother. Margaret smiled at her father in her deep joy, and said softly to him, "Now thou hast kissed me twice." Nothing that Peter could have done would have so bound her to him. He had sealed his command with that kiss, and though no word of promise was given him, he went to his store comparatively light-hearted; he was certain his daughter would not disobey him.

While this scene was transpiring, one far more pathetic was taking place in Snorro's room. Jan's clothes had been washed and mended, and he was dressing himself with an anxious desire to look well in his wife's eyes that was almost pitiful. Snorro sat watching him. Two women could hardly have been more interested in a toilet, or tried harder to make the most out of poor and small materials. Then Jan left his letter to Margaret with Snorro, and went to the cave agreed upon, to await the answer.

Very soon after Peter reached the store, Snorro left it. Peter saw him go, and he suspected his errand, but he knew the question had to be met and settled, and he felt almost sure of Margaret that morning. At any rate, she would have to decide, and the sooner the better. Margaret saw Snorro coming, but she never associated the visit with Jan. She thought her father had forgotten something and sent Snorro for it. So when he knocked, she said instantly, "Come in, Michael Snorro."

The first thing Snorro saw was the child. He went straight to the cradle and looked at it. Then he kneeled down, gently lifted the small hand outside the coverlet, and kissed it. When he rose up, his face was so full of love and delight that Margaret almost forgave him every thing. "How beautiful he is," he whispered, looking back at the sleeping babe.

Margaret smiled; she was well pleased at Snorro's genuine admiration.

"And he is so like Jan—only Jan is still more beautiful."

Margaret did not answer him. She was washing the china cups, and she stood at the table with a towel over her arm. Snorro thought her more beautiful than she had been on her wedding day. During her illness, most of her hair had been cut off, and now a small white cap covered her head, the short, pale-brown curls just falling beneath it on her brow and on her neck. A long, dark dress, a white apron, and a white lawn kerchief pinned over her bosom, completed her attire. But no lady in silk or lace ever looked half so womanly. Snorro stood gazing at her, until she said, "Well, then, what hast thou come for?"

With an imploring gesture he offered her Jan's letter.

She took it in her hand and turned it over, and over, and over. Then, with a troubled face, she

handed it back to Snorro.

"No, no, no, read it! Oh, do thou read it! Jan begs thee to read it! No, no, I will not take it back!"

"I dare not read it, Snorro. It is too late—too late. Tell Jan he must not come here. It will make more sorrow for me. If he loves me at all, he will not come. He is not kind to force me to say these words. Tell him I will not, dare not, see him!"

"It is thou that art unkind. He has been shipwrecked, Margaret Vedder; bruised and cut, and nearly tossed to death by the waves. He is broken-hearted about thee. He loves thee, oh, as no woman ever deserved to be loved. He is thy husband. Thou wilt see him, oh yes, thou wilt see him!"

"I will not see him, Snorro. My father hath forbid me. If I see Jan, he will turn me and the child from the house."

"Let him. Go to thy husband and thy own home."

"My husband hath no home for me."

"For thou pulled it to pieces."

"Go away, Snorro, lest worse words come. I will not sacrifice that little innocent babe for Jan."

"It is Jan's son—thou art ruining Jan—"

"Now, wilt thou go, Michael Snorro, and tell Jan that I say what my father says: when he is worthy of me I will come to him."

"I will go, but I will tell thee first, that Jan will be worthy of thee long before thou art worthy of him." Then, ere Margaret could prevent him, he walked to the cradle, lifted the child, and kissed it again and again, saying between each kiss, "That is for thy father, little one."

The child was crying when he laid it down, and Margaret again angrily ordered him to leave the house. Before she had soothed it to peace, Snorro was nearly out of sight. Then Thora, who had heard the dispute, rose from her bed and came into the room. She looked ill and sad, and asked faintly, "What is this message sent to Jan Vedder? He will not believe it. Look for him here very soon, and be sure what thou doest is right."

"My father told me what to do."

"Yet ask thy heart and thy conscience also. It is so easy for a woman to go wrong, Margaret; it is almost impossible for her to put wrong right. Many a tear shall she wash it out with."

"I have done no wrong to Jan. Dost thou think so?"

"When one gets near the grave, Margaret, there is a little light from beyond, and many things are seen not seen before. Oh, be sure thou art right about Jan! No one can judge for thee. Fear not to do what thy heart says, for at the end right will come right, and wrong will come wrong."

There was a solemn stillness after this conversation. Thora sat bent over beside the fire musing. Margaret, wearied with the feelings which her interview with Snorro had called forth, rested upon the sofa; she was suffering, and the silence and melancholy of her mother seemed almost a wrong to her. It was almost as if she had taken Jan's part.

A knock at the door startled both women. Thora rose and opened it. It was Jan. "Mother," he said, "I want to see my wife and child."

"Margaret, speak for thyself."

"I dare not see Jan. Tell him so."

Thora repeated the message.

"Ask Margaret if that is her last word to me?"

Mechanically Thora asked the question, and after an agonizing pause Margaret gasped out, "Yes, yes—until—"

"Ask her to stand a moment at the window with the child. I long to see them." Then he turned to go to the window, and Thora shut the door. But it was little use repeating Jan's request, Margaret had fainted, and lay like one dead, and Thora forgot every thing till life returned to her daughter. Then as the apparent unkindness was irrevocable and unexplainable, she said nothing of it. Why should she add to the sorrow Margaret was suffering?

And as for Jan, the universal opinion was that he ought to suffer. He had forfeited his wife, and his home, and his good name, and he had lost his boat. When a man has calamity upon calamity the world generally concludes that he must be a very wicked man to deserve them. Perhaps the world is right; but it is also just possible that the world, even with its six thousand years of gathered wisdom, may be wrong.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN AT DEATH'S DOOR.

“Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and
escaped,
All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God, whose wheel the
pitcher shaped.”

It must be remembered, however, that Margaret was bound by ties whose strength this generation can hardly conceive. The authority of a father over a child in England and Scotland is still a very decided one. Fifty years ago in Shetland it was almost absolute. Margaret believed the fifth commandment to be as binding upon her as the first. From her childhood it had been pointed out to her as leading all the six defining our duty to our fellow-creatures. Therefore if she thought her father's orders regarding Jan unkind, the possibility of disobeying them never presented itself.

Jan's troubles were pointed out to her as the obvious results of Jan's sins. How could he expect a blessing on a boat bought as he had bought *The Solan*? And what was the use of helping a man who was always so unfortunate? If Peter did not regard misfortune as a sin, he drew away from it as if it were something even worse. Sometimes God blesses a man through poverty, sometimes through riches, but until the rod blossoms even good Christians call it a chastening rod. Margaret had a dread of making her child share Jan's evil destiny: perhaps she was afraid of it for herself. Self is such an omnipresent god, that it is easy to worship him in the dark, and to obey him almost unconsciously. When Margaret recovered from her faint, she was inclined to think she deserved praise for what she called her self-denial. She knew also that her father would be satisfied with her conduct, and Peter's satisfaction took tangible forms. He had given her £100 when she broke up her home and left Jan; she certainly looked for some money equivalent for her present obedience. And yet she was quite positive this latter consideration had in no way at all influenced her decision; she was sure of that; only, there could be no harm in reflecting that a duty done would have its reward.

As for Jan, he let people say whatever they chose to say about him. To Tulloch and to Michael Snorro he described the tempest, and the desperation with which he had fought for his boat and his life; but defended himself to no one else. Day after day he passed in the retreat which Snorro had made him, and lying there he could plainly hear the men in Peter's store talk about him. Often he met the same men in Torr's at night, and he laughed bitterly to himself at their double tongues. There are few natures that would have been improved by such a discipline; to a man who had lost all faith in himself, it was a moral suicide.

Down, down, down, with the rapidity with which fine men go to ruin, went Jan. Every little thing seemed to help him to the bottom; yes, even such a trifle as his shabby clothes. But shabby clothes were not a trifle to Jan. There are men as well as women who put on respectability with respectable raiment; Jan was of that class. He was meanly dressed and he felt mean, and he had no money to buy a new suit. All Snorro's small savings he had used long before for one purpose or another, and his wages were barely sufficient to buy food, and to pay Jan's bill at Torr's; for, alas! Jan would go to Torr's. Snorro was in a sore strait about it, but if Torr's bill were not paid, then Jan would go to Inkster's, a resort of the lowest and most suspicious characters. Between the two evils he chose the lesser.

And Jan said in the freedom of Torr's many things which he ought not to have said: many hard and foolish things, which were repeated and lost nothing by the process. Some of them referred to his wife's cruelty, and to Peter Fae's interference in his domestic concerns. That he should talk of Margaret at all in such a place was a great wrong. Peter took care that she knew it in its full enormity; and it is needless to say, she felt keenly the insult of being made the subject of discussion among the sailor husbands who gathered in Ragon Torr's kitchen. Put a loving, emotional man like Jan Vedder in such domestic circumstances, add to them almost hopeless poverty and social disgrace, and any one could predict with apparent certainty his final ruin.

Of course Jan, in spite of his bravado of indifference, suffered very much. He had fits of remorse which frightened Snorro. Under their influence he often wandered off for two or three days, and Snorro endured during them all the agonies of a woman who has lost her child.

One night, after a long tramp in the wind and snow, he found himself near Peter Fae's house, and a great longing came over him to see his wife and child. He knew that Peter was likely to be at home and that all the doors were shut. There was a bright light in the sitting-room, and the curtains were undrawn. He climbed the inclosure and stood beside the window. He could see the whole room plainly. Peter was asleep in his chair on the hearth. Thora sitting opposite him, was, in her slow quiet way, crimping with her fingers the lawn ruffles on the newly ironed clothes. Margaret, with his son in her arms, walked about the room, softly singing the child to sleep. He knew the words of the lullaby—an old Finnish song that he had heard many a mother sing. He could follow every word of it in Margaret's soft, clear voice; and, oh, how nobly fair, how calmly good and far apart from him she seemed!

“Sleep on, sleep on, sweet bird of the meadow!
Take thy rest, little Redbreast.
Sleep stands at the door and says,
The son of sleep stands at the door and says,
Is there not a little child here?
Lying asleep in the cradle?
A little child wrapped up in swaddling clothes,
A child reposing under a coverlet of wool?”

Jan watched the scene until he could endure the heart-torture no longer. Had he not been so shabby, so ragged, so weather-stained, he would have forced his way to his wife's presence. But on such apparently insignificant trifles hang generally the great events of life. He could not bear the thought of this fair, calm, spotless woman seeing him in such a plight. He went back to Snorro, and was very cross and unreasonable with him, as he had been many times before. But Snorro was one of those rare, noble souls, who can do great and hopeless things, and continue to love what they have seen fall.

He not only pitied and excused Jan, he would not suffer any one to wrong, or insult him. All Torr's regular visitors feared the big man with the white, stern face, who so often called for Jan Vedder, and who generally took his friend away with him. Any thing that is genuine commands respect, and Snorro's love for Jan was so true, so tender, and unselfish, that the rudest soul recognized his purity. Even in Peter's store, and among the better class who frequented it, his honest affection was not without its result.

Jan usually avoided the neighborhood when Peter was there, but one afternoon, being half intoxicated, he went rolling past, singing snatches of "The Foula Reel." He was ragged and reckless, but through every disadvantage, still strikingly handsome. Michael Snorro lifted himself from the barrel which he was packing, and stood watching Jan with a face full of an inexpressible sorrow. Some one made a remark, which he did not hear, but he heard the low scornful laugh which followed it, and he saw Peter Fae, with a smile of contempt, walk to the door, and glance up the street after Jan.

"One thing I know," said Snorro, looking angrily at the group, "all of you have laughed in a very great company, for when a good man takes the road to hell, there also laughs the devil and all his angels. Yes, indeed."

It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen among them. Peter turned to his books, and one by one the men left the store, and Jan Vedder's name was not spoken again before Snorro by any one.

During the fishing season Jan went now and then to sea, but he had no regular engagement. Some said he was too unreliable; others, more honest, acknowledged they were superstitious about him. "Sooner or later ill luck comes with him," said Neil Scarpa. "I would as lief tread on the tongs, or meet a cat when going fishing as have Jan Vedder in my boat," said John Halcro. This feeling against him was worse than shipwreck. It drove Jan to despair. After a night of hard drinking, the idea of suicide began to present itself, with a frightful persistence. What was there for him but a life of dislike and contempt, or a swift unregretted death.

For it must be considered that in those days the ends of the earth had not been brought together. Emigration is an idea that hardly enters a Shetlander's mind at the present time; then it was a thing unknown. There were no societies for information, or for assistance. Every man relied upon his own resources, and Jan had none. He was in reality, a soul made for great adventures, condemned to fight life in the very narrowest lists.

When the warm weather came, he watched for Margaret, and made many attempts to see her. But she had all the persistence of narrow minds. She had satisfied herself that her duty to her father and to her son was before all other duties, and no cruelty is so cruel as that which attacks its victims from behind the ramparts of Duty and Conscience.

Thora frequently saw Jan, and he pleaded his cause eloquently to her. She was very sorry for him, and at times also very angry with him. She could not understand how Margaret's treatment should have taken all the heart and purpose out of his life. She would not let him say so; it was like casting the blame of all his idleness and dissipation upon her daughter. She would make no effort towards a reconciliation; while Margaret held him in such small estimation, she was sure that there could be no permanence in one, even if it could be effected.

Yet once or twice she spoke to Margaret in Jan's favor. If Margaret had desired to disobey her father, and see her husband, Thora's sympathies would have been with her; but no mother likes to put herself in a position which will give her child an opportunity of answering her with a look of reproachful astonishment. Something very like this had met her suggestion that "Jan must love his child, and long to see him."

Margaret was almost angry at such a supposition. "Jan love his child! It was impossible! No man who did so, would behave as Jan had done, and was still doing. To encourage Jan in any way was to disobey her father, and throw herself and her child upon Jan's mercies. She knew what they were. Even if she could see it to be her duty to sacrifice herself, on no account would she sacrifice the babe who had only her to think and care for him. She would do nothing in any way to prejudice its future." This was the tenor of her constant conversation. It was stated anew

every morning, it was reiterated every hour of the day; and with every day's reiteration, she became more certain of her own wisdom and justice.

One night, after another useless effort to see his wife, Jan went to Torr's, and found Hol Skager there. Jan was in a reckless mood, and the thought of a quarrel was pleasant to him. Skager was inclined to humor him. They had many old grievances to go over, and neither of them picked their words. At length Jan struck Skager across the mouth, and Skager instantly drew his knife.

In a moment Torr and others had separated the men. Skager was persuaded to leave the house, and Jan, partly by force and partly by entreaty, detained. Skager was to sail at midnight, and Torr was determined that Jan should not leave the house until that hour was passed. Long before it, he appeared to have forgotten the quarrel, to be indeed too intoxicated to remember any thing. Torr was satisfied, but his daughter Suneva was not.

About ten o'clock, Snorro, sitting in the back door of the store, saw Suneva coming swiftly towards him. Ere he could speak she said, "Skager and Jan have quarreled and knives have been drawn. If thou knowest where Skager is at anchor, run there, for I tell thee, there was more of murder than liquor in Jan's eyes this night. My father thought to detain him, but he hath slipped away, and thou may be sure he has gone to find Skager."

Snorro only said, "Thou art a good woman, Suneva." He thought he knew Skager's harbor; but when he got there, neither boat nor man was to be seen. Skager's other ground was two miles in an opposite direction under the Troll Rock, and not far from Peter Fae's house. Snorro hastened there at his utmost speed. He was in time to see Skager's boat, half a mile out at sea, sailing southward. Snorro's mental processes were slow. He stood still to consider, and as he mused, the solemn stillness of the lonely place was broken by a low cry of pain. It was Jan's voice. Among a thousand voices Snorro would have known it. In a few moments he had found Jan, prone upon the cliff edge bleeding from a wound in his side.

He was still sensible and he smiled at Snorro, saying slowly, "Thou must not be sorry. It is best so."

Most fishermen know something of the treatment of a knife wound; Snorro staunched the blood-flow, as well as he was able, and then with gigantic strides went to Peter Fae's. Margaret sat spinning beside her baby's cradle, Peter had gone to bed, Thora dozed at the fireside.

The impatience of his knock and voice alarmed the women, but when Margaret heard it was Snorro's voice, she quickly unfastened the door.

"Is the store burning?" she asked angrily, "that thou comest in such hot haste?"

"Thy husband has been murdered. Take thou water and brandy, and go as quick as thou canst run to the Troll's Rock. He lies there. I am going for the doctor."

"Why did thou come here, Michael Snorro? Ever art thou a messenger of ill. I will not go."

"Go thou at once, or I will give thee a name thou wilt shudder to hear. I will give it to thee at kirk, or market, or wherever I meet thee."

Snorro fled to the town, almost in uttering the words, and Thora, who had at once risen to get the water and the brandy, put them into her daughter's hands. "There is no time now for talking. I will tell thy father and send him after thee. Shall we have blood on our souls? All of us?"

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Art thou a woman? I tell thee, haste."

"I dare not—oh, my child! I will wake father."

"I command thee to go—this moment."

Then, almost in a passion, Margaret went. The office of mercy had been forced upon her. She had not been permitted to consider her own or her child's interest. No one had thought of her feelings in the matter. When she reached Jan's side she was still indignant at the peremptory way in which she had been treated.

He felt her there, rather than saw her—"Margaret!" he said feebly, "Margaret! At last!"

"Yes," she answered in bitter anger, "at last. Hast thou called me to see thy shameful end? A name full of disgrace thou leaves to me and to thy son."

"Forgive me—I am sorry. Forgive!"

"I will not forgive thee. No woman injured as I have been, can forgive."

His helplessness did not touch her. Her own wrongs and the wrongs of her child filled her heart. She was determined that at this hour he should at least understand their full enormity, and she spoke with all the rapid bitterness of a slow, cold nature, wrought up to an unnatural passion. In justifying herself she forgot quite that she had been sent to succor him until help arrived. She was turning away when Jan, in a voice full of misery, uttered one word:

"Water!"

Something womanly in her responded to the pitiful, helpless cry. She went back, and kneeling by his side, put the bottle to his mouth. The touch of his head upon her arm stirred her strangely; ere she let it slip from her hold, he had fainted.

"Oh Jan! Jan! Jan! My husband! My husband! Oh Jan, dear, forgive me! Jan, I am here! It is thy

Margaret! I still love thee! Yes, indeed, I love thee!—”

But it was too late. There was no response. She looked in horror and terror at the white face at her feet. Then she fled back to the house for help. Whether her father liked it or not, Jan must now be brought there. In that last moment she had forgiven him every thing. All the love of her betrothal had come like a great wave over her heart. “Poor Jan! Poor Jan!” she sobbed, as she fled like a deer across the moor.

Peter had been roused and had reluctantly dressed himself. In such an hour of extremity he would have to give the wounded man shelter if he were brought there. But he tarried as long as possible, hoping that Snorro would remove Jan and take him into the town. To be roused from sleep to confront such a problem of duty was a very unpleasant affair, and Peter was sulkily tying his shoe-strings when Margaret, breathless and sobbing, returned for him.

Her impetuosity and her emotion quite mastered him. She compelled him to go with her to Jan. But when they reached the Troll Rock Jan had disappeared. There was nothing there but the blue sailor’s cap which he had worn. No human being was in sight. Any party of relief brought by Snorro could be seen for a mile. Margaret picked up the cap, and gazed at it in a maze of anguish. Only one thing could have happened. During her absence consciousness had returned to Jan, and he, poor soul, remembering her cruel words, and seeing that she had left him there alone to die, had purposely edged himself over the cliff. The sea was twenty feet deep below it. She put her hands before her eyes, and shrieked until the welkin rang with her shrill, piercing cries. Peter could do nothing with her, she would not listen to him, and finally she became so frantically hysterical that he was alarmed for her life and reason, and had little opportunity that night to make any inquiries about his troublesome son-in-law.

Now, when God will help a man, he hath his own messenger. That night, Doctor Balloch sat in the open door of his house. This door was at the end of a little jetty to which his skiff was tied; and the whole expanse of the beautiful bay was before him. It was covered with boats, idly drifting about under the exquisite sky. Light ripples of laughter, and sweet echoes of song upon the waters, drifted toward him. He had read his evening portion, and he sat watching the flickering lights of the changing aurora. The portion had been the Nineteenth Psalm, and he was wishing that the Sweet Singer of Israel, who thought the Judean heavens “declared the glory of God,” could have seen the Shetland skies.

Suddenly, and peremptorily, a voice encompassed him—a soft, penetrating voice, that came like the wind, he knew not how or whence, “Take thy boat and go to the Troll Rock.” He rose at once and went to the end of the jetty. The sea, darkly blue, was smooth as glass, the air clear, the majestic headlands imparting to the scene a solemn cathedral grandeur. He strove to shake off the strange impression, but it grew stronger and more imperative, and he said softly, as if answering some one, “I will go.”

He returned to the house and called his servant Hamish. Hamish and he lived alone, and had done so for more than thirty years, and they thoroughly trusted each other.

“Untie the boat, Hamish. We are going for a row. We will go as far as Troll Rock.”

This rock projected over the sea, which flowed into a large cave under it; a cave which had long been a favorite hiding place for smuggled cargoes. But when the minister reached it, all was silence. Hamish looked at his master curiously. What could he mean by resting on his oars and watching so desolate and dangerous a place? Very soon both were aware of a human voice; the confused, passionate echoes of Margaret’s above them; and these had not long ceased when Jan Vedder fell from the rock into the water.

“This man is to be saved, Hamish; it is what we have come for.” Hamish quietly slipped into the water, and when Jan, speechless and insensible, rose to the surface, he caught him with one arm and swam with him to the boat. In another moment he was in the bottom of it, and when he came to himself, his wound had been dressed, and he was in the minister’s own bed.

“Now, thou wilt do well enough, Jan, only thou must keep quiet body and mind.”

“Tell no one I am here. Thou wilt do that for me? Yes, thou wilt. Let them think I am at the bottom of the Troll Rock—for God’s sake.”

“I will tell no one, Jan. Thou art safe here; be at perfect rest about that matter.”

Of course the minister thought Jan had committed some crime. It was natural for every one to suspect Jan of doing wrong. But the fact that he had been sent so obviously to save him was, in the doctor’s mind, an evidence of the divine interest in the youth which he was glad to share. He had been appointed his preserver, and already he loved him. He fully trusted Hamish, but he thought it well to say to him:

“We will speak to no one of our row to the Troll Rock, Hamish.”

“Does Hamish ever talk, master?”

“No, thou art a wise man; but here there is more to guide than I yet understand.”

“Look nor word of mine shall hinder it.”

For four days the doctor stayed near Jan, and never left his house. “I will be quiet and let the news find me,” he thought. It came into the manse kitchen in various forms. Hamish received every version of the story with that grave shake of the head which fits so admirably every requirement of sympathy. “It was all a great pity,” was his most lengthy comment; but then Hamish never exceeded half a dozen words on any subject.

On the fourth evening, which was Saturday, Peter Fae sent this message to the minister: "Wilt thou come down to my store for the good of a wretched soul?" It was then getting late, and Peter stood in his shop-door alone. He pointed to Michael Snorro, who sat in a corner on some seal-skins in a stupor of grief.

"He hath neither eaten nor slept since. It is pitiful. Thou knowest he never had too much sense —"

"I know very clever men who are fools, besides Michael Snorro. Go thy ways home. I will do what I can for him—only, it had been kinder, had thou sent for me ere this."

He went to Snorro and sat down beside him. "Thou wilt let me speak to thee, Snorro. I come in God's name. Is it Jan?"

"Yes, it is Jan. My Jan, my Jan, my friend! the only one that ever loved me. Jan! Jan! Jan!" He said the last words in an intense whisper. It seemed as if his heart would break with each.

"Is Jan's loss all thy grief, Snorro?"

"Nay, there is more. Has thou found it out?"

"I think so. Speak to me."

"I dare not speak it."

"It is as sinful to think it. I am thy true friend. I come to comfort thee. Speak to me, Snorro."

Then he lifted his face. It was overspread by an expression of the greatest awe and sorrow:

"It is also my Lord Christ. He hath deceived me. He said to me, whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do. I asked him always, every hour to take care of Jan. If I was packing the eggs, or loading the boats, or eating my dinner, my heart was always praying. When Jan was at sea, I asked, 'take care of him,' when he was at Torr's, I prayed then the more, 'dear Lord Christ, take care of him.' I was praying for him that night, *at the very hour he perished*. I can pray no more now. What shall I do?"

"Art thou sure thou prayed for the right thing?"

"He said, 'whatsoever.' Well, then, I took him at his word. Oh yes, I believed every word he said. At the last, I thought, he will surely save Jan. I will pray till his time comes. He will not deceive a poor soul like me, for he knows right well that Snorro loves him."

"And so thou thinkest that Christ Jesus who died for thee hath deceived thee?"

"Well, then, he hath forgotten."

"Nay, nay, Snorro. He never forgets. Behold he has graven thy name upon his hands. Not on the mountains, for they shall depart; not on the sun, for it shall grow dark; not on the skies, for they shall melt with fervent heat; but on *his own hand*, Snorro. Now come with me, and I will show thee, whether Lord Christ heard thee praying or not, and I will tell thee how he sent me, his servant always, to answer thy prayer. I tell thee at the end of all this thou shalt surely say: 'there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised.'"

Then he lifted Michael's cap and gave it to him, and they locked the store door, and in silence they walked together to the manse. For a few minutes he left Snorro alone in the study. There was a large picture in it of Christ upon the cross. Michael had never dreamed of such a picture. When the minister came back he found him standing before it, with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

"Can thou trust him, Michael?"

"Unto death, sir."

"Come, tread gently. He sleeps."

Wondering and somewhat awestruck Michael followed the doctor into the room where Jan lay. One swift look from the bed to the smiling face of Jan's saviour was all Michael needed. He clasped his hands above his head, and fell upon his knees, and when the doctor saw the rapture in his face, he understood the transfiguration, and how this mortal might put on immortality.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH AND CHANGE.

"Wield thine own arm!—the only way
To know life is by living."

When Jan awoke Snorro was standing motionless beside him. He feebly stretched out his hand,

and pulled him close, closer, until his face was on the pillow beside his own.

"Oh Jan, how could'st thou? My heart hath been nearly broken for thee."

"It is all well now, Snorro. I am going to a new life. I have buried the old one below the Troll Rock."

Until the following night the men remained together. They had much to talk of, much that related both to the past and the future. Jan was particularly anxious that no one should know that his life had been saved: "And mind thou tell not my wife, Snorro," he said. "Let her think herself a widow; that will please her best of all."

"There might come a time when it would be right to speak."

"I can not think it."

"She might be going to marry again."

Jan's face darkened. "Yes, that is possible—well then, in that case, thou shalt go to the minister; he will tell thee what to do, or he himself will do it."

"She might weep sorely for thee, so that she were like to die."

"Mock me not, Snorro. She will not weep for me. Well then, let me pass out of memory, until I can return with honor."

"Where wilt thou go to?"

"Dost thou remember that yacht that was tied to the minister's jetty four weeks ago?"

"Yes, I remember it."

"And that her owner stayed at the manse for two days?"

"Yes, I saw him. What then?"

"He will be back again, in a week, in a few days, perhaps to-morrow. He is an English lord, and a friend of the minister's. I shall go away with him. There is to be a new life for me—another road to take; it must be a better one than that in which I have stumbled along for the last few years. Thou art glad?"

"Yes, Jan, I am glad."

"If things should happen so that I can send for thee, wilt thou come to me?"

"Yes, to the end of the world I will come. Thee only do I love. My life is broken in two without thee."

Every day Snorro watched the minister's jetty, hoping, yet fearing, to see the yacht which was to carry Jan away. Every night when the town was asleep, he went to the manse to sit with his friend. At length one morning, three weeks after Jan's disappearance, he saw the minister and the English lord enter Peter's store together. His heart turned sick and heavy; he felt that the hour of parting was near.

Peter was to send some eggs and smoked geese on board the yacht, and the minister said meaningly to Snorro, "Be sure thou puts them on board this afternoon, for the yacht sails southward on the midnight tide." Snorro understood the message. When the store was closed he made a bundle of Jan's few clothes; he had washed and mended them all. With them he put the only sovereign he possessed, and his own dearly-loved copy of the Gospels. He thought, "for my sake he may open them, and then what a comfort they will be sure to give him."

It was in Snorro's arms Jan was carried on board at the very last moment. Lord Lynne had given him a berth in the cabin, and he spoke very kindly to Snorro. "I have heard," he said, "that there is great love between you two. Keep your heart easy, my good fellow; I will see that no harm comes to your friend." And the grateful look on Snorro's face so touched him that he followed him to the deck and reiterated the promise.

It was at the last a silent and rapid parting. Snorro could not speak. He laid Jan in his berth, and covered him as tenderly as a mother would cover her sick infant. Then he kissed him, and walked away. Dr. Balloch, who watched the scene, felt the deep pathos and affection that had no visible expression but in Snorro's troubled eyes and dropped head; and Lord Lynne pressed his hand as a last assurance that he would remember his promise concerning Jan's welfare. Then the anchor was lifted, and the yacht on the tide-top went dancing southward before the breeze.

At the manse door the minister said, "God be thy consolation, Snorro! Is there any thing I, his servant, can do for thee?"

"Yes, thou can let me see that picture again."

"Of the Crucified?"

"That is what I need."

"Come then."

He took a candle from Hamish and led him into the study. In the dim light, the pallid, outstretched figure and the divine uplifted face had a sad and awful reality. Even upon the cultivated mind and heart, fine pictures have a profound effect; on this simple soul, who never before had seen any thing to aid his imagination of Christ's love, the effect was far more potent. Snorro stood before it a few minutes full of a holy love and reverence, then, innocently as a child might have done, he lifted up his face and kissed the pierced feet.

Dr. Balloch was strangely moved and troubled. He walked to the window with a prayer on his lips, but almost immediately returned, and touching Snorro, said—

“Take the picture with thee, Snorro. It is thine. Thou hast bought it with that kiss.”

“But thou art weeping!”

“Because I can not love as thou dost. Take what I have freely given, and go. Ere long the boats will be in and the town astir. Thou hast some room to hang it in?”

“I have a room in which no foot but mine will tread till Jan comes back again.”

“And thou wilt say no word of Jan. He must be cut loose from the past awhile. His old life must not be a drag upon his new one. We must give him a fair chance.”

“Thou knows well I am Jan’s friend to the uttermost.”

Whatever of comfort Snorro found in the pictured Christ, he sorely needed it. Life had become a blank to him. There was his work, certainly, and he did it faithfully, but even Peter saw a great change in the man. He no longer cared to listen to the gossip of the store, he no longer cared to converse with any one. When there was nothing for him to do, he sat down in some quiet corner, buried his head in his hands, and gave himself up to thought.

Peter also fancied that he shrank from him, and the idea annoyed him; for Peter had begun to be sensible of a most decided change in the tone of public opinion regarding himself. It had come slowly, but he could trace and feel it. One morning when he and Tulloch would have met on the narrow street, Tulloch, to avoid the meeting, turned deliberately around and retraced his steps. Day by day fewer of the best citizens came to pass their vacant hours in his store. People spoke to him with more ceremony, and far less kindness.

He was standing at his store door one afternoon, and he saw a group of four or five men stop Snorro and say something to him. Snorro flew into a rage. Peter knew it by his attitude, and by the passionate tones of his voice. He was vexed at him. Just at this time he was trying his very best to be conciliating to all, and Snorro was undoubtedly saying words he would, in some measure, be held accountable for.

When he passed Peter at the store door, his eyes were still blazing with anger, and his usually white face was a vivid scarlet. Peter followed him in, and asked sternly, “Is it not enough that I must bear thy ill-temper? Who wert thou talking about? That evil Jan Vedder, I know thou wert!”

“We were talking of thee, if thou must know.”

“What wert thou saying? Tell me; if thou wilt not, I will ask John Scarpa.”

“Thou wert well not to ask. Keep thy tongue still.”

“There is some ill-feeling toward me. It hath been growing this long while. Is it thy whispering against me?”

“Ask Tulloch why he would not meet thee? Ask John Scarpa what Suneva Glumm said last night?”

“Little need for me to do that, since thou can tell me.”

Snorro spoke not.

“Snorro?”

“Yes, master.”

“How many years hast thou been with me?”

“Thou knows I came to thee a little lad.”

“Who had neither home nor friends?”

“That is true yet.”

“Have I been a just master to thee?”

“Thou hast.”

“Thou, too, hast been a just and faithful servant. I have trusted thee with every thing. All has been under thy thumb. I locked not gold from thee. I counted not after thee. I have had full confidence in thee. Well, then, it seems that my good name is also in thy hands. Now, if thou doest thy duty, thou wilt tell me what Tulloch said.”

“He said thou had been the ruin of a better man than thyself.”

“Meaning Jan Vedder?”

“That was whom he meant.”

“Dost thou think so?”

“Yes, I think so, too.”

“What did Suneva Glumm say?”

“Well, then, last night, when the kitchen was full, they were talking of poor Jan; and Suneva—thou knowest she is a widow now and gone back to her father’s house—Suneva, she strode up to the table, and she struck her hand upon it, and said, ‘Jan was a fisherman, and it is little of men you fishers are, not to make inquiry about his death. Here is the matter,’ she said. ‘Snorro finds him wounded, and Snorro goes to Peter Fae’s and sends Jan’s wife to her husband. Margaret

Vedder says she saw him alive and gave him water, and went back for Peter Fae. Then Jan disappears, and when Snorro gets back with a doctor and four other men, there is no Jan to be found.' I say that Margaret Vedder or Peter Fae know what came of Jan, one, or both of them, know. But because the body has not been found, there hath been no inquest, and his mates let him go out of life like a stone dropped into the sea, and no more about it."

"They told thee that?"

"Ay, they did; and John Scarpa said thou had long hated Jan, and he did believe thou would rather lose Jan's life than save it. Yes, indeed!"

"And thou?"

"I said some angry words for thee. Ill thou hast been to Jan, cruel and unjust, but thou did not murder him. I do not think thou would do that, even though thou wert sure no man would know it. If I had believed thou hurt a hair of Jan's head, I would not be thy servant to-day."

"Thou judgest right of me, Snorro. I harmed not Jan. I never saw him. I did not want him brought to my house, and therefore I made no haste to go and help him; but I hurt not a hair of his head."

"I will maintain that every where, and to all."

"What do they think came of Jan?"

"What else, but that he was pushed over the cliff-edge? A very little push would put him in the sea, and the under-currents between here and the Vor Ness might carry the body far from this shore. All think that he hath been drowned."

Then Peter turned away and sat down, silent and greatly distressed. A new and terrible suspicion had entered his mind with Snorro's words. He was quite sure of his own innocence, but had Margaret pushed Jan over? From her own words it was evident she had been angry and hard with him. Was this the cause of the frantic despair he had witnessed. It struck him then that Margaret's mother had ever been cold and silent, and almost resentful about the matter. She had refused to talk of it. Her whole behavior had been suspicious. He sat brooding over the thought, sick at heart with the sin and shame it involved, until Snorro said—"It is time to shut the door." Then he put on his cloak and went home.

Home! How changed his home had become! It was a place of silence and unconfessed sorrow. All its old calm restfulness had gone. Very soon after Jan's disappearance, Thora had taken to her bed, and she had never left it since. Peter recognized that she was dying, and this night he missed her sorely. Her quiet love and silent sympathy had been for many a year a tower of strength to him. But he could not carry this trouble to her, still less did he care to say any thing to Margaret. For the first time he was sensible of a feeling of irritation in her presence. Her white despairing face angered him. For all this trouble, in one way or another, she was responsible.

He felt, too, that full of anxiety as he was, she was hardly listening to a word he said. Her ears were strained to catch the first movement of her child, who was sleeping in the next room. To every one he had suddenly become of small importance. Both at home and abroad he felt this. To such bitter reflections he smoked his pipe, while Margaret softly sung to her babe, and Thora, with closed eyes, lay slowly breathing her life away: already so far from this world, that Peter felt as if it would be cruel selfishness to trouble her more with its wrongs and its anxieties.

Four days afterward, Thora said to her daughter: "Margaret, I had a token early this morning. I saw a glorious ship come sailing toward me. Her sails were whiter than snow under the moonshine; and at her bow stood my boy, Willie, my eldest boy, and he smiled and beckoned me. I shall go away with the next tide. Ere I go, thou tell me something?"

"Whatever thou ask me."

"What came of poor Jan Vedder?"

Then Margaret understood the shadow that had fallen between herself and her mother; the chill which had repressed all conversation; the silent terror which had perchance hastened death.

"Oh, mother!" she cried, "did thou really have this fear? I never harmed Jan. I left him on the cliff. God knows I speak the truth. I know no more."

"Thank God! Now I can go in peace." Margaret had fallen on her knees by the bedside, and Thora leaned forward and kissed her.

"Shall I send for father?"

"He will come in time."

A few hours afterward she said in a voice already far away, as if she had called back from a long distance, "When Jan returns be thou kinder to him, Margaret."

"Will he come back? Mother, tell me!"

But there was no answer to the yearning cry. Never another word from the soul that had now cast earth behind it. Peter came home early, and stood gloomily and sorrowfully beside his companion. Just when the tide turned, he saw a momentary light flash over the still face, a thrill of joyful recognition, a sigh of peace, instantly followed by the pallor, and chill, and loneliness of death.

At the last the end had come suddenly. Peter had certainly known that his wife was dying, but

he had not dreamed of her slipping off her mortal vesture so rapidly. He was shocked to find how much of his own life would go with her. Nothing could ever be again just as it had been. It troubled him also that there had been no stranger present. The minister ought to have been sent for, and some two or three of Thora's old acquaintances. There was fresh food for suspicion in Thora Fae being allowed to pass out of life just at this time, with none but her husband and daughter near, and without the consolation of religious rites.

Peter asked Margaret angrily, why she had neglected to send for friends and for the minister?

"Mother was no worse when thou went to the store this morning. About noon she fell asleep, and knew nothing afterward. It would have been cruel to disturb her."

But in her own heart Margaret was conscious that under any circumstances she would have shrunk from bringing strangers into the house. Since Jan's disappearance, she had been but once to kirk, for that once had been an ordeal most painful and humiliating. None of her old friends had spoken to her; many had even pointedly ignored her. Women excel in that negative punishment which they deal out to any sister whom they conceive to have deserved it. In a score of ways Margaret Vedder had been made to feel that she was under a ban of disgrace and suspicion.

Some of this humiliation had not escaped Peter's keen observation; but at the time he had regarded it as a part of the ill-will which he also was consciously suffering from, and which he was shrewd enough to associate with the mystery surrounding the fate of his son-in-law. Connecting it with what Snorro had said, he took it for further proof against his daughter. Thora's silence and evident desire to be left to herself, were also corroborative. Did Thora also suspect her? Was Margaret afraid to bring the minister, lest at the last Thora might say something? For the same reason, had Thora's old intimates been kept away? Sometimes the dying reveal things unconsciously; was Margaret afraid of this? When once suspicion is aroused, every thing feeds it. Twenty-four hours after the first doubt had entered Peter's heart, he had almost convinced himself that Margaret was responsible for Jan's death.

He remembered then the stories in the Sagas of the fair, fierce women of Margaret's race. A few centuries previously they had ruled things with a high hand, and had seldom scrupled to murder the husbands who did not realize their expectations. He knew something of Margaret's feelings by his own; her wounded self-esteem, her mortification at Jan's failures, her anger at her poverty and loss of money, her contempt for her own position. If she had been a man, he could almost have excused her for killing Jan; that is, if she had done it in fair fight. But crimes which are unwomanly in their nature shock the hardest heart, and it was unwomanly to kill the man she had loved and chosen, and the father of her child; it was, above all, a cowardly, base deed to thrust a wounded man out of life. He tried to believe his daughter incapable of such a deed, but there were many hours in which he thought the very worst of her.

Margaret had no idea that her father nursed such suspicions; she felt only the change and separation between them. Her mother's doubt had been a cruel blow to her; she had never been able to speak of it to her father. That he shared it, never occurred to her. She was wrapped up in her own sorrow and shame, and at the bottom of her heart inclined to blame her father for much of the trouble between her and Jan. If he had dealt fairly with Jan after the first summer's fishing, Jan would never have been with Skager. And how eager he had been to break up her home! After all, Jan had been the injured man; he ought to have had some of her tocher down. A little ready money would have made him satisfied and happy; her life and happiness had been sacrificed to her father's avarice. She was sure now that if the years could be called back, she would be on Jan's side with all her heart.

Two souls living under the same roof and nursing such thoughts against each other were not likely to be happy. If they had ever come to open recrimination, things uncertain might have been explained; but, for the most part, there was only silence in Peter's house. Hour after hour, he sat at the fireside, and never spoke to Margaret. She grew almost hysterical under the spell of this irresponsive trouble. Perhaps she understood then why Jan had fled to Torr's kitchen to escape her own similar exhibitions of dissatisfaction.

As the months wore on, things in the store gradually resumed their normal condition. Jan was dead, Peter was living, the tide of popular feeling turned again. Undoubtedly, however, it was directed by the minister's positive, almost angry, refusal to ask Peter before the kirk session to explain his connection with Jan's disappearance. He had never gone much to Peter's store, but for a time he showed his conviction of Peter's innocence by going every day to sit with him. It was supposed, of course, that he had talked the affair thoroughly over with Peter, and Peter did try at various times to introduce the subject. But every such attempt was met by a refusal in some sort on the minister's part. Once only he listened to his complaint of the public injustice.

"Thou can not control the wind, Peter," he said in reply; "stoop and let it pass over thee. I believe and am sure thy hands are clear of Jan's blood. As to how far thou art otherwise guilty concerning him, that is between God and thy conscience. But let me say, if I were asked to call thee before the kirk session on the count of unkindness and injustice, I would not feel it to be my duty to refuse to do so." Having said this much, he put the matter out of their conversation; but still such a visible human support in his dark hour was a great comfort to Peter.

It was a long and dreary winter. It is amazing how long time can be when Sorrow counts the hours. Sameness, too, adds to grief; there was nothing to vary the days. Margaret went to bed every night full of that despairing oppression which hopes nothing from the morrow. Even when the spring came again her life had the same uniform gray tinge. Peter had his fisheries to look

forward to, and by the end of May he had apparently quite recovered himself. Then he began to be a little more pleasant and talkative to his daughter. He asked himself why he should any longer let the wraith of Jan Vedder trouble his life? At the last he had gone to help him; if he were not there to be helped, that was not his fault. As for Margaret, he knew nothing positively against her. Her grief and amazement had seemed genuine at the time; very likely it was; at any rate, it was better to bury forever the memory of a man so inimical to the peace and happiness of the Faes.

The fishing season helped him to carry out this resolution. His hands were full. His store was crowded. There were a hundred things that only Peter could do for the fishers. Jan was quite forgotten in the press and hurry of a busier season than Lerwick had ever seen. Peter was again the old bustling, consequential potentate, the most popular man in the town, and the most necessary. He cared little that Tulloch still refused to meet him; he only smiled when Suneva Glumm refused to let him weigh her tea and sugar, and waited for Michael Snorro.

Perhaps Suneva's disdain did annoy him a little. No man likes to be scorned by a good and a pretty woman. It certainly recurred to Peter's mind more often than seemed necessary, and made him for a moment shrug his shoulders impatiently, and mutter a word or two to himself.

One lovely moonlight night, when the boats were all at sea, and the town nearly deserted, Peter took his pipe and rambled out for a walk. He was longing for some womanly sympathy, and had gone home with several little matters on his heart to talk over with Margaret. But unfortunately the child had a feverish cold, and how could she patiently listen to fishermen's squabbles, and calculations of the various "takes," when her boy was fretful and suffering? So Peter put on his bonnet, and with his pipe in his mouth, rambled over the moor. He had not gone far before he met Suneva Glumm. Under ordinary circumstances he would have let her pass him, but to-night he wanted to talk, and even Suneva was welcome. He suddenly determined "to have it out with her," and without ceremony he called to her.

"Let me speak to thee, Suneva; I have something to say."

She turned and faced him: "Well then, say it."

"What have I done to get so much of thy ill-will? I, that have been friends with thee since I used to lift thee over the counter and give thee a sweet lozenger?"

"Thou did treat poor Jan Vedder so badly."

"And what is Jan Vedder to thee, that thou must lift his quarrel?"

"He was my friend, then."

"And thy lover, perhaps. I have heard that he loved thee before he ever saw my Margaret when she was at school in Edinburgh."

"Thou hast heard lies then; but if he had loved me and if I had been his wife, Jan had been a good man this day; good and loving. Yes, indeed!"

"Art thou sure he is dead?"

"Peter Fae, if any one can answer that question, thou can; thou and thy daughter Margaret."

"I have heard thou hast said this before now."

"Ay, I have said it often, and I think it."

"Now, then, listen to me, and see how thou hast done me wrong."

Then Peter pleaded his own cause, and he pleaded it with such cleverness and eloquence that Suneva quite acquitted him.

"I believe now thou art innocent," she answered calmly. "The minister told me so long ago. I see now that he was right." Then she offered Peter her hand, and he felt so pleased and grateful that he walked with her all the way to the town. For Suneva had a great deal of influence over the men who visited Torr's, and most of them did visit Torr's. They believed all she said. They knew her warm, straightforward nature, and her great beauty gave a kind of royal assurance to her words.

Peter was therefore well pleased that he had secured her good will, and especially that he had convinced her of his entire innocence regarding Jan's life. If the subject ever came up over the fishers' glasses, she was a partisan worth having. He went home well satisfied with himself for the politic stroke he had made, and with the success which had attended it.

Margaret had seen her father talking and walking with Suneva, and she was very much offended at the circumstance. In her anger she made a most imprudent remark—"My mother not a year dead yet! Suneva is a bold, bad woman!"

"What art thou thinking of? Let me tell thee it was of Jan Vedder, and Jan Vedder only, that we spoke."

Not until that moment had it struck Peter that Suneva was a widow, and he a widower. But the thought once entertained was one he was not disposed to banish. He sat still half an hour and recalled her bright eyes, and good, cheerful face, and the pleasant confidential chat they had had together. He felt comforted even in the memory of the warm grip of her hand, and her sensible, honorable opinions. Why should he not marry again? He was in the prime of life, and he was growing richer every year. The more he thought of Suneva the warmer his heart grew toward her.

He was not displeased when next day one of his old comrades told him in a pawkie, meaning way, that he had "seen him walking with Glumm's handsome widow." A man nearly sixty is just as ready to suppose himself fascinating as a man of twenty. Peter had his courtiers, and they soon found out that he liked to be twitted about Suneva; in a little while a marriage between the handsome widow and the rich merchant was regarded as a very probable event.

When once the thought of love and marriage has taken root in a man's heart it grows rapidly. The sight of Suneva became daily more pleasant to Peter. Every time she came to the store he liked her better. He took care to let her see this, and he was satisfied to observe that his attentions did not prevent her visits.

In a few weeks he had quite made up his mind; he was only watching for a favorable opportunity to influence Suneva. In August, at the Fisherman's Foy, it came. Peter was walking home one night, a little later than usual, and he met Suneva upon the moor. His face showed his satisfaction. "Long have I watched for this hour," he said; "now thou must walk with me a little, for I have again some thing to say to thee. Where hast thou been, Suneva?"

"Well, then, I took charge of Widow Thorkel's knitting to sell it for her. She is bedridden, thou knows. I got a good price for her, and have been to carry her the money."

"Thou art a kind woman. Now, then, be kind to me also. I want to have thee for my wife."

"What will thy daughter say to that? She never liked me—nor have I much liked her."

"It will be long ere I ask my daughter if I shall do this or that. It is thee I ask. Wilt thou be my wife, Suneva?"

"It would not be a bad thing."

"It would be a very good thing for me, and for thee also. I should have thy pleasant face, and thy good heart, and thy cheerful company at my fireside. I will be to thee a loving husband. I will give thee the house I live in, with all its plenishing, and I will settle £70 a year on thee."

"That is but a little thing for thee to do."

"Then I will make it a £100 a year. Now what dost thou say?"

"I will marry thee, Peter, and I will do my duty to thee, and make thee happy." Then she put her hand in his, and he walked home with her.

Next day all Lerwick knew that Peter was going to marry Glumm's handsome widow.

CHAPTER IX.

JAN AT HIS POST.

"Then like an embryo bird
One day, he knew not how, but God that morn
Had pricked his soul—he cracked his shelly case,
and
Claimed his due portion in a larger life.
Into new life he starts, surveys the world
With bolder scope, and breathes more ample
breath."

With a great sigh of content Jan resigned himself to rest when the parting was over; and "The Lapwing," with wind and tide in her favor, went almost flying down the black North Sea. The motion of the vessel and the scent of the salt breeze were like his mother's lap and his native air. He had cast off his old life like an old garment. Michael Snorro and Dr. Balloch were the only memories of it he desired to carry into his new one. But at the first hour he could not even think of them. He only wanted to sleep.

Very soon sleep came to him, steeped him from head to feet in forgetfulness, lulled him fathoms deep below the tide of life and feeling. It was after twelve the next noon when he opened his eyes. Lord Lynne was sitting at the cabin table just opposite his berth. It took Jan two or three moments to remember where he was, and during them Lord Lynne looked up and smiled at him. Jan smiled back a smile frank and trustful as a child's. It established his position at once. Lord Lynne had been wondering what that position was to be, and he had decided to let Jan's unconscious behavior settle it. Even an animal, or a bird, that trusts us, wins us. The face that Jan turned to Lord Lynne was just such a face as he would have turned to Snorro—it trusted every thing, it claimed every thing, and every thing was given it.

"You have had your health-sleep, Vedder; I dare say you are hungry now?"

"Very hungry," answered Jan. "Is it breakfast time?"

"You mean is it lunch time? You will have to put two meals into one. Shall I order you some fresh fish, and eggs, and a broiled bird?"

"The thought of them is good."

"And some roast mutton and potatoes?"

"Yes, and plenty of tea if thou pleases."

My lord had his lunch while Jan ate his breakfast, and a very pleasant meal they made of it. The yacht was tossing and pitching a good deal, but they were leaving the islands behind and sailing fast toward smoother waters and brighter skies. Jan improved with every hour's flight, and he would gladly have left his berth had Lord Lynne permitted it.

"At Aberdeen," he said, "you shall go on shore, and see a physician. Dr. Balloch thinks that he has treated you properly, but I promised him to make sure of it."

The decision at Aberdeen was highly favorable. Jan was assured that he might be on deck a few hours every day, with great advantage to his health. They remained in Aberdeen two days. On the second day a trunk bearing his name was brought on board. Lord Lynne was on shore at the time, but his valet had it taken to Jan's room and opened. It contained a quantity of linen and clothing.

Jan had a love for good clothing. He felt its influence, and without reasoning about the matter, felt that it influenced every one else. When he had put on the linen, and a yachting suit with its gilt buttons, and had knotted the handkerchief at his neck, he felt that in all eyes he was a different being from Vedder the fisherman.

It would have been a difficult matter to Lord Lynne to have given clothing to some men, but Jan had not a vulgar feeling. He made no protestations, no excuses, no promises of repayment; he was not offensively demonstrative in his gratitude. He took the gift, as the gift had been given, with pleasure and confidence, and he looked handsome and noble in every thing he put on.

Lord Lynne was proud of him. He liked to see his crew watch Jan. He encouraged his valet to tell him what they said of him. Every one had invented some romance about the yacht's visitor; no one supposed him to be of less than noble birth. The cook had a theory that he was some prince who had got into trouble with his father. The secrecy with which he had been brought on board at midnight, his scarcely healed wound, the disguise of a fisherman's dress, were all regarded as positive proofs of some singular and romantic adventure. On board "The Lapwing" Jan was the central point of every man's interest and speculations.

And at this time, even Lord Lynne was a little in the dark regarding Jan. Dr. Balloch had only spoken of him as a young man going to ruin for want of some friends. Incidentally he had alluded to his matrimonial troubles, and, one evening when they were walking, he had pointed out Margaret Vedder. She was standing on the Troll Rock looking seaward. The level rays of the setting sun fell upon her. She stood, as it were, in a glory; and Lord Lynne had been much struck with her noble figure and with the set melancholy of her fine face.

So he knew that Jan had had trouble about his wife, and also that he had been wounded in a fight; and putting the two things together he made a perfectly natural inference. He was aware, also, that Margaret was Peter Fae's daughter and a probable heiress. If he thought of Jan's social position, he doubtless considered that only a Shetland gentleman would aspire to her hand. But he made no effort whatever to gain Jan's confidence; if he chose to give it, he would do so at the proper time, and without it they were very happy. For Lord Lynne had been a great traveler, and Jan never wearied of hearing about the places he had visited. With a map before him, he would follow every step up and down Europe. And across Asian seas, through Canadian cities, and the great plains of the West, the two men in memory and imagination went together.

Nothing was said of Jan's future; he asked no questions, gave no hints, exhibited no anxiety. He took his holiday in holiday spirit, and Lord Lynne understood and appreciated the unselfishness and the gentlemanly feeling which dictated the apparent indifference. At Margate the yacht went into harbor. Lord Lynne expected letters there, which he said would decide his movements for the winter. He was silent and anxious when he landed; he was in a mood of reckless but assumed indifference when he came on board again.

After dinner he spread the large map on the saloon table, and said: "Vedder, what do you say to a few months' cruise in the Mediterranean? I am not wanted at home, and I should like to show you some of the places we have talked about. Suppose we touch at the great Spanish ports, at Genoa, Venice, Naples and Rome, and then break the winter among the Isles of Greece and the old Ionian cities?"

Jan's face beamed with delight; there was no need for him to speak.

"And," continued his lordship, "as I sleep a great deal in warm climates, I shall want a good sailor aboard. I saw by the way you handled the yacht during that breeze in 'The Wash,' that you are one. Will you be my lieutenant this winter? I will pay you £100 a quarter; that will keep you in pocket money."

"That will be a great deal of money to me, and I shall be very glad to earn it so pleasantly."

"Then that settles matters for a few months—when we get back it will be time to buckle to work. Heigh-ho! Lieutenant, head 'The Lapwing' for the Bay of Biscay, and we will set our faces toward sunshine, and cast care and useless regret behind our backs."

At Gibraltar Lord Lynne evidently expected letters, but they did not come. Every mail he was

anxious and restless, every mail he was disappointed. At length he seemed to relinquish hope, and 'The Lapwing' proceeded on her voyage. One night they were drifting slowly off the coast of Spain. The full moon shone over a tranquil sea, and the wind blowing off shore, filled the sails with the perfume of orange blossoms. Lord Lynne had sent that day a boat into Valencia, hoping for letters, and had been again disappointed. As he walked the deck with Jan in the moonlight, he said sadly, "I feel much troubled to-night, Jan."

"Ever since we were in Gibraltar I have seen that thou hast some trouble, my lord. And I am sorry for thee; my own heart is aching to-night; for that reason I can feel for thy grief too."

"I wonder what trouble could come to a man hid away from life in such a quiet corner of the world as Shetland?"

"There is no corner too quiet, or too far away, for a woman to make sorrow in it."

"By every thing! You are right, Jan."

There was a few minutes' silence, and then Jan said: "Shall I tell thee what trouble came to me through a woman in Shetland?"

"I would like to hear about it."

Then Jan began. He spoke slowly and with some hesitation at first. His youth was connected with affairs about which the Shetlanders always spoke cautiously. His father had been one of the boldest and most successful of the men who carried on that "French trade" which the English law called smuggling. He had made money easily, had spent it lavishly, and at the last had gone to the bottom with his ship, rather than suffer her to be taken. His mother had not long survived her husband, but there had been money enough left to educate and provide for Jan until he reached manhood.

"I was ten years old when mother died," he continued, "and since then no one has really loved me but Michael Snorro. I will tell thee how our love began. One day I was on the pier watching the loading of a boat. Snorro was helping with her cargo, and the boys were teasing him, because of his clumsy size and ugly face. One of them took Snorro's cap off his head and flung it into the water. I was angry at the coward, and flung him after it, nor would I let him out of the water till he brought Snorro's cap with him. I shall never forget the look Snorro gave me that hour. Ever since we have been close friends. I will tell thee now how he hath repaid me for that deed."

Then Jan spoke of Margaret's return from school; of their meeting at one Fisherman's Foy, and of their wedding at the next. All of Peter's kindness and subsequent injustice; all of Margaret's goodness and cruelty, all of Snorro's affection and patience he told. He made nothing better nor worse. His whole life, as he knew and could understand it, he laid before Lord Lynne.

"And so thou sees," he concluded, "how little to blame and how much to blame I have been. I have done wrong and I have suffered. Yes, I suffer yet, for I love my wife and she has cast me off. Dost thou think I can ever be worthy of her?"

"I see, Jan, that what you said is true—in any corner of the earth where women are, they can make men suffer. As to your worthiness, I know not. There are some women so good, that only the angels of heaven could live with them. That £600 was a great mistake."

"I think that now."

"Jan, life is strangely different and yet strangely alike. My experience has not been so very far apart from yours. I was induced to marry when only twenty-one a lady who is my inferior in rank, but who is a very rich woman. She is a few years older than I, but she is beautiful, full of generous impulses, and well known for her charitable deeds."

"You are surely fortunate."

"I am very unhappy."

"Does she not love thee?"

"Alas! she loves me so much that she makes both her own and my life miserable."

"That is what I do not understand."

"Her love is a great love, but it is a selfish love. She is willing that I should be happy in her way, but in no other. I must give her not only my affection, but my will, my tastes, my duties to every other creature. My friends, horses, dogs, even this yacht, she regards as enemies; she is sure that every one of them takes the thought and attention she ought to have. And the hardest part is, that her noble side only is seen by the world. I alone suffer from the fault that spoils all. Consequently the world pities her, and looks upon me very much as the people of Lerwick looked on you."

"And can thou do nothing for thy own side?"

"Nothing. I am in the case of a very worthy old Roman lord who desired to divorce his wife. There was a great outcry. All his friends were amazed. 'Is she not handsome, virtuous, rich, amiable?' they asked. 'What hath she done to thee?' The Roman husband pointed to his sandal. 'Is it not new, is it not handsome and well made? But none of you can tell where it pinches me.' That old Roman and I are brothers. Every one praises 'my good wife, my rich wife, my handsome wife,' but for all that, the matrimonial shoe pinches me."

This confidence brought the two men near together. Henceforward there was no lack of

conversation. While every other subject fails, a domestic grievance is always new. It can be looked at in so many ways. It has touched us on every side of our nature. We are never quite sure where we have been right, and where wrong. So Lord Lynne and Jan talked of 'My Lady' in Lynnton Castle, and of Margaret Vedder in her Shetland home, but the conversations were not in the main unkind ones. Very early in them Lynne told Jan how he had once seen his wife standing on the Troll Rock at sunset, "lovely, and grand, and melancholy, as some forsaken goddess in her desolated shrine."

They were sitting at the time among the ruins of a temple to Pallas. The sun was setting over Lydian waters, and Jan seemed to see in the amber rays a vision of the tall, fair woman of his love and dreams. She ruled him yet. From the lonely islands of that forlorn sea she called him. Not continents nor oceans could sever the mystical tie between them. On the sands close by, some young Greek girls were dancing to a pipe. They were beautiful, and the dance was picturesque, but Jan hardly noticed them. The home-love was busy in his heart. "Until death us part." Nothing is more certain, in a life of such uncertainty.

Amid the loveliest scenes of earth they passed the winter months. It was far on in May when they touched Gibraltar on their return. Letters for both were waiting there. For Jan a short one from Dr. Balloch, and a long one from Michael Snorro. He was sitting with Snorro's in his hand when Lord Lynne, bright and cheerful, came out of his cabin. "I have very fair news, Jan; what has the mail brought you?" he asked.

"Seldom it comes for nothing. I have heard that my mother-in-law is dead. She was ever my friend, and I am so much the poorer. Peter Fae too is in trouble; he is in trouble about me. Wilt thou believe that the people of Lerwick think he may have——"

"Murdered you?"

"Yes, just that."

"I have often thought that the suspicion would be a natural one. Has he been arrested?"

"No, no; but he is in bad esteem. Some speak not to him. The minister, though, he stands by him."

"That is enough. If Dr. Balloch thought it necessary, he would say sufficient to keep Peter Fae out of danger. A little popular disapproval will do him good. He will understand then how you felt when wife and friends looked coldly on you, and suspicion whispered things to injure you that no one dared to say openly. Let Peter suffer a little. I am not sorry for him."

"Once he liked me, and was kind to me."

"Jan!"

"Yes, my friend."

"We are now going straight to Margate. I am promised office, and shall probably be a busy public man soon. It is time also that you buckled down to your work. We have had our holiday and grown strong in it—every way strong. What next?"

"Thou speak first."

"Well, you see, Jan, men must work if they would be rich, or even respectable. What work have you thought of?"

"Only of the sea. She is my father and my mother and my inheritance. Working on land, I am as much out of place as a fish out of water."

"I think you are right. Will you join the Merchant Service, or do you think better of the Royal Navy? I have a great deal of influence with the Admiralty Lords, and I have often wished I could be a 'blue jacket' myself."

"Above all things, I would like the Royal Navy."

"Then you shall be a 'blue jacket;' that is quite settled and well settled, I am sure. But every moment will take time, and it will probably be winter before I can get you a post on any squadron likely to see active service. During the interval I will leave 'The Lapwing' in your care, and you must employ the time in studying the technical part of your profession. I know an old captain in Margate who will teach you all he knows, and that is all that any of them know."

Jan was very grateful. The prospect was a pleasant one and the actual experience of it more than fulfilled all his expectations. "The Lapwing" was his home and his study. For he soon discovered how ignorant he was. Instruction in naval warfare was not all he needed. Very soon the old captain was supplemented by the schoolmaster. The days were too short for all Jan wished to learn. He grudged the hours that were spent in sleep. So busy was he that he never noticed the lapse of time, or, if he did, it was only that he might urge himself to greater efforts.

It did not trouble him that Lord Lynne seldom wrote, and never came. His salary was promptly paid, and Jan was one of the kind of men whom good fortune loves. He did not worry over events. He did not keep wondering what she was going to do for him, or wish night and day that she would make haste with the next step in his behalf. He took gratefully and happily the good he had, and enjoyed it to the utmost.

When a change came it was the first week in November. A lovely afternoon had not tempted Jan from his books. Suddenly the cabin door was darkened; he lifted his head, and saw Lord Lynne regarding him with a face full of pleasure. He came rapidly forward and turned over the volumes on the table with great interest. "I am glad to see these books, Jan," he said,

"Arithmetic, Geography, History, French—very good, indeed! And your last letter delighted me. The writing was excellent. Her Majesty's officers ought to be educated gentlemen; and you are now one of them."

Jan looked up, with eager, inquiring face.

"Yes, sir; you are now Lieutenant Jan Vedder, of Her Majesty's Schooner Retribution. You are to sail for the African coast within a week. Jan, I congratulate you!"

Jan rose and put out both hands. The action was full of feeling. No words could have been so eloquent. It was worth an hour of words, and Lord Lynne so understood it.

"I called at the mail as I came through the town, here is a letter for you. While you read it I will go through the yacht."

When he returned Jan was walking anxiously about with the letter in his hand. "Has bad news come with the good, Jan?"

"I know not if it be bad or if it be good. Peter Fae hath married again."

"Do you know the new wife?"

"Well I know her. She was ever a good friend to me, but my wife liked her not."

"Is she young or old, pretty or otherwise?"

"Few women are so handsome, and she has not yet thirty years."

"Then it is likely Peter Fae has found a master?"

"That, too, is likely. Snorro says that he hath settled on her the house in which he lives, with much money beside. Perhaps now my Margaret will be poor. I can not think that she will live with Suneva. What then will she do? I wish to see her very much."

"That you can not possibly do, Lieutenant Vedder. You will be under orders in the morning. To leave your post now, would be desertion. I do not fear for your wife. She knows very well how to look after her own interests. The two women in Peter's house will be Greek against Greek, and your wife will certainly win some victories."

"I would not have her suffer, my friend."

"She will not suffer. It is likely I may be in Lerwick next summer; I will see to that. Have you saved any thing of your salary?"

"I have spent very little of it. I have now over £300."

"Then I advise you to send £200 to Dr. Balloch for her. Tell him if help is needed to give it. He will understand the wisest way in which it can be offered. If it is not needed, he can save it toward that £600."

"I can send £300."

"No, you can not. Uniforms must be bought, and fees must be paid, and there are numerous other expenses to meet. Now you must pack your clothes and books. To-morrow you must be in Portsmouth; there 'The Retribution' is waiting for you and for orders. The orders may arrive at any hour, and it is possible you may have to sail at once."

The next afternoon Jan was in Portsmouth. It was a wonderful thing for him to tread the deck of his own ship; a handsome, fast-sailing schooner, specially built for the African blockade. She carried a heavy pivot gun and a carronade, and had a crew of fifty officers and men. He could scarcely believe that he was to command her, even when his officers saluted him. In three days he was to sail, and there was much to be done in the interval. But the hurry and bustle was an advantage; he had no time to feel the strangeness of his position; and men soon get accustomed to honor. On the third day he filled his place with the easy nonchalance of long authority.

It was fortunate for Jan that the mission on which he was sent was one that stirred him to the very depths of his nature. In the seclusion and ignorance of his life in Shetland, he had heard nothing of the wrongs and horrors of slavery. It is doubtful if there had ever come into his mind, as a distant idea, the thought of a race of men who were as black as he was white. Therefore when Lord Lynne explained to him the cruelty and wickedness of the slave traffic, Jan heard him at first with amazement, then with indignation. That passionate love of freedom and that hatred of injustice, which are at the foundation of the Norse character, were touched at every point. The tears of pity, the fire of vengeance, were in his eyes. To chase a slaver, to punish her villainous owners, to liberate her captives! Jan took in the whole grand duty at once.

"I see you are pleased with your prospects, Jan. Many would not be. The duty of the African blockading squadron is very hard; it is not a favorite station. That fact made your appointment so easy."

"Only one thing could make my prospects brighter."

"What is that thing?"

"If Snorro could go with me! How he would rejoice in such work! He is so strong; when he is angry, he is as strong as six men, I think. Once I saw him put a sick fisherman behind his back, and compel the boat crew to give him his share. Yes, indeed! They looked in Snorro's face, and did what he said without a word. He would fly on these men-catchers like a lion. He would stamp them under his feet. It is a war that would make Snorro's heart glad. He would slay the foe as he would pour out water, and for the weak and suffering he would lay down his life. He

would, indeed!"

Jan spoke rapidly, and with enthusiasm. Lord Lynne looked at him with admiration, as he said: "It is too late now to send for Snorro. How you do love that man, Jan!"

"Well, then, he deserves it. I would be a cur if I loved him not. I love thee, too. Thou saved me from myself; thou hast given to me like a prince; but as for Snorro! He gave me all he had! Thou art not grieved? Thou wilt not think me ungrateful for thy goodness?"

"If you had forgotten Snorro, Jan, I would not have trusted you for myself. You do right to love him. When the squadron is recalled he must be sent for. It is not right to part you two."

"I will tell him what thou says. It will make him happy. Snorro is one of those men who can wait patiently."

So Jan wrote to Snorro. He took the largest official paper he could find, and he sealed the letter with the ship's seal, sparing not the sealing-wax in its office. For he knew well what an effect the imposing missive would have. In the hurry of his own affairs he could think of such small things, for the sake of the satisfaction which they would give to his simple-minded friend.

But mails were long at that time of the year in reaching Shetland. Jan was far down the African coast when his letter came to Lerwick. It was under cover to Dr. Balloch, and though the day was rough and snowy the good minister found his way to Peter's store. He was always welcome there. Peter never forgot how faithfully he stood by him when the darkest suspicions kept other men away, and Snorro associated his visits with news from Jan. When, therefore, the minister in leaving said, "Snorro thou art strong, and Hamish is weak, come to-night and carry him some peats into the house," Snorro's face lighted up with expectation.

Undoubtedly it was a great night for Snorro. When Dr. Balloch explained to him, as Lord Lynne had explained to Jan, the noble necessity of the African squadron, his heart burned like fire. He could almost have shouted aloud in his pity and indignation. It seemed to him a glorious thing that Jan had gone. Somehow his limited capacity failed to take in more than the work to be done, and that Jan was to do it. Minor details made no impression on him. Jan to his mind was the only hero. The British Government, Wilberforce, public opinion, all the persons and events that had led up to England's advocacy of the rights of humanity, all were merged in Jan.

When he left Dr. Balloch he felt as if he were walking upon air. On the moor, where no one could hear him, he laughed aloud, a mighty laugh, that said for Jan far more than he could find words to say. He heeded not the wind and the softly falling snow; had not Jan, his Jan, sailed away in her Majesty's service, a deliverer and a conqueror? Suddenly he felt a desire to see something relating to him. If he went round by Peter's house, perhaps he might see Margaret and the baby. In the state of exaltation he was in, all things seemed easy and natural to him. In fact the slight resistance of the elements was an unconscious and natural relief.

Peter's house shone brightly afar off. As he approached it he saw that the sitting-room was in a glow of fire and candle-light. Before he reached the gate he heard the murmur of voices. He had only to stand still and the whole scene was before him. Peter sat in his old place on the hearthstone. Around it were two of Suneva's cousins, soncy, jolly wives, with their knitting in their hands and their husbands by their sides. They were in eager and animated conversation, noisy laughs and ejaculations could be distinctly heard, and Suneva herself was moving busily about, setting the table for a hot supper. Her blue silk dress and gold chain, and her lace cap fluttering with white ribbons, made her a pleasant woman to look at. It was a happy household picture, but Margaret Vedder was not in it.

Snorro waited long in hopes of seeing her; waited until the smoking goose and hot potatoes, and boiling water, lemons and brandy, drew every one to the white, glittering table. He felt sure then that Margaret would join the party, but she did not. Was it a slight to her? That Margaret Vedder personally should be slighted affected him not, but that Jan's wife was neglected, that made him angry. He turned away, and in turning glanced upward. There was a dim light in a corner room up stairs. He felt sure that there Margaret was sitting, watching Jan's boy. He loitered round until he heard the moving of chairs and the bustle incident to the leave-taking of guests. No access of light and no movement in Margaret's room had taken place. She had made no sign, and no one remembered her. But never had Snorro felt so able to forgive her as at that hour.

CHAPTER X.

SWEET HOME.

"On so nice a pivot turns
True wisdom; here an inch, or there,
we swerve

From the just balance; by too much we
sin,
And half our errors are but truths
unpruned."

If Margaret were neglected, it was in the main her own fault; or, at least, the fault of circumstances which she would not even try to control. Between her and Suneva there had never been peace, and she did not even wish that there should be. When they were scarcely six years old, there was rivalry between them as to which was the better and quicker knitter. During their school days, this rivalry had found many other sources from which to draw strength. When Margaret consented to go to Edinburgh to finish her education, she had felt that in doing so she would gain a distinct triumph over Suneva Torr. When she came back with metropolitan dresses, and sundry trophies in the way of Poonah painting and Berlin wool work, she held herself above and aloof from all her old companions, and especially Suneva.

Her conquest of Jan Vedder, the admiration and hope of all the young girls on the Island, was really a victory over Suneva, to whom Jan had paid particular attention before he met Margaret. Suneva had been the bitterest drop in all her humiliation concerning her marriage troubles. In her secret heart she believed Suneva had done her best to draw her old lover from his quiet home to the stir and excitement of her father's drinking-room. If Peter had searched Shetland through, he could not have found a second wife so thoroughly offensive to his daughter.

And apart from these personal grievances, there were pecuniary ones which touched Margaret's keenest sensibilities. Peter Fae's house had long been to her a source of pride; and, considering all things, it was admirably arranged and handsomely furnished. In the course of events, she naturally expected that it would become her house—hers and her boy's. To not only lose it herself, but to have it given to Suneva without reservation, seemed to Margaret not only a wrong but an insult. And the £100 a year which had been given with it, was also to her mind a piece of cruel injustice. She could not help reflecting that some such kindness to her at her own wedding would have satisfied Jan, and perhaps altered their whole life. It must be admitted that her mortification in being only a dependent in the house which she had ruled, and regarded as her own, was a natural and a bitter one.

At the last, too, the change had come upon her with the suddenness of a blow from behind. It is true that Peter made no secret of his courtship, and equally true that the gossips of the town brought very regular news of its progress to Margaret. But she did not believe her father would take a step involving so much to them both, without speaking to her about it. As soon as he did so, she had resolved to ask him to prepare her own home for her without delay. She had taken every care of her furniture. It was in perfect order, and as soon as the house had been again put into cleanly shape, she could remove to it. The thought of its perfect isolation, and of its independence, began to appear desirable to her. Day by day she was getting little articles ready which she would need for her own housekeeping.

In the meantime the summer with all its busy interests kept Peter constantly at the store. When he was at home, his mind was so full of "fish takes" and of "curing," that Margaret knew that it would be both imprudent and useless to name her private affairs. Perhaps his extreme preoccupation was partly affected in order to avoid the discussion of unpleasant matters; but if so, Margaret never suspected it. She had many faults, but she was honest and truthful in all her ways, and she believed her father would be equally so with her. When the fishing was over, Peter was always a few weeks employed in counting up his expenses and his gains. October and part of November had been from her girlhood regarded as a critical time; a time when on no account he was to be troubled about household matters. But when November was nearly over, then Margaret determined to open the subject of the reported marriage to him, if he did not take the initiative.

As it was getting near this time, she walked over one afternoon to her old home, in order to ascertain its condition. Never, since she so foolishly abandoned it, had she been near the place. Its mournful, desolate aspect shocked her. Peter had never been able to rent it. There was an idea that it belonged to Margaret and was "unlucky." The gate had fallen from the rusted hinges. Passing boys had maliciously broken the windows, and the storms of two winters had drifted through the empty rooms. Timber is scarce and dear in Shetland, and all the conveniences for her animals and fowls had been gradually plundered and carried off. Margaret looked with dismay at the place, and, as she went through the silent rooms, could not help a low cry of real heart pain. In them it was impossible to forget Jan, the gay, kind-hearted husband, who had once made all their echoes ring to his voice and tread.

Never had the sense of her real widowhood seemed so strong and so pitiful. But in spite of its dreariness, the house attracted her. There, better than in any other place, she could rear her son, and devote her life to memories at once so bitter and so sweet. She determined to speak that very night, unless her father were unusually cross or thoughtful. Christmas was a favorite date for weddings, and it was very probable that Suneva would choose that time for her own. If so, there would be barely time to prepare the old home.

She set Peter's tea-table with unusual care; she made him the cream-cakes that he liked so well, and saw that every thing was bright and comfortable, and in accord with his peculiar fancies. But Peter did not come home to tea, and after waiting an hour, she put the service away. It had become a very common disappointment.

Peter said something in a general way about business, but Margaret was well aware, that when

he did not come home until ten o'clock, he had taken tea with the Torrs, and spent the evening with Suneva.

This night she had a very heavy heart. Three times within the past week Peter had been late. Things were evidently coming to a crisis, and she felt the necessity of prompt movement in her own interests. She put the child to sleep, and sat down to wait for her father's arrival. About eight o'clock she heard his voice and step, and before she could rise and go with a candle to the door, Peter and Suneva entered together.

There was something in their manner that surprised her; the more so, that Suneva immediately began to take off her bonnet and cloak, and make herself quite at home. Margaret saw then that she wore a rich silk dress and many gold ornaments, and that her father also wore his Sunday suit. The truth flashed upon her in a moment. There was no need for Peter to say—

"Suneva and I have just been married, Margaret. Suppose thou make us a cup of tea."

At that hour, and under such circumstances, nothing could have induced her to obey the request. Never before had she disobeyed her father, and it gave her a shock to do it, but all the same she enjoyed the sensation. Make tea for Suneva! For the woman who had supplanted her in her father's affection, and in all her rights! She felt that she would rather take her child, and walk out with it upon the dark and desolate moor.

But she was slow of speech, and in her anger and amazement she could find no word to interpret her emotion. One long, steady look she gave her father—a look which Peter never forgot—then, haughtily as a discrowned queen, but with a face as white as snow, she left the room. Suneva laughed, but it was not an ill-natured laugh. "It would have been better had we told her, Peter," she said. "If I had been thy daughter, I should not have liked thee to bring home a wife without a word about it."

"It will be an ill day with Peter Fae when he asks his women what he shall do, or how he shall do it. Yes, indeed!"

Suneva looked queerly at him. She did not speak a word, but her dancing, gleaming eyes said very plainly that such an "ill day" might be coming even for Peter Fae.

Then she set herself to making the tea he had asked for. There were the cakes Margaret had baked, and sweets, and cold meat, and all kinds of spirits at hand; and very soon Margaret heard the pleasant clatter of china, and the hum of subdued but constant conversation, broken at intervals by Suneva's shrill rippling laugh. Margaret made up her mind that hour, that however short or long her stay might be in Suneva's house, she would never again lift a finger in its ordering.

In the morning she remained in her own room until her father had gone to the store. When she went down stairs, she found the servants, her servants, eagerly waiting upon Suneva, who was examining her new possessions. As she entered the room, Suneva turned with a piece of the best china in her hand, and said, "Oh, it is thee! Good morning, Margaret." Then in a moment Margaret's dour, sulky temper dominated her; she looked at Suneva, but answered her not one word.

No two women could have been more unlike each other. Margaret, dressed in a plain black gown, was white and sorrowful. Suneva, in a scarlet merino, carefully turned back over a short quilted petticoat that gave pleasant glimpses of her trim latched shoes and white stockings, had a face and manner bright and busy and thoroughly happy. Margaret's dumb anger did not seem to affect her. She went on with her work, ordering, cleaning, rearranging, sending one servant here and another there, and took no more notice of the pale, sullen woman on the hearth, than if she had not existed.

However, when Margaret brought the child down stairs, she made an effort at conciliation. "What a beautiful boy!" she exclaimed. "How like poor Jan! What dost thou call him?" And she flipped her fingers, and chirruped to the child, and really longed to take him in her arms and kiss him.

But to Margaret the exclamation gave fresh pain and offense. "What had Suneva to do with Jan? And what right had she to pity him, and to say 'poor Jan!'" She did not understand that very often a clumsy good nature says the very thing it ought to avoid. So she regarded the words as a fresh offense, and drew her child closer to her, as if she were afraid even it would be taken from her.

It was snowing lightly, and the air was moist with a raw wind from the north-east. Yet Margaret dressed herself and her child to go out. At the door Suneva spoke again. "If thou wants to go abroad, go; but leave the child with me. I will take care of him, and it is damp and cold, as thou seest."

She might as well have spoken to the wind. Margaret never delayed a moment for the request; and Suneva stood looking after her with a singular gleam of pity and anger in her eyes. There was also a kind of admiration for the tall, handsome woman who in her perfect health and strength bore so easily the burden of her child. She held him firmly on her left arm, and his little hand clasped her neck behind, as with perfect grace she carried him, scarcely conscious of his weight, especially when he nestled his face against her own.

She went directly to her father's store. It was nearly noon when she arrived there, and it was empty. Only Snorro stood beside the great peat fire. He saw Margaret enter, and he placed a chair for her in the warmest corner. Then he said, "Give me little Jan, and I will hold him for

thee." She put the boy in his arms and watched him a moment as he shook the snow from his cap and coat; then she said: "Tell my father I want to speak to him."

Peter came somewhat reluctantly. He knew the conversation had to be gone through, but he felt as if Margaret had him at a disadvantage in the store. Snorro was present, and strangers might at any moment come in, and hurry him into an unwise concession. He was angry at Margaret, also, for her behavior on the previous night, and it was not in any amiable mood he approached her.

"Father, wilt thou have my house put in order for me? I want to go back to it."

"Yes, I will; soon."

"How soon, then?"

"I can not be hurried. There is no glass left in it, and there are many things to repair besides. It will take time and money, a good deal of money, more than I can well afford at present. I have had many expenses lately."

"Dost thou then mean that I must live with Suneva? No, I will not do that. I will go into the house without windows. Snorro will patch up the best ones, and board up the others."

"Snorro! Snorro, indeed! When was Snorro thy servant? As for Suneva, she is as good as thou art. Am I made of money to keep two houses going?"

"I will not ask thee for a penny."

"Thou wilt make a martyr of thyself, and set the town talking of me and of Suneva. No, thou shalt not do such a thing. Go home and behave thyself, and no one will say wrong to thee."

"I will not live with Suneva. If thou wilt not make a house habitable for me, then I will hire a man to do it."

"Thou wilt not dare. When it seems right to me, I will do it. Wait thou my time."

"I can not wait. So then I will hire John Hay's empty cottage. It will do, poor as it is."

"If thou dost, I will never speak to thee nor to thine again. I will not give thee nor thy child a shilling, whether I be living or dead."

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" And Margaret wrung her hands helplessly, and burst into passionate weeping.

"Do' go home, and be thankful for thy home. What would thou do in a Shetland hut, alone, at the beginning of winter? And I will not have thee come crying here. Mind that! Take thy child and go home; go at once."

"Thou might have told me! Thou might! It was a cruel thing to take me unawares; at a moment _"

"And if I had told thee, what then? Tears and complaints, and endless wants. I had no mind to be tormented as thou tormented thy husband."

That was a needlessly cruel taunt, and Peter was ashamed of it as soon as uttered. But all the same he turned away in anger, and two men coming in at the moment, he went with them to the other end of the store.

Snorro had held "little Jan" during the interview. The fresh air and the heat had overpowered the child, and he had fallen asleep. He lay in Snorro's arms, a beautiful, innocent miniature of the man he loved so dearly. Watching the sleeping face, he had seemed unconscious of what passed between Peter and his daughter, but in reality he had heard every word. When Peter turned away he watched Margaret put on her baby's cap and coat, and then as she rose with it folded in her arms, he said, "Let me see him again."

"Kiss him, Snorro, for thou loved his father."

He stooped and kissed the boy, and then glanced into Margaret's face. Her tears, her pallor, her air of hopeless suffering went straight to his heart. After all she was Jan's wife. He felt a great pity for her, and perhaps Margaret divined it, for she said timidly, "Snorro, can thou mend the windows in the old house—the house where I lived with Jan?"

"Yes, I can."

"Wilt thou ask my father if thou may do it?"

"I will do it. Have thou patience, Margaret Vedder. It would be a sin if thou made the child suffer."

"Dost thou think I would? Little does thou know of a mother's heart."

"Snorro!"

It was Peter calling, and calling angrily; but ere Snorro answered the summons he went with Margaret to the door, and as he opened it, said, "If I can help thee, for Jan's sake I am on thy side."

Very hard and bitter and cold was the walk homeward. The snow fell thick and fast, and she was tired and faint when she reached the house. Never had its warmth and comfort seemed so good to her. How could she feel kindly to the woman who had robbed her and her child of their right in it? Every one must have noticed that when they are in trouble, the weather is usually their enemy. A very long and severe snow-storm followed Margaret's useless effort. She had perforce

to sit still, and for "little Jan's" sake be grateful for the warmth and shelter given her.

"*Little Jan*" Snorro had unconsciously named the child. Several attempts had been made to do so, but somehow all had hitherto failed. At first "Peter" had been thought of; but Peter Fae had not taken kindly to a Peter Vedder, and the name after a few half-hearted utterances had been dropped. Thora had longed to call him "Willie," but at her death the scarcely recognized name was given up. But Snorro's tender, positive "little Jan" had settled the matter in Margaret's mind. Henceforward the boy was to be called by his father's name, and she cared not whether it were liked or not.

To Margaret the winter passed drearily away. She refused to have any part in Suneva's hospitalities, though the "Fae House" became during it as famous for its gayety, as it had been in Thora's time for its quiet and seclusion. Suneva had no idea of being the mistress of a shut up house. She was proud of her large rooms and fine furniture, and anxious to exhibit them. Besides which, she was in her element as hostess of the cozy tea-party or the merry dance.

Fortunately for her peaceful success, Peter discovered that he had the same taste. It had lain dormant and undeveloped during his struggle for wealth, and in the quiet content of Thora's atmosphere; but every circumstance now favored its growth, and he became quite as proud of his name as a generous and splendid host, as he was of his character as a keen and successful trader.

He was still a handsome man, fresh and active, carrying his fifty-eight years with all the dignity of conscious independence and assured position. It was Suneva's great pride that she had induced him to wear the fine cloth and velvet and linen suitable to his wealth. She flattered him into many an extravagance; she persuaded him that no one in the Islands could recite as well, or dance with more activity and grace. Under her influence Peter renewed his youth and enjoyed it. Margaret often heard them planning some entertainment, and laughing over it, with all the zest of twenty years.

To her, their whole life seemed an outrage. She could not imagine how her father could bear to put aside so completely his old habits and memories. It wounded her to see him going off with a joke and a kiss to the store in the morning; and hurrying back at night, as eager as a boy-bridegroom for the company of his handsome wife and her gay friends. It may easily be understood that even if Margaret had countenanced Suneva's festivities by her presence at them, she would have been only a silent and a reproachful guest.

It is but fair to say that Suneva gave to her absence the best and kindest excuse. "Poor Margaret!" she said pitifully, "she weeps constantly for her husband. Few wives are as faithful."

Suneva had indeed taken Thora's place with a full determination to be just and kind to Thora's daughter. She intended, now that fortune had placed her above her old rival, to treat her with respect and consideration. Suneva was capable of great generousities, and if Margaret had had the prudence and forbearance to accept the peace offered, she might have won whatever she desired through the influence of her child, for whom Suneva conceived a very strong attachment.

But this was just the point which Margaret defended with an almost insane jealousy. She saw that little Jan clung to Suneva, that he liked to be with her, that he often cried in the solitude of her room to go down stairs, where he knew he would have sweetmeats, and petting, and company, and his own way. If ever she was cross to the boy, it was on this subject. She would not even be bribed by Suneva's most diplomatic services in his behalf. "Let Jan come where his grandfather is, Margaret," she pleaded. "It will be for his good; I tell thee it will. I have already persuaded him that the boy has his eyes, and his figure, and when he was in a passion the other night, and thy father was like to be cross with him, I said, 'It is a nice thing to see Satan correcting sin, for the child has thy own quick temper, Peter,' and thy father laughed and pulled little Jan to his side, and gave him the lump of sugar he wanted."

"The boy is all thou hast left me. Would thou take him also?" Margaret answered with angry eyes. "His mother's company is good enough for him."

So all winter the hardly-admitted strife went on. Suneva pitied the child. She waylaid him and gave him sweetmeats and kisses. She imagined that he daily grew more pale and quiet. And Margaret, suspicious and watchful, discovered much, and imagined more. She was determined to go away from Suneva as soon as the spring opened, but she had come to the conclusion that she must look after her house herself, for though Snorro had promised to make it habitable, evidently he had been unable to do so, or he would have contrived to let her know.

One day in the latter part of April, all nature suddenly seemed to awake. The winter was nearly over. Margaret heard the larks singing in the clear sunshine. Little Jan had fallen asleep and might remain so for a couple of hours. She put on her cloak and bonnet, and went to see how far Snorro had been able to keep his word. Things were much better than she had hoped for. Nearly all of the windows had been reglazed, the gate was hung, and the accumulated drift of two years in the yard cleared away.

With lighter spirits, and a firm determination in her heart, she walked swiftly back to her child. When she entered the door she heard his merry laugh in Suneva's parlor. He was standing on her knee, singing after her some lines of a fisherman's "Casting Song," swaying backwards and forwards, first on one foot and then on the other, to the melody. Suneva was so interested in the boy, that, for a moment, she did not notice the pale, angry woman approaching her. When she did, her first thought was conciliation. "I heard him crying, Margaret; and as I knew thou wert out, I went for him. He is a merry little fellow, he hath kept me laughing."

"Come here, Jan!" In her anger, she grasped the child's arm roughly, and he cried out, and clung to Suneva.

Then Margaret's temper mastered her as it had never done before in her life. She struck the child over and over again, and, amid its cries of pain and fright, she said some words to Suneva full of bitterness and contempt.

"Thee love thy child!" cried Suneva in a passion, "not thou, indeed! Thou loves no earthly thing but thyself. Every day the poor baby suffers for thy bad temper—even as his father did."

"Speak thou not of his father—thou, who first tempted him away from his home and his wife."

"When thou says such a thing as that, then thou lies; I tempted him not. I was sorry for him, as was every man and woman in Lerwick. Poor Jan Vedder!"

"I told thee not to speak of my husband."

"Thy husband!" cried Suneva scornfully. "Where is he? Thou may well turn pale. Good for thee is it that the Troll Rock hasn't a tongue! Thou cruel woman! I wonder at myself that I have borne with thee so long. Thou ought to be made to tell what thou did with Jan Vedder!"

"What art thou saying? What dost thou mean? I will not listen to thee"—and she lifted the weeping child in her arms, and turned to go.

"But at last thou shalt listen. I have spared thee long enough. Where is Jan Vedder? Thou knows and thou only; and that is what every one says of thee. Is he at the bottom of the Troll Rock? And who pushed him over? Answer that, Margaret Vedder!"

Suneva, in her passion, almost shrieked out these inquiries. Her anger was so violent, that it silenced her opponent. But no words could have interpreted the horror and anguish in Margaret's face, when she realized the meaning of Suneva's questions. The sudden storm ended in the lull which follows recrimination. Suneva sat fuming and muttering to herself; Margaret, in her room, paced up and down, the very image of despairing shame and sorrow. When her father returned she knew Suneva would tell him all that had transpired. To face them both was a trial beyond her strength. She looked at her child softly sobbing on the bed beside her, and her heart melted at the injustice she had done him. But she felt that she must take him away from Suneva, or he would be stolen from her; worse than stolen, he would be made to regard her as a terror and a tyrant.

She heard the clatter of the tea-cups and the hum of conversation, and knew that her father was at home. As soon as he had finished his tea, she would probably be summoned to his presence. It had grown dark and a rain-storm was coming; nevertheless she dressed herself and little Jan, and quietly went out of the house. Peter and Suneva were discussing the quarrel over their tea; the servants sat spinning by the kitchen fire, doing the same. She only glanced at them, and then she hastened toward the town as fast as she could.

Snorro was sitting at the store-fire, a little pot of tea, a barley cake, and a broiled herring by his side. He was thinking of Jan, and lo! a knock at the door—just such a knock as Jan always gave. His heart bounded with hope; before he thought of possibilities he had opened it. Not Jan, but Jan's wife and child, and both of them weeping. He said not a word, but he took Margaret's hand and led her to the fire. Her cloak and hood were dripping with the rain, and he removed and shook them. Then he lifted the child in his arms and gave him some tea, and soon soothed his trouble and dried his tears.

Margaret sobbed and wept with a passion that alarmed him. He had thought at first that he would not interfere, but his tender heart could not long endure such evident distress without an effort to give comfort.

"What is the matter with thee, Margaret Vedder? and why art thou and thy child here?"

"We have nowhere else to go to-night, Snorro." Then Margaret told him every thing.

He listened in silence, making no comments, asking no questions, until she finished in another burst of anguish, as she told him of Suneva's accusation. Then he said gravely: "It is a shame. Drink this cup of tea, and then we will go to the minister. He only can guide the boat in this storm."

"I can not go there, Snorro. I have been almost rude and indifferent to him. Three times he has written to me concerning my duty; many times he has talked to me about it. Now he will say, 'Thou hast reaped the harvest thou sowed, Margaret Vedder.'"

"He will say no unkind word to thee. I tell thee thou must go. There is none else that can help thee. Go for little Jan's sake. Wrap the boy up warm. Come."

She was weeping and weary, but Snorro took her to the manse, carrying little Jan under his own coat. Margaret shrank from an interview with Dr. Balloch, but she had no need. He was not a man to bruise the broken reed; no sooner did he cast his eyes upon the forlorn woman than he understood something of the crisis that had brought her to him for advice and protection.

He took them into his cheerful parlor, and sent their wet clothing to the kitchen to be dried. Then he said: "Snorro, now thou go and help Hamish to make us a good supper. It is ill facing trouble on an empty stomach. And light a fire, Snorro, in the room up stairs; thou knowest which room; for Margaret and her son will have to sleep there. And after that, thou stop with Hamish, for it will be better so."

There were no reproofs now on the good doctor's lips. He never reminded Margaret how often

he had striven to win her confidence and to lead her to the only source of comfort for the desolate and broken-hearted. First of all, he made her eat, and dry and warm herself; then he drew from her the story of her grief and wrongs.

"Thou must have thy own home, Margaret, that is evident," he said; "and as for Suneva, I will see to her in the morning. Thou art innocent of thy husband's death, I will make her to know that. Alas! how many are there, who if they can not wound upon proof, will upon likelihood! Now there is a room ready for thee, and thou must stay here, until this matter is settled for thee."

It seemed a very haven of rest to Margaret. She went to it gratefully, and very soon fell into that deep slumber which in youth follows great emotions. When she awoke the fire had been re-built, and little Jan's bread and milk stood beside it. It was a dark, dripping morning; the rain smote the windows in sudden, gusts, and the wind wailed drearily around the house. But in spite of the depressing outside influences, her heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. She felt as those feel "who have escaped;" and she dressed and fed her child with a grateful heart.

When she went down stairs she found that, early as it was, the doctor had gone to her father's house; and she understood that this visit was made in order to see him where conversation would not be interrupted by the entrance of buyers and sellers.

Dr. Balloch found Peter sitting at breakfast with Suneva, in his usual cheerful, self-complacent mood. In fact, he knew nothing of Margaret's flight from his house. She rarely left her boy to join the tea-table; she never appeared at the early breakfast. Her absence was satisfactory to both parties, and had long ceased to call forth either protest or remark. So neither of them were aware of the step she had taken, and the minister's early visit did not connect itself with her, until he said gravely to Peter, "Dost thou know where thy daughter is?"

"She hath not left her room yet," answered Suneva; "she sleeps late for the child's sake."

"She hath left thy house, Peter. Last night I gave her and the child shelter from the storm."

Peter rose in a great passion: "Then she can stay away from my house. Here she comes back no more."

"I think that, too. It is better she should not come back. But now thou must see that her own home is got ready for her, and that quickly."

"What home?"

"The house thou gave her at her marriage."

"I gave her no house. She had the use of it. The title deeds never left my hands."

"Then more shame to thee. Did thou not boast to every one, that thou had given the house and the plenishing? No title deeds, no lawyer's paper, can make the house more Margaret Vedder's than thy own words have done. Thou wilt not dare to break thy promise, thou, who ate the Bread of Remembrance only last Sabbath Day. Begin this very hour to put the house in order, and then put the written right to it in her hands. Any hour thou may be called to give an account; leave the matter beyond disputing."

"It will take a week to glaze and clean it."

"It is glazed and cleaned. Michael Snorro brought the sashes one by one to the store, and glazed them, when he had done his work at night. He hath also mended the plaster, and kept a fire in the house to dry it; and he hath cleaned the yard and re-hung the gate. Begin thou at once to move back again the furniture. It never ought to have been removed, and I told thee that at the time. Thou knowest also what promises thou made me, and I will see that thou keep them every one, Peter Fae. Yes, indeed, I will!"

"It is too wet to move furniture."

"The rain will be over at the noon. Until then thy men can carry peats and groceries, and such store of dried meats as will be necessary."

"Peter," said Suneva indignantly, "I counsel thee to do nothing in a hurry."

Dr. Balloch answered her, "I counsel thee, Mistress Fae, to keep well the door of thy mouth. It is no light thing to make the charges thou hast made against an innocent woman."

"I asked her how Jan Vedder got his death? Let her tell that."

"I might ask thee how Paul Glumm got his death! Listen now, and I will show thee what a great thing may come from one foul suspicion. Thou married Paul Glumm, and it is well known he and thee were not always in the same mind, for thou loved company and he loved quiet. Then Glumm took thee to the Skoolfiord, where there were none at the station but thee and he. Thou knowest how thou rebelled at that, and how often thou could be found in thy father's house. Suddenly Glumm takes a sickness, and when a doctor sees him there is little hope, and after three days he dies. Then thou art back at Lerwick again, quick enough, and in a few weeks thou hast plenty of lovers. Now, then, how easy to say, 'Glumm's death was a very strange affair!' 'Such a strong young man!' 'Did his wife know any thing about it?' 'Did she send for a doctor as soon as might be?' 'Did she give him the medicine the doctor left?' 'Was she not very glad when she was free again?' Mistress Fae, I say not these things were so, or were even said, I am only trying to show thee how easy it is out of nothing at all to make up a very suspicious case. But come, Peter, there is duty to be done, and I know that thou wilt do it. And I am in haste about it, for it is not easy for Hamish to have a woman and child at the manse. Hamish has failed much

lately.”

“Send the woman with her child here.”

“No, for it is easier to avoid quarrels than to mend them. Margaret shall stay at the manse till her own house is ready.”

So they went away together, leaving Suneva crying with anger; partly because of the minister’s lecture; partly because she thought Peter had not “stood up for her” as he ought to have done. As for Peter, though he did not think of disobeying the order given him, yet he resented the interference; and he was intensely angry at Margaret for having caused it. When he arrived at the store, he was made more so by Snorro’s attitude. He sat upon a sailor’s chest with his hands folded before him, though the nets were to be examined and a score of things to get for the fishers.

“Can thou find nothing for thy lazy hands to do?” he asked scornfully, “or are they weary of the work thou hast been doing at night?”

“My mind is not to lift a finger for thee again, Peter Fae; and as for what I do at night, that is my own affair. I robbed thee not, neither of time nor gear.”

“From whence came the glass, and the nails, and the wood, and the hinges?”

“I bought them with my own money. If thou pays me the outlay it will be only just. The work I gave freely to the wife of Jan Vedder.”

“Then since thou hast mended the house, thou may carry back the furniture into it.”

“I will do that freely also. Thou never ought to have counseled its removal; for that reason, I blame thee for all that followed it.” Snorro then hailed a passing fisherman, and they lifted his chest in order to go away.

“What art thou taking?”

“My own clothes, and my own books, and whatever is my own. Nothing of thine.”

“But why?”

“For that I will come no more here.”

“Yes, thou wilt.”

“I will come no more.”

Peter was much troubled. Angry as he was, grief at Snorro’s defection was deeper than any other feeling. For nearly twenty years he had relied on him. Besides the inconvenience to the business, the loss of faith was bitter. But he said no more at that time. When Margaret was in her home, Snorro would be easier to manage. More as a conciliatory measure with him, than as kindness to his offending daughter, he said, “First of all, however, take a load of tea, and sugar and flour, and such things as will be needed; thou knowest them. Take what thou wishes, and all thou wishes; then, thou canst not say evil of me.”

“When did I say evil of thee, only to thy face? Michael Snorro hath but one tongue. It knows not how to slander or to lie. Pay me my wages, and I will go, and speak to thee no more.”

“Do what I said and come back to me in three days; then we will settle this trouble between us;” saying which, Peter went into his counting house, and Snorro went to work with all his will and strength to get Margaret’s house ready for her.

But though he hired three men to help him, it was the evening of the second day before she could remove to it. It was a different homecoming from her previous one in that dwelling. Then all had been in exquisitely spotless order, and Jan had turned and kissed her at the open door. This night every thing was in confusion. Snorro had carried all her belongings into the house, but they were unpacked and unarranged. Still he had done a great deal. A large fire was burning, the kettle boiling on the hearth, and on the little round table before it he had put bread and milk and such things as would be necessary for a first meal. Then, with an innate delicacy he had gone away, fully understanding that at the first Margaret would wish to be quite alone.

She stood a minute and looked around. Then she opened the box in which her china and silver were packed. In half an hour the tea-table was spread. She even made a kind of festival of the occasion by giving little Jan the preserved fruit he loved with his bread. It seemed to her as if food had never tasted so good before. She was again at her own table; at her own fireside! Her own roof covered her! There was no one to gloom at her or make her feel uncomfortable. Work, poverty, all things, now seemed possible and bearable.

When Jan had chattered himself weary she laid him in his cot, and sat hour after hour in the dim light of the glowing peats, thinking, planning, praying, whispering Jan’s name to her heart, feeling almost as if she were in his presence. When at length she rose and turned the key in her own house again, she was as proud and as happy as a queen who has just come into her kingdom, and who lifts for the first time the scepter of her authority.

CHAPTER XI.

SNORRO IS WANTED.

"Now the great heart
Leaps to new action and appointed toil
With steady hope, sure faith, and sober
joy."

During the next two years, Margaret's life appeared to be monotonously without incident. In reality it deepened and broadened in a manner but slightly indicated by the stillness of its surface. Early in the morning following her re-occupation of her own house, she had two visitors, Dr. Balloch and her old servant, Elga.

"Elga's husband is with the Greenland fleet," said the minister; "she is poor and lonely, and wants to come back and serve thee."

"But I can not afford a servant."

"Thou can well afford it, take my word for that; besides, thou art not used to hard work nor fit for it. Also, I have something better for thee to do. When thy house is in order, come to the manse and see me, then we will talk of it."

So Elga quietly resumed her old duties, and ere two weeks were gone the house was almost in its first condition. White paint and soap and water, bees'-wax and turpentine, needle and thread, did wonders. On the evening of the eleventh day, Margaret and Elga went from attic to cellar with complete satisfaction. Every thing was spotless, every thing was in its old place. Jan's big cushioned chair again stood on the hearth, and little Jan took possession of it. Many a night, wearied with play, he cuddled himself up among its cushions, and had there his first sleep. It is easy to imagine what Margaret's thoughts were with such a picture before her—tender, regretful, loving thoughts most surely, for the fine shawl or stocking she was knitting at the time was generally wet with her tears.

The day after all was in its place and settled, she went to see Dr. Balloch. It was in the early morning when every thing was sweet, and cool and fresh. The blue-bells and daisies were at her feet, the sea dimpling and sparkling in the sunshine, the herring-fleet gathering in the bay. Already the quays and streets were full of strangers, and many a merry young fisherman with a pile of nets flung over his shoulders passed her, singing and whistling in the fullness of his life and hope. All of them, in some way or other, reminded her of Jan. One carried his nets in the same graceful, nonchalant way; another wore his cap at the same angle; a third was leaning against his oars, just as she had seen Jan lean a hundred times.

The minister sat at his open door, looking seaward. His serene face was full of the peace and light of holy contemplation. His right hand was lovingly laid on the open Bible, which occupied the small table by his side.

"Come in, Margaret," he said pleasantly. "Come in; is all well with thee now?"

"Every thing is well. The house is in order and Snorro hath promised to plant some berry bushes in my garden; he will plant them to-day with the flower seeds thou gave me. The snowdrops are in bloom already, and the pansies show their buds among the leaves."

"Dost thou know that Snorro hath left thy father?"

"He told me that he had taken John Hay's cottage, the little stone one on the hill above my house, and that in three days he would go to the fishing with Matthew Vale."

"Now, then, what wilt thou do with thy time? Let me tell thee, time is a very precious gift of God; so precious that he only gives it to us moment by moment. He would not have thee waste it."

Margaret took from her pocket a piece of knitting. It was a shawl twelve yards round, yet of such exquisite texture that she drew it easily through a wedding ring. Beautiful it was as the most beautiful lace, and the folds of fine wool fell infinitely softer than any fold of fine flax could do. It was a marvelous piece of handiwork, and Dr. Balloch praised it highly.

"I am going to send it to the Countess of Zetland," she said. "I have no doubt she will send me as many orders as I can fill. Each shawl is worth £7, and I can also do much coarser work, which I shall sell at the Foy."

"Would thou not rather work for me than for the Countess?"

"Thou knowest I would, ten thousand times rather. But how can I work for thee?"

"What is there, Margaret, on the long table under the window?"

"There is a large pile of newspapers and magazines and books."

"That is so. None of these have I been able to read, because my sight has failed me very much

lately. Yet I long to know every word that is in them. Wilt thou be eyes to an old man who wishes thee only well, Margaret? Come every day, when the weather and thy health permits, and read to me for two hours, write my letters for me, and do me a message now and then, and I will cheerfully pay thee £50 a year."

"I would gladly do all this without money, and think the duty most honorable."

"Nay, but I will pay thee, for that will be better for thee and for me."

Now all good work is good for far more than appears upon its surface. The duties undertaken by Margaret grew insensibly and steadily in beneficence and importance. In the first place, the effect upon her own character was very great. It was really two hours daily study of the finest kind. It was impossible that the books put into her hand could be read and discussed with a man like Dr. Balloch without mental enlargement. Equally great and good was the moral effect of the companionship. Her pen became the pen of a ready writer, for the old clergyman kept up a constant correspondence with his college companions, and with various learned societies.

About three months after this alliance began, the doctor said one day, "Thou shalt not read to me this morning, for I want thee to carry some wine and jelly to old Neill Brock, and when thou art there, read to him. Here is a list of the Psalms and the Epistles that will be the best for him." And Margaret came back from her errand with a solemnly happy light upon her face. "It was a blessed hour," she said, "surely he is very near the kingdom."

This service once begun grew by a very natural course of events. Margaret delighted in it. The sick loved her calm, gentle ways. She was patient and silent, and yet sympathetic. She had that womanly taste which naturally sets itself to make dainty dishes for those who can not eat coarse food. In a few months the sick all through the parish felt the soothing touch of her soft, cool hands, and became familiar with the tones of her low, even voice, as she read aloud the portions which Dr. Balloch usually selected for every case.

And as there is no service so gratefully remembered as that given in sickness, Margaret Vedder gradually acquired a very sincere popularity. It rather amazed Peter to hear such remarks as the following: "Luke Thorkel is better, thanks to Margaret Vedder." "John Johnson can go to the fishing with an easy mind now, Margaret Vedder is caring for his sick wife." "The Widow Hay died last night. She would have died ere this, but for Margaret Vedder's care."

These outside duties made her home duties sufficient to fill all her time. She had no hours to spare for foolish repining, or morbid sorrow. Little Jan must be taught his letters, and his clothes must be made. Her garden, poultry and knitting kept her hands ever busy, and though her work was much of it of that silent kind which leads to brooding thought, she had now much of interest to fill her mind. Yet still, and always, there was the haunting, underlying memory of Jan's disappearance or death, keeping her life hushed and silent. To no one did she speak of it, and it seemed strange to her that Dr. Balloch visibly discouraged any allusion to it. Sometimes she felt as if she must speak to Snorro about it, but Snorro kept ever a little aloof from her. She was not very sure as to his friendship.

She thought this a little hard, for she had given him every opportunity to understand that her own animosity was dead. She permitted little Jan to spend nearly all his time with him, when he was not engaged in fishing, or busy on the quays. And Snorro now spent much of his time at home. His earnings during the fishing season more than sufficed for his wants. Every fine day in winter he was apt to call for little Jan, and Margaret rarely refused him the child's company.

And little Jan dearly loved Snorro. Snorro put him in the water, and taught him how to swim like a seal. Snorro made him a spear and taught him how to throw it. He made him a boat and taught him how to sail it. He got him a pony and taught him how to ride it. Once they found a baby seal whose mother had been shot, and the child kept it at Snorro's house. There also he had a dozen pet rabbits, and three Skye terriers, and a wild swan with a broken wing, and many other treasures, which would not have been so patiently tolerated in the cleanliness and order of his own home.

So the time went pleasantly and profitably by for two years. Again the spring joy was over the land, and the town busy with the hope of the fishing season. Snorro's plans were all made, and yet he felt singularly restless and unsettled. As he sat one evening wondering at this feeling, he said to himself: "It is the dreams I have had lately, or it is because I think of Jan so much. Why does he not write? Oh, how I long to see him! Well, the day will come, by God's leave."

Just as this thought crossed his mind, Dr. Balloch stepped across his threshold. Snorro rose up with a face of almost painful anxiety. He always associated a visit from the doctor with news from Jan. He could scarcely articulate the inquiry, "Hast thou any news?"

"Great news for thee, Snorro. Jan is coming home from Africa. He is broken down with the fever. He wants thee. Thou must go to him at once, for he hath done grand work, and proved himself a hero, worthy even of thy true great love."

"I am ready—I have been waiting for him to call me. I will go this hour."

"Be patient. Every thing must be done wisely and in order. The first thing is supper. I came away without mine, so now I will eat with thee. Get the tea ready; then I will tell thee all I know."

As Snorro moved about, the doctor looked at his home. Every piece of furniture in it was of Snorro's own manufacture. His bed was a sailor's bunk against the wall, made soft with sheep-fleeces and covered with seal-skins. A chair of woven rushes for little Jan, a couple of stools and

a table made from old packing boxes, and a big hearth-rug of sheep-skins, that was all. But over the fireplace hung the pictured Christ, and some rude shelves were filled with the books Jan had brought him. On the walls, also, were harpoons and seal spears, a fowling-piece, queer ribbons and branches of sea weeds, curiosities given him by sailors from all countries, stuffed birds and fish skeletons, and a score of other things, which enabled the doctor to understand what a house of enchantment it must be to a boy like little Jan.

In a few minutes the table was set, and Snorro had poured out the minister's tea, and put before him a piece of bread and a slice of broiled mutton. As for himself he could not eat, he only looked at the doctor with eyes of pathetic anxiety.

"Snorro, dost thou understand that to go to Jan now is to leave, forever perhaps, thy native land?"

"Wherever Jan is, that land is best of all."

"He will be in Portsmouth ere thou arrive there. First, thou must sail to Wick; there, thou wilt get a boat to Leith, and at Leith take one for London. What wilt thou do in London?"

"Well, then, I have a tongue in my head; I will ask my way to Portsmouth. When I am there it will be easy to find Jan's ship, and then Jan. What help can thou give me in the matter?"

"That I will look to. Jan hath sent thee £100."

Snorro's face brightened like sunrise. "I am glad that he thought of me; but I will not touch the money. I have already more than £20. Thou shalt keep the £100 for little Jan."

"Snorro, he hath also sent the £600 he took from his wife, that and the interest."

"But how? How could he do that already?"

"He has won it from the men who coin life into gold; it is mostly prize money."

"Good luck to Jan's hands! That is much to my mind."

"I will tell thee one instance, and that will make thee understand it better. Thou must know that it is not a very easy matter to blockade over three thousand miles of African coast, especially as the slave ships are very swift, and buoyant. Indeed the Spanish and Portuguese make theirs of very small timbers and beams which they screw together. When chased the screws are loosened, and this process gives the vessel amazing play. Their sails are low, and bent broad. Jan tells me that the fore-yard of a brig of one hundred and forty tons, taken by 'The Retribution' was seventy-six feet long, and her ropes so beautifully racked aloft, that after a cannonade of sixty shot, in which upward of fifty took effect, not one sail was lowered. Now thou must perceive that a chase in the open sea would mostly be in favor of vessels built so carefully for escape."

"Why, then, do not the Government build the same kind of vessels?"

"That is another matter. I will go into no guesses about it. But they do not build them, and therefore captures are mostly made by the boats which are sent up the rivers to lie in wait for the slavers putting out to sea. Sometimes these boats are away for days, sometimes even for weeks; and an African river is a dreadful place for British sailors, Snorro: the night air is loaded with fever, the days are terrible with a scorching sun."

"I can believe that; but what of Jan?"

"One morning Jan, with a four-oared gig, chased a slave brig. They had been at the river mouth all night watching for her. Thou knows, Snorro, what a fine shot our Jan is. When she came in sight he picked off five of her crew, and compelled her to run on shore to avoid being boarded. Then her crew abandoned her, in order to save their own lives, and 'The Retribution' hove her off. She proved to be a vessel of two hundred tons, and she carried one thousand slaves. She was taken as a prize into Sierra Leone, and sold, and then Jan got his share of her."

"But why did not the slavers fight?"

"Bad men are not always brave men; and sometimes they fly when no man pursues them. Portuguese slavers are proverbial cowards, yet sometimes Jan did have a hard fight with the villains."

"I am right glad of that."

"About a year ago, he heard of a brigantine of great size and speed lying in the old Calabar river with a cargo of slaves destined for Cuba. She carried five eighteen-pounder guns, and a crew of eighty men; and her captain had vowed vengeance upon 'The Retribution' and upon Jan, for the slavers he had already taken. Jan went down to the old Calabar, but he could not enter it, so he kept out of sight, waiting for the slaver to put to sea.

"At length she was seen coming down the river under all sail. Then 'The Retribution' lowered her canvas in order to keep out of sight as long as possible. When she hoisted it again, the slaver in spite of her boasts endeavored to escape, and then Jan, setting all the canvas his schooner could carry, stood after her in chase. The slaver was the faster of the two, and Jan feared he would lose her; but fortunately a calm came on and both vessels got out their sweeps. Jan's vessel, being the smaller, had now the advantage, and his men sent her flying through the water.

"All night they kept up the chase, and the next morning Jan got within range."

"Oh," cried Snorro, "if I had only been there! Why did no one tell me there was such work for

strong men to do?"

"Now I will tell thee a grand thing that our Jan did. Though the slaver was cutting his rigging to pieces with her shot, Jan would not fire till he was close enough to aim only at her decks. Why, Snorro? Because below her decks there was packed in helpless misery five hundred black men, besides many women and little children."

"That was like Jan. He has a good heart."

"But when he was close enough, he loaded his guns with grape, and ordered two men to be ready to lash the slaver to 'The Retribution,' the moment they touched. Under cover of the smoke, Jan and ten men boarded the slaver, but unfortunately, the force of the collision drove 'The Retribution' off, and Jan and his little party found themselves opposed to the eighty villains who formed the slaver's crew.

"For a moment it seemed as if they must be overpowered, but a gallant little midshipman, only fourteen years old, Snorro, think of that, gave an instant order to get out the sweeps, and almost immediately 'The Retribution,' was alongside, and securely lashed to her enemy. Then calling on the sailors to follow him the brave little lad boarded her, and a desperate hand to hand fight followed. After fifteen Spaniards had been killed and near forty wounded, the rest leaped below and cried for quarter."

"Snorro would have given them just ten minutes to say a prayer, no more. It is a sin to be merciful to the wicked, it is that; and the kindness done to them is unblessed, and brings forth sin and trouble. I have seen it."

"What thinkest thou? When Jan flung open the hatches under which the poor slaves were fastened, sixty were dead, one hundred and twenty dying. During the twenty-eight hours' chase and fight in that terrible climate they had not been given a drop of water, and the air was putrid and hot as an oven. Most of them had to be carried out in the arms of Jan's sailors. There were seven babies in this hell, and thirty-three children between the ages of two years and seven. Many more died before Jan could reach Sierra Leone with them. This is the work Jan has been doing, Snorro; almost I wish I was a young man again, and had been with him."

The doctor's eyes were full; Snorro's head was in his hands upon the table. When the doctor ceased, he stood up quivering with anger, and said, "If God would please Michael Snorro, he would send him to chase and fight such devils. He would give them the measure they gave to others, little air and less water, and a rope's end to finish them. That would be good enough for them; it would that."

"Well, then, thou wilt go to Jan?"

"I must go to-morrow. How can I wait longer? Is there a mail boat in the harbor?"

"It was Lord Lynne brought me the news and the money. He will carry thee as far as Wick. The tide serves at five o'clock to-morrow morning, can thou be ready?"

"Ay, surely. Great joy hath come to me, but I can be ready to meet it."

"Lean on me in this matter as much as thou likest; what is there I can do for thee?"

"Wilt thou care for what I have in my house, especially the picture?"

"I will do that."

"Then I have but to see Margaret Vedder and little Jan. I will be on 'The Lapwing,' ere she lift her anchor. God bless thee for all the good words thou hast said to me!"

"Snorro!"

"What then?"

"When thou sees Jan, say what will make peace between him and Margaret."

Snorro's brow clouded. "I like not to meddle in the matter. What must be is sure to happen, whether I speak or speak not."

"But mind this—it will be thy duty to speak well of Margaret Vedder. The whole town do that now."

"She was ever a good woman some way. There is not now a name too good for her. It hath become the fashion to praise Jan Vedder's wife, and also to pity her. If thou heard the talk, thou would think that Jan was wholly to blame. For all that, I do not think she is worthy of Jan. Why does she not talk to her son of his father? Who ever saw her weep at Jan's name? I had liked her better if she had wept more."

"It is little men know of women; their smiles and their tears alike are seldom what they seem. I think Margaret loves her husband and mourns his loss sincerely; but she is not a woman to go into the market-place to weep. Do what is right and just to her, I counsel thee to do that. Now I will say 'Farewell, brave Snorro.' We may not meet again, for I am growing old."

"We shall anchor in the same harbor at last. If thou go first, whatever sea I am on, speak me on thy way, if thou can do so."

"Perhaps so. Who can tell? Farewell, mate."

"Farewell."

Snorro watched him across the moor, and then going to a locked box, he took out of it a bundle in a spotted blue handkerchief. He untied it, and for a moment looked over the contents. They

were a bracelet set with sapphires, a ring to match it, a gold brooch, an amber comb and necklace, a gold locket on a chain of singular beauty, a few ribbons and lace collars, and a baby coral set with silver bells; the latter had been in Jan's pocket when he was shipwrecked, and it was bruised and tarnished. The sight of it made Snorro's eyes fill, and he hastily knotted the whole of the trinkets together and went down to Margaret's home.

It was near nine o'clock and Margaret was tired and not very glad to see him coming, for she feared his voice would awake little Jan who was sleeping in his father's chair. Rather wearily she said, "What is the matter, Snorro? Is any one sick? Speak low, for little Jan is asleep, and he has been very tiresome to-night."

"Nothing much is the matter, to thee. As for me, I am going away in the morning to the mainland. I may not be back very soon, and I want to kiss Jan, and to give thee some things which belong to thee, if thou cares for them."

"What hast thou of mine?"

"Wilt thou look then? They are in the handkerchief."

He watched her keenly, perhaps a little hardly, as she untied the knot. He watched the faint rose-color deepen to scarlet on her face; he saw how her hands trembled, as she laid one by one the jewels on the table, and thoughtfully fingered the lace yellow with neglect. But there were no tears in her dropped eyes, and she could scarcely have been more deliberate in her examination, if she had been appraising their value. And yet, her heart was burning and beating until she found it impossible to speak.

Snorro's anger gathered fast. His own feelings were in such a state of excitement, that they made him unjust to a type of emotion unfamiliar to him.

"Well then," he asked, sharply, "dost thou want them or not?"

"Jan bought them for me?"

"Yes, he bought them, and thou sent them back to him. If thou had sent me one back, I had never bought thee another. But Jan Vedder was not like other men."

"We will not talk of Jan, thee and me. What did thou bring these to-night for?"

"I told thee I was going to Wick, and it would not be safe to leave them, nor yet to take them with me. I was so foolish, also, as to think that thou would now prize them for Jan's sake, but I see thou art the same woman yet. Give them to me, I will take them to the minister."

"Leave them here. I will keep them safely."

"The rattle was bought for little Jan. It was in his father's pocket when he was shipwrecked."

She stood with it in her hand, gazing down upon the tarnished bells, and answered not a word. Snorro looked at her angrily, and then stooped down, and softly kissed the sleeping child.

"Good-by, Margaret Vedder!"

She had lifted the locket in the interval, and was mechanically passing her fingers along the chain. "It is the very pattern I wished for," she whispered to her heart, "I remember drawing it for him." She did not hear Snorro's "good-by," and he stood watching her curiously a moment.

"I said 'good-by,' Margaret Vedder."

"Good-by," she answered mechanically. Her whole soul was moved. She was in a maze of tender, troubled thoughts, but Snorro perceived nothing but her apparent interest in the jewels. He could not forget his last sight of her standing, so apparently calm, with her eyes fixed upon the locket and chain that dangled from her white hand. "She was wondering how much they cost Jan," he thought bitterly; "what a cold, cruel woman she is!"

That she had not asked him about his own affairs, why he left so hurriedly, how he was going, for what purpose, how long he was to be away, was a part of her supreme selfishness, Snorro thought. He could no longer come into her life, and so she cared nothing about him. He wished Dr. Balloch could have seen her as he did, with poor Jan's love-gifts in her hands. With his heart all aflame on Jan's noble deeds, and his imagination almost deifying the man, the man he loved so entirely, Margaret's behavior was not only very much misunderstood by Snorro, it was severely and unjustly condemned.

"What did God make women for?" he asked angrily, as he strode back over the moor. "I hope Jan has forgotten her, for it is little she thinks of him."

On reaching his home again he dressed himself in his best clothes, for he could not sleep. He walked up and down the old town, and over the quays, and stood a five minutes before Peter Fae's store, and so beguiled the hours until he could go on board "The Lapwing."

At five o'clock he saw Lord Lynne come aboard, and the anchor was raised. Snorro lifted his cap, and said, "Good morning, Lord Lynne;" and my lord answered cheerily, "Good morning, Snorro. With this wind we shall make a quick passage to Wick."

CHAPTER XII.

SNORRO AND JAN.

“And yet when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head;
Still what we hope, we must believe,
And what is given us receive.”

Snorro had indeed very much misjudged Margaret. During her interview with him she had been absorbed in one effort, that of preserving her self-control while he was present. As soon as he had gone, she fled to her own room, and locking the door, she fell upon her knees. Jan's last love-gifts lay on the bed before her, and she bent her head over them, covering them with tears and kisses.

“Oh, Jan! Oh, my darling!” she whispered to the deaf and dumb emblems of his affection. “Oh, if thou could come back to me again! Never more would I grieve thee, or frown on thee! Never should thy wishes be unattended to, or thy pleasure neglected! No one on earth, no one should speak evil of thee to me! I would stand by thee as I promised until death! Oh, miserable, unworthy wife that I have been! What shall I do? If now thou knew at last how dearly Margaret loves thee, and how bitterly she repents her blindness and her cruelty!”

So she mourned in half-articulate sobbing words, until little Jan awoke and called her. Then she laid him in her own bed and sat down beside him; quiet, but full of vague, drifting thoughts that she could hardly catch, but which she resolutely bent her mind to examine. Why had Snorro kept these things so long, and then that night suddenly brought them to her at such a late hour? What was he going away for? What was that strange light upon his face? She had never seen such a look upon Snorro's face before. She let these questions importune her all night, but she never dared put into form the suspicion which lay dormant below them, that Jan had something to do with it; that Snorro had heard from Jan.

In the morning she took the trinkets with her to Dr. Balloch's. She laid them before him one by one, telling when, and how, they had been offered and refused. “All but this,” she said, bursting into childlike weeping, and showing the battered, tarnished baby coral. “He brought this for his child, and I would not let him see the baby. Oh, can there be any mercy for one so unmerciful as I was?”

“Daughter, weep; thy tears are gracious tears. Would to God poor Jan could see thee at this hour. Whatever happiness may now be his lot, thy contrition would add to it, I know. Go home to-day. No one is in any greater trouble than thou art. Give to thyself tears and prayers; it may be that ere long God will comfort thee. And as thou goes, call at Snorro's house. See that the fire is out, lock the door, and bring me the key when thou comes to-morrow. I promised Snorro to care for his property.”

“Where hath Snorro gone?”

“What did he say to thee?”

“That he was going to Wick. But how then did he go? There was no steamer due.”

“Lord Lynne took him in his yacht.”

“That is strange!” and Margaret looked steadily at Dr. Balloch. “It seems to me, that Lord Lynne's yacht was at Lerwick, on that night; thou knowest.”

“When Skager and Jan quarreled?”

She bowed her head, and continued to gaze inquisitively at him.

“No, thou art mistaken. On that night he was far off on the Norway coast. It must have been two weeks afterward, when he was in Lerwick.”

“When will Lord Lynne be here again?”

“I know not; perhaps in a few weeks, perhaps not until the end of summer. He may not come again this year. He is more uncertain than the weather.”

Margaret sighed, and gathering her treasures together she went away. As she had been desired, she called at Snorro's house. The key was on the outside of the door, she turned it, and went in. The fire had been carefully extinguished, and the books and simple treasures he valued locked up in his wooden chest. It had evidently been quite filled with these, for his clothes hung against the wall of an inner apartment. Before these clothes Margaret stood in a kind of amazement. She was very slow of thought, but gradually certain facts in relation to them fixed themselves in her mind with a conviction which no reasoning could change.

Snorro had gone away in his best clothes; his fishing suit and his working suit he had left behind. It was clear, then, that he had not gone to the Wick fisheries; equally clear that he had not gone away with any purpose of following his occupation in loading and unloading vessels.

Why had he gone then? Margaret was sure that he had no friends beyond the Shetlands. Who was there in all the world that could tempt Snorro from the little home he had made and loved; and who, or what could induce him to leave little Jan?

Only Jan's father!

She came to this conclusion at last with a clearness and rapidity that almost frightened her. Her cheeks burned, her heart beat wildly, and then a kind of anger took possession of her. If Snorro knew any thing, Dr. Balloch did also. Why was she kept in anxiety and uncertainty? "I will be very quiet and watch," she thought, "and when Lord Lynne comes again, I will follow him into the manse, and ask him where my husband is."

As she took a final look at Snorro's belongings, she thought pitifully, "How little he has! And yet who was so good and helpful to every one? I might have taken more interest in his housekeeping! How many little things I could easily have added to his comforts! What a selfish woman I must be! Little wonder that he despised me!" And she determined that hour to make Jan's friend her friend when he came back, and to look better after his household pleasures and needs.

She had plenty now to think about, and she was on the alert morning, noon, and night; but nothing further transpired to feed her hope for nearly a month. The fishing season was then in full business, and Peter Fae, as usual, full of its cares. There had been no formal reconciliation between Margaret and her father and stepmother, and there was no social intercourse between the houses, but still they were on apparent terms of friendship with each other. The anger and ill-will had gradually worn away, and both Peter and Suneva looked with respect upon a woman so much in the minister's favor and company. Peter sent her frequent presents from the store, and really looked upon his handsome little grandson with longing and pride. When he was a few years older he intended to propose to pay for his education. "We'll send him to Edinburgh, Suneva," he frequently said, "and we will grudge nothing that is for his welfare."

And Suneva, who had carefully fostered this scheme, would reply, "That is what I have always said, Peter. It is a poor family that has not one gentleman in it, and, please God and thy pocket-book, we will make a gentleman and a minister of our little Jan;" and the thought of his grandson filling a pulpit satisfied Peter's highest ambition.

So, though there had been no visiting between the two houses, there were frequent tokens of courtesy and good-will, and Margaret, passing through the town, and seeing her father at his shop-door, stopped to speak to him.

"Where hast thou been, and where is thy boy?" he asked.

"He is at home with Elga. I have been to read with Mary Venn; she is failing fast, and not long for this life."

As they spoke Tulloch approached, and, with a cold bow to Peter, turned to Margaret and said, "I will walk with thee, Mistress Vedder, as I have some business matter to speak of." Then, after they had turned to Margaret's home: "It was about the interest of the seven hundred pounds placed to thy credit a few days since. I will count the interest from the first of the month."

Margaret was completely amazed. "Seven hundred pounds!" she said, in a low trembling voice. "I know nothing about it. Surely thou art dreaming. Who brought it to thee?"

"Dr. Balloch. He said it was conscience money and not to be talked about. I suppose thy father sent it, for it is well known that he made his will a few days ago."

Margaret, however, did not believe that it was her father. She was sure Jan had sent the money. It was her £600, with £100 for interest. And oh, how it pained her! Somewhere on earth Jan was alive, and he would neither come to her, nor write to her. He sent her gold instead of love, as if gold were all she wanted. He could scarcely have contrived a more cruel revenge, she thought. For once she absolutely hated money; but it put into her mind a purpose which would not leave it. If Snorro could find Jan, she could. The money Jan had sent she would use for that purpose.

She was cautious and suspicious by nature, and she determined to keep her intention close in her own heart. All summer she watched anxiously for the return of "The Lapwing," but it came not. One day, in the latter part of August, Dr. Balloch asked her to answer for him a letter which he had received from Lord Lynne. She noted the address carefully. It was in Hyde Park, London. Very well, she would go to London. Perhaps she would be nearer to Jan if she did.

She had now nearly £1,000 of her own. If she spent every farthing of it in the search and failed, she yet felt that she would be happier for having made the effort. The scheme took entire possession of her, and the difficulties in the way of its accomplishment only made her more stubbornly determined. The first, was that of reaching the mainland without encountering opposition. She was sure that both her father and Dr. Balloch would endeavor to dissuade her; she feared they would influence her against her heart and judgment. After August, the mail boats would be irregular and infrequent; there was really not a day to be lost.

In the morning she went to see Tulloch. He was eating his breakfast and he was not at all astonished to see her. He thought she had come to talk to him about the investment of her money.

"Good morning, Mistress Vedder! Thou hast been much on my mind, thou and thy money, and no doubt it is a matter of some consequence what thou will do with it."

"I am come to speak to thee as a friend, in whom I may confide a secret. Wilt thou hear, and

keep it, and give me good advice?"

"I do not like to have to do with women's secrets, but thou art a woman by thyself. Tell me all, then, but do not make more of the matter than it is worth."

"When Jan Vedder had no other friend, thou stood by him."

"What then? Jan was a good man. I say that yet, and I say it to thy face, Margaret Vedder. I think, too, that he had many wrongs."

"I think that too, and I shall be a miserable woman until I have found Jan, and can tell him to his face how sorry I am. So then, I am going away to find him."

"What art thou talking of? Poor Jan is dead. I am sure that is so."

"I am sure it is not so. Now let me tell thee all." Then she went over the circumstances which had fed her convictions, with a clearness and certainty which brought conviction to Tulloch's mind also.

"I am sure thou are right," he answered gravely, "and I have nothing at all to say against thy plan. It is a very good plan if it has good management. Now, then, where will thou go first?"

"I have Lord Lynne's address in London. I will go first of all to him. Jan sent me that money, I am sure. It must have been a person of wealth and power who helped him to make such a sum, or he must have lent Jan the money. I think this person was Lord Lynne."

"I think that too. Now about thy money?"

"I will take it with me. Money in the pocket is a ready friend."

"No, it will be a great care to thee. The best plan for thee is this: take fifty pounds in thy pocket, and I will give thee a letter of credit for the balance on a banking firm in London. I will also write to them, and then, if thou wants advice on any matter, or a friend in any case, there they will be to help thee."

"That is good. I will leave also with thee twenty-five pounds for Elga. Thou art to pay her five shillings every week. She will care for my house until I return."

"And thy child?"

"I will take him with me. If Jan is hard to me, he may forgive me for the child's sake."

"Build not thy hopes too high. Jan had a great heart, but men are men, and not God. Jan may have forgotten thee."

"I have deserved to be forgotten."

"He may not desire to live with thee any more."

"If he will only listen to me while I say, 'I am sorry with all my heart, Jan;' if he will only forgive my unkindness to him, I shall count the journey well made, though I go to the ends of the earth to see him."

"God go with thee, and make all thy plans to prosper. Here is the table of the mail boats. One leaves next Saturday morning at six o'clock. My advice is to take it. I will send on Thursday afternoon for thy trunk, and Friday night I will find some stranger fisher-boy to take it to the boat. Come thou to my house when all is quiet, and I will see thee safely on board. At six in the morning, when she sails, the quay will be crowded."

"I will do all this. Speak not of the matter, I ask thee."

"Thou may fully trust me."

Then Margaret went home with a light heart. Her way had been made very plain to her; it only now remained to bind Elga to her interest. This was not hard to do. Elga promised to remain for two years in charge of the house if Margaret did not return before. She felt rich with an allowance of five shillings a week, and the knowledge that Banker Tulloch had authority to prevent either Peter or Suneva from troubling her during that time. So that it was Elga's interest, even if it had not been her will, to give no information which might lead to the breaking up of the comfort dependent on Margaret's absence.

Nothing interfered with Margaret's plans. During the three intervening days, she went as usual to Dr. Balloch's. Twice she tried to introduce the subject of Snorro's singular journey, and each time she contrived to let the minister see that she connected it in her own mind with Jan. She noticed that on one of these occasions, the doctor gave her a long, searching look, and that the expression of his own face was that of extreme indecision. She almost thought that he was going to tell her something, but he suddenly rose and changed the subject of their conversation, in a very decided manner. His reticence pained and silenced her, for she almost longed to open her heart to him. Yet, as he gave her no encouragement, she was too shy, and perhaps too proud to force upon him an evidently undesired confidence. She determined, however, to leave letters for him, and for her father, stating the object of her voyage, but entering into no particulars about it. These letters she would put in Elga's care, with orders not to deliver them until Saturday night. By that time Margaret Vedder hoped to be more than a hundred miles beyond Lerwick.

In the meantime Snorro had reached Portsmouth, his journey thither having been uneventful. "The Retribution" had arrived two days before, and was lying in dock. At the dock office a letter which Lord Lynne had given him, procured an admission to visit the ship, and her tall tapering masts were politely pointed out to him. Snorro went with rapid strides toward her, for it was

near sunset and he knew that after the gun had been fired, there would be difficulty in getting on board. He soon came to the ship of his desire. Her crew were at their evening mess, only two or three sailors were to be seen.

Snorro paused a moment, for he was trembling with emotion, and as he stood he saw three officers come from the cabin. They grouped themselves on the quarter-deck, and one of them, taller, and more splendidly dressed than the others, turned, and seemed to look directly at Snorro. The poor fellow stretched out his arms, but his tongue was heavy, like that of a man in a dream, and though he knew it was Jan, he could not call him. He had received at the office, however, a permit to board "The Retribution" in order to speak with her commander, and he found no difficulty in reaching him.

Jan was still standing near the wheel talking to his officers as Snorro approached. Now that the moment so long watched and waited for, had come, poor Snorro could hardly believe it, and beside, he had seen in the first glance at his friend, that this was a different Jan somehow from the old one. It was not alone his fine uniform, his sash and sword and cocked hat; Jan had acquired an air of command, an indisputable nobility and ease of manner, and for a moment, Snorro doubted if he had done well to come into his presence unannounced.

He stood with his cap in his hand waiting, feeling heart-faint with anxiety. Then an officer said some words to Jan, and he turned and looked at Snorro.

"Snorro! Snorro!"

The cry was clear and glad, and the next moment Jan was clasping both his old friend's hands. As for Snorro, his look of devotion, of admiration, of supreme happiness was enough. It was touching beyond all words, and Jan felt his eyes fill as he took his arm and led him into his cabin.

"I am come to thee, my captain. I would have come, had thou been at the end of the earth."

"And we will part no more, Snorro, we two. Give me thy hand on that promise."

"No more, no more, my captain."

"To thee, I am always 'Jan.'"

"My heart shall call thee 'Jan,' but my lips shall always say 'my captain,' so glad are they to say it! Shall I not sail with thee as long as we two live?"

"We are mates for life, Snorro."

Jan sent his boy for bread and meat. "Thou art hungry I know," he said; "when did thou eat?"

"Not since morning. To-day I was not hungry, I thought only of seeing thee again."

At first neither spoke of the subject nearest to Jan's heart. There was much to tell of people long known to both men, but gradually the conversation became slower and more earnest, and then Snorro began to talk of Peter Fae and his marriage. "It hath been a good thing for Peter," he said; "he looks by ten years a younger man."

"And Suneva, is she happy?"

"Well, then, she dresses gayly, and gives many fine parties, and is what she likes best of all, the great lady of the town. But she hath not a bad heart, and I think it was not altogether her fault if thy wife was——"

"If my wife was what, Snorro?"

"If thy wife was unhappy in her house. The swan and the kittywake can not dwell in the same nest."

"What hast thou to tell me of my wife and son?"

"There is not such a boy as thy boy in all Scotland. He is handsomer than thou art. He is tall and strong, and lish and active as a fish. He can dive and swim like a seal, he can climb like a whaler's boy, he can fling a spear, and ride, and run, and read; and he was beginning to write his letters on a slate when I came away. Also, he was making a boat, for he loves the sea, as thou loves it. Oh, I tell thee, there is not another boy to marrow thy little Jan."

"Is he called Jan?"

"Yes, he is called Jan after thee."

"This is great good news, Snorro. What now of my wife?"

Snorro's voice changed, and all the light left his face. He spoke slowly, but with decision. "She is a very good woman. There is not a better woman to be found anywhere than Margaret Vedder. The minister said I was to tell thee how kind she is to all who are sick and in trouble, and to him she is as his right hand. Yes, I will tell thee truly, that he thinks she is worthy of thy love now."

"And what dost thou think?"

"I do not think she is worthy."

"Why dost thou not think so?"

"A woman may be an angel, and love thee not."

"Then thou thinks she loves me not? Why? Has she other lovers? Tell me truly, Snorro."

"The man lives not in Lerwick who would dare to speak a word of love to Margaret Vedder. She

walks apart from all merry-making, and from all friends. As I have told thee she lives in her own house, and enters no other house but the manse, unless it be to see some one in pain or sorrow. She is a loving mother to thy son, but she loves not thee. I will tell thee why I think." Then Snorro recounted with accurate truthfulness his last interview with Margaret. He told Jan every thing, for he had noted every thing:—her dress, her attitude, her rising color, her interest in the locket's chain, her indifference as to his own hurried journey, its object, or its length.

Jan heard all in silence, but the impression made on him by Snorro's recital, was not what Snorro expected. Jan knew Margaret's slow, proud nature. He would have been astonished, perhaps even a little suspicious of any exaggeration of feeling, of tears, or of ejaculations. Her interest in the locket chain said a great deal to him. Sitting by his side, with her fair face almost against his own, she had drawn the pattern of the chain she wished. Evidently she had remembered it; he understood that it was her emotion at the recognition which had made her so silent, and so oblivious of Snorro's affairs. The minister's opinion had also great weight with him. Dr. Balloch knew the whole story of his wrong, knew just where he had failed, and where Margaret had failed. If he believed a reconciliation was now possible and desirable, then Jan also was sure of it.

Snorro saw the purpose in his face. Perhaps he had a moment's jealous pang, but it was instantly put down. He hastened to let Jan feel that, even in this matter, he must always be at one with him:

"Trust not to me," he said; "it is little I know or understand about women, and I may judge Margaret Vedder far wrong."

"I think thou does, Snorro. She was never one to make a great show of her grief or her regrets. But I will tell thee what she did when thou wert gone away. In her own room, she wept over that chain the whole night long."

"That may be. When little Jan had the croup she was still and calm until the boy was out of danger, and then she wept until my heart ached for her. Only once besides have I seen her weep; that was when Suneva accused her of thy murder; then she took her baby in her arms and came through the storm to me at the store. Yes, she wept sorely that night."

Jan sat with tightly-drawn lips.

"If it will make thee happy, send me back to Lerwick, and I will bring thy wife and child safely here. Thou would be proud indeed to see them. The boy is all I have told thee. His mother is ten times handsomer than when thou married her. She is the fairest and most beautiful of women. When she walks down the street at the minister's side, she is like no other woman. Even Peter Fae is now proud that she is his daughter, and he sends her of the finest that comes to his hand. Shall I then go for thee? Why not go thyself?"

"I will think about it, Snorro. I can not go myself. I received my promotion yesterday, and I asked to be transferred for immediate service. I may get my orders any day. If I send thee, I may have to sail without thee, and yet not see my wife and child. No, I will not part with thee, Snorro; thou art a certain gain, and about the rest, I will think well. Now we will say no more, for I am weary and weak; my head aches also, and I fear I have fever again."

The next day Jan was very ill, and it was soon evident that typhoid fever of a long and exhausting character had supervened on a condition enfeebled by African malaria. For many weeks he lay below the care of love or life, and indeed it was August when he was able to get on deck again. Then he longed for the open sea, and so urged his desire, that he received an immediate exchange to the ship Hydra, going out to Borneo with assistance for Rajah Brooke, who was waging an exterminating war against the pirates of the Chinese and Indian seas.

The new ship was a very fine one, and Jan was proud of his command. Snorro also had been assigned to duty on her, having special charge of a fine Lancaster gun which she carried, and no words could express his pride and joy in his position. She was to sail on the 15th day of August, one hour after noon, and early in the morning of that day, Jan went off the ship alone. He went direct to the Post Office, and with trembling hands, for he was still very weak, he dropped into it the following letter:

MY DEAR WIFE—MY FAIR DEAR MARGARET:

I have never ceased to love thee. Ask Dr. Balloch to tell thee all. To-day I leave for the Chinese sea. If thou wilt forgive and forget the past, and take me again for thy husband, have then a letter waiting for me at the Admiralty Office, and when I return I will come to Shetland for thee. Snorro is with me. He hath told me all about thy goodness, and about our little Jan. Do what thy heart tells thee to do, and nothing else. Then there will be happiness. Thy loving husband,

JAN VEDDER.

A few hours after this letter had been posted Jan stood on his quarter deck with his face to the open sea, and Snorro, in his new uniform, elate with joy and pride, was issuing his first orders to the quarter-master, and feeling that even for him, life had really begun at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

LITTLE JAN'S TRIUMPH.

"I deemed thy garments, O my hope, were gray,
So far I viewed thee. Now the space between
Is passed at length; and garmented in green
Even as in days of yore thou stand'st to-day.
Ah God! and but for lingering dull dismay,
On all that road our footsteps erst had been
Even thus commingled, and our shadows
seen
Blent on the hedgerows and the water way."

Margaret intended leaving Saturday, but on Thursday night something happened, the most unlooked-for thing that could have happened to her—she received Jan's letter. As she was standing beside her packed trunk, she heard Elga call:

"Here has come Sandy Bane with a letter, Mistress Vedder, and he will give it to none but thee."

It is not always that we have presentiments. That strange intelligence, that wraith of coming events, does not speak, except a prescient soul listens. Margaret attached no importance to the call. Dr. Balloch often sent letters, she supposed Sandy was waiting for a penny fee. With her usual neatness, she put away some trifles, locked her drawers, and then washed her hands and face. Sandy was in no hurry either; Elga had given him a cup of tea, and a toasted barley-cake, and he was telling her bits of gossip about the boats and fishers.

While they were talking, Margaret entered; she gave Sandy a penny, and then with that vague curiosity which is stirred by the sight of almost any letter, she stretched out her hand for the one he had brought. The moment she saw it, she understood that something wonderful had come to her. Quick as thought she took in the significance of the official blue paper and the scarlet seal. In those days, officers in the Admiralty used imposing stationery, and Jan had felt a certain pride in giving his few earnest words the sanction of his honor and office. Certainly it had a great effect upon Margaret, although only those very familiar with her, could have detected the storm of anxiety and love concealed beneath her calm face and her few common words.

But oh, when she stood alone with Jan's loving letter in her hand, then all barriers were swept away. The abandon of her slow, strong nature, had in it an intensity impossible to quicker and shallower affection. There was an hour in which she forgot her mortality, when her soul leaned and hearkened after Jan's soul, till it seemed not only possible, but positive, that he had heard her passionate cry of love and sorrow, and answered it. In that moment of intense silence which succeeds intense feeling, she was sure Jan called her. "*Margaret!*" She heard the spiritual voice, soft, clear, sweeter than the sweetest music, and many a soul that in extremities has touched the heavenly horizon will understand that she was not mistaken.

In an hour Tulloch sent for her trunk.

"There is no trunk to be sent now; tell Tulloch that Margaret Vedder will tell him the why and the wherefore to-morrow." Elga was amazed, and somewhat disappointed, but Margaret's face astonished and subdued her, and she did not dare to ask, "What then is the matter?"

Margaret slept little that night. To the first overwhelming personality of joy and sorrow, there succeeded many other trains of thought. It was evident that Dr. Balloch, perhaps Snorro also, had known always of Jan's life and doings. She thought she had been deceived by both, and not kindly used. She wondered how they could see her suffer, year after year, the slow torture of uncertainty, and unsatisfied love and repentance. She quite forgot how jealously she had guarded her own feelings, how silent about her husband she had been, how resentful of all allusion to him.

Throughout the night Elga heard her moving about the house. She was restoring every thing to its place again. The relief she felt in this duty first revealed to her the real fear of her soul at the strange world into which she had resolved to go and seek her husband. She had the joy of a child who had been sent a message on some dark and terror-haunted way, and had then been excused from the task. Even as a girl the great outside world had rather terrified than allured her. In her Edinburgh school she had been homesick for the lonely, beautiful islands, and nothing she had heard or read since had made her wish to leave them. She regarded Jan's letter, coming just at that time, as a special kindness of Providence.

"Yes, and I am sure that is true," said Tulloch to her next morning. "Every one has something to boast of now and then. Thou canst say, 'God has kept me out of the danger, though doubtless He could have taken me through it very safely.' And it will be much to Jan's mind, when he hears that it was thy will to go and seek him."

"Thou wert ever kind to Jan."

"Jan had a good heart. I thought that always."

"And thou thought right; how glad thou will be to see him! Yes, I know thou wilt."

"I shall see Jan no more, Margaret, for I am going away soon, and I shall never come back."

"Art thou sick, then?"

"So I think; very. And I have seen one who knows, and when I told him the truth, he said to me, 'Set thy house in order, Tulloch, for it is likely this sickness will be thy last.' So come in and out as often as thou can, Margaret, and thou tell the minister the road I am traveling, for I shall look to him and thee to keep me company on it as far as we may tread it together."

It did not enter Margaret's mind to say little commonplaces of negation. Her large, clear eyes, solemn and tender, admitted the fact at once, and she answered the lonely man's petition by laying her hand upon his, and saying, "At this time thou lean on me like a daughter. I will serve thee until the last hour."

"When thou hast heard all concerning Jan from the minister, come and tell me too; for it will be a great pleasure to me to know how Jan Vedder turned his trouble into good fortune."

Probably Dr. Balloch had received a letter from Jan also, for he looked singularly and inquisitively at Margaret as she entered his room. She went directly to his side, and laid Jan's letter before him. He read it slowly through, then raised his face and said, "Well, Margaret?"

"It is not so well. Thou knew all this time that Jan was alive."

"Yes, I knew it. It is likely to be so, for I—I mean, I was sent to save his life."

"Wilt thou tell me how?"

"Yes, I will tell thee now. Little thou thought in those days of Jan Vedder, but I will show thee how God loved him! One of his holy messengers, one of his consecrated servants, one of this world's nobles, were set to work together for Jan's salvation." Then he told her all that had happened, and he read her Jan's letters, and as he spoke of his great heart, and his kind heart, the old man's eyes kindled, and he began to walk about the room in his enthusiasm.

Such a tale Margaret had never heard before. Tears of pity and tears of pride washed clean and clear-seeing the eyes that had too often wept only for herself. "Oh, Margaret! Margaret!" he said, "learn this—when it is God's pleasure to save a man, the devil can not hinder, nor a cruel wife, nor false friends, nor total shipwreck, nor the murderer's knife—all things must work together for it."

"If God gives Jan back to me, I will love and honor him with all my heart and soul. I promise thee I will that."

"See thou do. It will be thy privilege and thy duty."

"Oh, why did thou not tell me all this before? It would have been good for me."

"No, it would have been bad for thee. Thou has not suffered one hour longer than was necessary. Week by week, month by month, year by year, thy heart has been growing more humble and tender, more just and unselfish; but it was not until Snorro brought thee those poor despised love-gifts of Jan's that thou wast humble and tender, and just, and unselfish enough to leave all and go and seek thy lost husband. But I am sure it was this way—the very hour this gracious thought came into thy heart thy captivity was turned. Now, then, from thy own experience thou can understand why God hides even a happy future from us. If we knew surely that fame or prosperity or happiness was coming, how haughty, how selfish, how impatient we should be."

"I would like thee to go and tell my father all."

"I will tell thee what thou must do—go home and tell the great news thyself."

"I can not go into Suneva's house. Thou should not ask that of me."

"In the day of thy good fortune, be generous. Suneva Fae has a kind heart, and I blame thee much that there was trouble. Because God has forgiven thee, go without a grudging thought, and say—'Suneva, I was wrong, and I am sorry for the wrong; and I have good news, and want my father and thee to share it.'"

"No; I can not do that."

"There is no 'can' in it. It is my will, Margaret, that thou go. Go at once, and take thy son with thee. The kind deed delayed is worth very little. To-day that is thy work, and we will not read or write. As for me, I will loose my boat, and I will sail about the bay, and round by the Troll Rock, and I will think of these things only."

For a few minutes Margaret stood watching him drift with the tide, his boat rocking gently, and the fresh wind blowing his long white hair, and carrying far out to sea the solemnly joyful notes to which he was singing his morning psalm.

"Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God
and not forgetful be
Of all his gracious benefits
he hath bestowed on thee.

Such pity as a father hath
unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
as worship him in fear."

[*] Version allowed by the authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland.

"Thou art a good man," said Margaret to herself, as she waved her hand in farewell, and turned slowly homeward. Most women would have been impatient to tell the great news that had come to them, but Margaret could always wait. Besides, she had been ordered to go to Suneva with it, and the task was not a pleasant one to her. She had never been in her father's house, since she left it with her son in her arms; and it was not an easy thing for a woman so proud to go and say to the woman who had supplanted her—"I have done wrong, and I am sorry for it."

Yet it did not enter her mind to disobey the instructions given her; she only wanted time to consider how to perform them in the quietest, and least painful manner. She took the road by the sea shore, and sat down on a huge barricade of rocks. Generally such lonely communion with sea and sky strengthened and calmed her; but this morning she could not bring her mind into accord with it. Accidentally she dislodged a piece of rock, and it fell among the millions of birds sitting on the shelving precipices below her. They flickered with piercing cries in circles above her head, and then dropped like a shower into the ocean, with a noise like the hurraing of an army. Impatient and annoyed, she turned away from the shore, across the undulating heathy plateau. She longed to reach her own room; perhaps in its seclusion she would find the composure she needed.

As she approached her house, she saw a crowd of boys and little Jan walking proudly in front of them. One was playing "Miss Flora McDonald's reel" on a violin, and the gay strains were accompanied by finger snappings, whistling, and occasional shouts. "There is no quiet to be found anywhere, this morning," thought Margaret, but her curiosity was aroused, and she went toward the children. They saw her coming, and with an accession of clamor hastened to meet her. Little Jan carried a faded, battered wreath of unrecognizable materials, and he walked as proudly as Pompey may have walked in a Roman triumph. When Margaret saw it, she knew well what had happened, and she opened her arms, and held the boy to her heart, and kissed him over and over, and cried out, "Oh, my brave little Jan, brave little Jan! How did it happen then? Thou tell me quick."

"Hal Ragner shall tell thee, my mother;" and Hal eagerly stepped forward:

"It was last night, Mistress Vedder, we were all watching for the 'Arctic Bounty;' but she did not come, and this morning as we were playing, the word was passed that she had reached Peter Fae's pier. Then we all ran, but thou knowest that thy Jan runs like a red deer, and so he got far ahead, and leaped on board, and was climbing the mast first of all. Then Bor Skade, he tried to climb over him, and Nichol Sinclair, he tried to hold him back, but the sailors shouted, 'Bravo, little Jan Vedder!' and the skipper he shouted 'Bravo!' and thy father, he shouted higher than all the rest. And when Jan had cut loose the prize, he was like to greet for joy, and he clapped his hands, and kissed Jan, and he gave him five gold sovereigns,—see, then, if he did not!" And little Jan proudly put his hand in his pocket, and held them out in his small soiled palm.

The feat which little Jan had accomplished is one which means all to the Shetland boy that his first buffalo means to the Indian youth. When a whaler is in Arctic seas, the sailors on the first of May make a garland of such bits of ribbons, love tokens, and keep-sakes, as have each a private history, and this they tie to the top of the main-mast. There it swings, blow high or low, in sleet and hail, until the ship reaches her home-port. Then it is the supreme emulation of every lad, and especially of every sailor's son, to be first on board and first up the mast to cut it down, and the boy who does it, is the hero of the day, and has won his footing on every Shetland boat.

What wonder, then, that Margaret was proud and happy? What wonder that in her glow of delight the thing she had been seeking was made clear to her? How could she go better to Suneva than with this crowd of happy boys? If the minister thought she ought to share one of her blessings with Suneva, she would double her obedience, and ask her to share the mother's as well as the wife's joy.

"One thing I wish, boys," she said happily, "let us go straight to Peter Fae's house, for Hal Ragner must tell Suneva Fae the good news also." So, with a shout, the little company turned, and very soon Suneva, who was busy salting some fish in the cellar of her house, heard her name called by more than fifty shrill voices, in fifty different keys.

She hurried up stairs, saying to herself, "It will be good news, or great news that has come to pass, no doubt; for when ill-luck has the day, he does not call any one like that; he comes sneaking in." Her rosy face was full of smiles when she opened the door, but when she saw Margaret and Jan standing first of all, she was for the moment too amazed to speak.

Margaret pointed to the wreath: "Our Jan took it from the top-mast of the 'Arctic Bounty;'" she said. "The boys brought him home to me, and I have brought him to thee, Suneva. I thought thou would like it."

"Our Jan!" In those two words Margaret canceled every thing remembered against her. Suneva's eyes filled, and she stretched out both her hands to her step-daughter.

"Come in, Margaret! Come in, my brave, darling Jan! Come in, boys, every one of you! There is cake, and wheat bread, and preserved fruit enough for you all; and I shall find a shilling for every boy here, who has kept Jan's triumph with him." And when Suneva had feasted the children she brought a leather pouch, and counting out £2 14s., sent them away, fiddling and singing, and shouting with delight.

But Margaret stayed; and the two women talked their bitterness over to its very root. For Suneva said: "We will leave nothing unexplained, and nothing that is doubtful. Tell me the worst thou hast thought, and the worst thou hast heard, and what I can not excuse, that I will say, 'I am sorry for,' and thou wilt forgive it, I know thou wilt." And after this admission, it was easy for Margaret also to say, "I am sorry;" and when that part of the matter had been settled, she added, "Now then, Suneva, I have great good news to tell thee."

But with the words Peter and the minister entered the house, and Margaret went to Dr. Balloch and said, "I have done all thou bid me; now then, thou tell my father and Suneva whatever thou told me. That is what thou art come for, I know it is."

"Yes, it is so. I was in the store when thy little Jan and his companions came there with the gold given them, and when the sovereigns had been changed and every boy had got his shilling, I said to thy father, 'Come home with me, for Margaret is at thy house, and great joy has come to it to-day.'"

Then he told again the whole story, and read aloud Jan's letters; and Peter and Suneva were so amazed and interested, that they begged the minister to stay all day, and talk of the subject with them. And the good man cheerfully consented, for it delighted him to see Margaret and Suneva busy together, making the dinner and the tea, and sharing pleasantly the household cares that women like to exercise for those they love or respect. He looked at them, and then he looked at Peter, and the two men understood each other, without a word.

By and by, little Jan, hungry and weary with excitement, came seeking his mother, and his presence added the last element of joy to the reunited family. The child's eager curiosity kept up until late the interest in the great subject made known that day to Peter and Suneva. For to Norsemen, slavery is the greatest of all earthly ills, and Peter's eyes flashed with indignation, and he spoke of Snorro not only with respect, but with something also like a noble envy of his privileges.

"If I had twenty years less, I would man a ship of mine own, and go to the African coast as a privateer, I would that. What a joy I should give my two hands in freeing the captives, and hanging those slavers in a slack rope at the yard-arm."

"Nay, Peter, thou would not be brutal."

"Yes, I would be a brute with brutes; that is so, my minister. Even St. James thinks as I do—'He shall have judgment without mercy that showeth no mercy.' That is a good way, I think. I am glad Snorro hath gone to look after them. I would be right glad if he had Thor's hammer in his big hands."

"He hath a Lancaster gun, Peter."

"But that is not like seeing the knife redden in the hand. Oh, no!"

"Peter, we are Christians, and not heathens."

"I am sorry if the words grieve thee. Often I have wondered why David wrote some of the hard words he did write. I wonder no more. He wrote them against the men who sell human life for gold. If I was Jan Vedder, I would read those words every morning to my men. The knife that is sharpened on the word of God, cuts deep—that is so."

"Jan hath done his part well, Peter, and I wish that he could see us this night. It hath been a day of blessing to this house, and I am right happy to have been counted in it."

Then he went away, but that night Margaret and her son once more slept in their old room under Peter Fae's roof. It affected her to see that nothing had been changed. A pair of slippers she had forgotten still stood by the hearthstone. Her mother's Bible had been placed upon her dressing table. The geranium she had planted, was still in the window; it had been watered and cared for, and had grown to be a large and luxuriant plant. She thought of the last day she had occupied that room, and of the many bitter hours she had spent in it, and she contrasted them with the joy and the hope of her return.

But when we say to ourselves, "I will be grateful," it is very seldom the heart consents to our determination; and Margaret, exhausted with emotion, was almost shocked to find that she could not realize, with any degree of warmth, the mercy and blessing that had come to her. She was the more dissatisfied, because as soon as she was alone she remembered the message Tulloch had given her. It had remained all day undelivered, and quite forgotten. "How selfish I am," she said wearily, but ere she could feel sensibly any regret for her fault she had fallen asleep.

In the morning it was her first thought, and as soon after breakfast as possible she went to Dr. Balloch's. He seemed shocked at the news, and very much affected. "We have been true friends for fifty years, Margaret," he said; "I never thought of his being ill, of his dying—dying."

"He does not appear to fear death, sir."

"No, he will meet it as a good man should. He knows well that death is only the veil which we who live call life. We sleep, and it is lifted."

"Wilt thou see him to-day?"

"Yes, this morning. Thirty-eight years ago this month his wife died. It was a great grief to him. She was but a girl, and her bride-year was not quite worn out."

"I have never heard of her."

"Well, then, that is like to be. This is the first time I have spoken of Nanna Tulloch since she went away from us. It is long to remember, yet she was very lovely, and very much beloved. But thou knowest Shetlanders speak not of the dead, nor do they count any thing from a day of sorrow. However, thy words have brought many things to my heart. This day I will spend with my friend."

The reconciliation which had taken place was a good thing for Margaret. She was inclined to be despondent; Suneva always faced the future with a smile. It was better also that Margaret should talk of Jan, than brood over the subject in her own heart; and nothing interested Suneva like a love-quarrel. If it were between husband and wife, then it was of double importance to her. She was always trying to put sixes and sevens at one. She persuaded Margaret to write without delay to Jan, and to request the Admiralty Office to forward the letter. If it had been her letter she would have written "Haste" and "Important" all over it. She never tired of calculating the possibilities of Jan receiving it by a certain date, and she soon fixed upon another date, when, allowing for all possible detentions, Jan's next letter might be expected.

But perhaps, most of all, the reconciliation was good for Peter. Nothing keeps a man so young as the companionship of his children and grandchildren. Peter was fond and proud of his daughter, but he delighted in little Jan. The boy, so physically like his father, had many of Peter's tastes and peculiarities. He loved money, and Peter respected him for loving it. There were two men whom Peter particularly disliked; little Jan disliked them also with all his childish soul, and when he said things about them that Peter did not care to say, the boy's candor charmed and satisfied him, although he pretended to reprove it.

Jan, too, had a very high temper, and resented, quick as a flash, any wound to his childish self-esteem. Peter was fond of noticing its relationship to his own. One day he said to the boy: "Do that again and I will send thee out of the store."

"If thou sends me out just once, I will never come in thy store again; no, I will not; never, as long as I live," was the instant retort. Peter repeated it to Suneva with infinite pride and approval. "No one will put our little Jan out for nothing," he said.

"Well, then, he is just like thee!" said the politic Suneva; and Peter's face showed that he considered the resemblance as very complimentary.

CHAPTER XIV.

JAN'S RETURN.

"For them the rod of chastisement
flowered."

A stranger suddenly dropped in these Shetland islands, especially in winter, would not unnaturally say, "how monotonously dreary life must be here! In such isolation the heart must lose its keen sense of sympathy, and be irresponsive and dumb." That is the great mistake about the affections. It is not the rise and fall of empires, the birth and death of kings, or the marching of armies that move them most. When they answer from their depths, it is to the domestic joys and tragedies of life. Ever since Eve wept over her slain son, and Rebecca took the love-gifts of Isaac, this has been the case; and until that mighty angel, who stands on the sea and land, cries, "Time shall be no more," the home loves, and the home trials, will be the center of humanity's deepest and sweetest emotions. So, then, the little Shetland town had in it all the elements necessary for a life full of interest—birth and death, love and sorrow, the cruel hand and the generous hand, the house of mourning and the house of joy.

Just before Christmas-tide, Tulloch was sitting alone at midnight. His malady was too distressing to allow him to sleep, but a Norseman scorns to complain of physical suffering, and prefers, so long as it is possible, to carry on the regular routine of his life. He was unable to go much out, and his wasted body showed that it was under a constant torture, but he said nothing, only he welcomed Margaret and the doctor warmly, and seemed to be glad of their unspoken sympathy. It had been stormy all day, but the wind had gone down, and a pale moon glimmered above the dim, tumbling sea. All was quiet, not a footfall, not a sound except the dull roar of the waves breaking upon the beach.

Suddenly a woman's sharp cry cut the silence like a knife. It was followed by sobs and shrieks and passing footsteps and the clamor of many voices. Every one must have noticed how much more terrible noises are at night than in the daytime; the silly laughter of drunkards and fools, the maniac's shout, the piercing shriek of a woman in distress, seem to desecrate its peaceful gloom, and mock the slow, mystic panorama of the heavens. Tulloch felt unusually impressed by this night-tumult, and early in the morning sent his servant out to discover its meaning.

"It was Maggie Barefoot, sir; her man was drowned last night; she has six bairns and not a

bread-winner among them. But what then? Magnus Tulloch went too, and he had four little lads—their mother died at Lammas-tide. They'll be God's bairns now, for they have neither kith nor kin. It is a sad business, I say that."

"Go and bring them here."

The order was given without consideration, and without any conscious intention. He was amazed himself when he had uttered it. The man was an old servant, and said hesitatingly, "Yes, but they are no kin of thine."

"All the apples on the same tree have come from the same root, Bele; and it is like enough that all the Tullochs will have had one forbear. I would be a poor Tulloch to see one of the name wanting a bite and sup. Yes, indeed."

He was very thoughtful after seeing the children, and when Dr. Balloch came, he said to him at once: "Now, then, I will do what thou hast told me to do—settle up my affairs with this world forever. Wilt thou help me?"

"If I think thou does the right thing, I will help thee, but I do not think it is right to give thy money to Margaret Vedder. She has enough and to spare. 'Cursed be he that giveth unto the rich.' It was Mahomet and Anti-Christ that said the words, but for all that they are good words."

"I have no kin but a fifth cousin in Leith; he is full of gold and honor. All that I have would be a bawbee to him. But this is what I think, my money is Shetland money, made of Shetland fishers, and it ought to stay in Shetland."

"I think that too."

"Well, then, we are of one mind so far. Now my wish is to be bread-giver even when I am dead, to be bread-giver to the children whose fathers God has taken. Here are Magnus Tulloch's four, and Hugh Petrie's little lad, and James Traill's five children, and many more of whom I know not. My houses, big and little, shall be homes for them. My money shall buy them meal and meat and wadmall to clothe them. There are poor lonely women who will be glad to care for them, eight or ten to each, and Suneva Fae and Margaret Vedder will see that the women do their duty. What thinkest thou?"

"Now, then, I think this, that God has made thy will for thee. Moreover, thou hast put a good thought into my heart also. Thou knows I brought in my hand a little money when I came to Shetland, and it has grown, I know not how. I will put mine with thine, and though we are two childless old men, many children shall grow up and bless us."

Into this scheme Tulloch threw all his strength and foresight and prudence. The matter was urgent, and there were no delays, and no waste of money. Three comfortable fishermen's cottages that happened to be vacant, were fitted with little bunks, and plenty of fleeces for bedding. Peat was stacked for firing, and meal and salted fish sent in; so that in three days twenty-three fatherless, motherless children were in warm, comfortable homes.

Suneva entered into the work with perfect delight. She selected the mothers for each cottage, and she took good care that they kept them clean and warm, that the little ones' food was properly cooked, and their clothes washed and mended. If there were a sorrow or a complaint it was brought to her, and Suneva was not one to blame readily a child.

Never man went down to the grave with his hands so full of beneficent work as Tulloch. Through it he took the sacrament of pain almost joyfully, and often in the long, lonely hours of nightly suffering, he remembered with a smile of pleasure, the little children sweetly sleeping in the homes he had provided for them. The work grew and prospered wonderfully; never had there been a busier, happier winter in Lerwick. As was customary, there were tea-parties at Suneva's and elsewhere nearly every night, and at them the women sewed for the children, while the men played the violin, or recited from the Sagas, or sung the plaintive songs of the Islands.

Margaret brought the dying man constant intelligence of his bounty: the children, one or two at a time, were allowed to come and see him; twice, leaning on Dr. Balloch, and his servant Bele, he visited the homes, and saw the orphans at their noonday meals. He felt the clasp of grateful hands, and the kiss of baby lips that could not speak their thanks. His last was the flower of his life-work and he saw the budding of it, and was satisfied with its beauty.

One morning in the following April, Margaret received the letter which Suneva had prophesied would arrive by the twentieth, if the weather were favorable. Nowhere in the world has the term, "weather permitting," such significance as in these stormy seas. It is only necessary to look at the mail steamers, so strongly built, so bluff at the bows, and nearly as broad as they are long, to understand that they expect to have to take plenty of hard blows and buffetings. It was the first steamer that had arrived for months, and though it made the harbor in a blinding snow-storm, little Jan would not be prevented from going into the town to see if it brought a letter. For the boy's dream of every thing grand and noble centered in his father. He talked of him incessantly; he longed to see him with all his heart.

Margaret also was restless and faint with anxiety; she could not even knit. Never were two hours of such interminable length. At last she saw him coming, his head bent to the storm, his fleet feet skimming the white ground, his hands deep in his pockets. Far off, he discovered his mother watching for him; then he stopped a moment, waved the letter above his head, and hurried onward. It was a good letter, a tender, generous, noble letter, full of love and longing, and yet alive with the stirring story of right trampling wrong under foot. The child listened to it

with a glowing face:

"I would I were with my father and Snorro," he said, regretfully.

"Would thou then leave me, Jan?"

"Ay, I would leave thee, mother. I would leave thee, and love thee, as my father does. I could stand by my father's side, I could fire a gun, or reef a sail, as well as Snorro. I would not be afraid of any thing; no, I would not. It is such a long, long time till a boy grows up to be a man! When I am a man, thou shall see that I will have a ship of my own."

It is only in sorrow bad weather masters us; in joy we face the storm and defy it. Margaret never thought of the snow as any impediment. She went first to Suneva, and then to Dr. Balloch with her letter; and she was so full of happiness that she did not notice the minister was very silent and preoccupied. After a little, he said, "Margaret, I must go now to Tulloch; it has come to the last."

"Well, then, I think he will be glad. He has suffered long and sorely."

"Yet a little while ago he was full of life, eager for money, impatient of all who opposed him. Thou knowest how hard it often was to keep peace between him and thy father. Now he has forgotten the things that once so pleased him; his gold, his houses, his boats, his business, have dropped from his heart, as the toys drop from the hand of a sleepy child."

"Father went to see him a week ago."

"There is perfect peace between them now. Thy father kissed him when they said 'good-by.' When they meet again, they will have forgotten all the bitterness, they will remember only that they lived in the same town, and worshiped in the same church, and were companions in the same life. This morning we are going to eat together the holy bread; come thou with me."

As they walked through the town the minister spoke to a group of fishers, and four from among them silently followed him. Tulloch was still in his chair, and his three servants stood beside him. The table was spread, the bread was broken, and, with prayers and tears, the little company ate it together. Then they bade each other farewell, a farewell tranquil and a little sad—said simply, and without much speaking. Soon afterward Tulloch closed his eyes and the minister and Margaret watched silently beside him. Only once again the dying man spoke. He appeared to be sleeping heavily, but his lips suddenly moved and he said: "We shall see Nanna to-morrow!"

"We!" whispered Margaret. "Whom does he mean?"

"One whom we can not see; one who knows the constellations, and has come to take him to his God."

Just at sunset a flash of strange light transfigured for a moment the pallor of his face; he opened wide his blue eyes, and standing erect, bowed his head in an untranslatable wonder and joy. It was the moment of release, and the weary body fell backward, deserted and dead, into the minister's arms.

During the few months previous to his death, Tulloch had been much in every one's heart and on every one's tongue. There had not been a gathering of any kind in which his name had not been the prominent one; in some way or other, he had come into many lives. His death made a general mourning, especially among the fishers, to whom he had ever been a wise and trustworthy friend. He had chosen his grave in a small islet half a mile distant from Lerwick—a lonely spot where the living never went, save to bury the dead.

The day of burial was a clear one, with a salt, fresh wind from the south-west. Six fishermen made a bier of their oars, and laid the coffin upon it. Then the multitude followed, singing as they went, until the pier was reached. Boat after boat was filled, and the strange procession kept a little behind the one bearing the coffin and the minister. The snow lay white and unbroken on the island, and, as it was only a few acres in extent, the sea murmured unceasingly around all its shores.

The spot was under a great rock carved by storms into cloud-like castles and bastions. Eagles watched them with icy gray eyes from its summit, and the slow cormorant, and the sad sea-gulls. Overhead a great flock of wild swans were taking their majestic flight to the solitary lakes of Iceland, uttering all the time an inspiring cry, the very essence of eager expectation and of joyful encouragement. Dr. Balloch stood, with bared head and uplifted eyes, watching them, while they laid the mortal part of his old friend in "that narrow house, whose mark is one gray stone." Then looking around on the white earth, and the black sea, and the roughly-clad, sad-faced fishers, he said, almost triumphantly—

"The message came forth from him in whom we live, and move, and have our being:

"Who is nearer to us than breathing, and closer than hands or feet.

"Come up hither and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

"The days of thy sorrow have been sufficient; henceforward there is laid up for thee the reward of exceeding joy.

"Thou shalt no more fear the evil to come; the bands of suffering are loosed. Thy Redeemer hath brought thee a release from sorrow.

"So he went forth unto his Maker; he attained unto the beginning of peace.

"He departed to the habitations of just men made perfect, to the communion of saints, to the life everlasting."

Then he threw a few spadefuls of earth into the grave, and every man in turn did the same, till the sepulture was fully over. Silently then the boats filled, and all went to their homes. They were solemn, but not sorrowful. The simple, pathetic service left behind it a feeling as of triumph. It had shown them they were mortal, but assured them also of immortality.

During the following summer Margaret received many letters from Jan; and she wrote many to him. Nothing is so conducive to a strong affection as a long sweet course of love-letters, and both of them impressed their souls on the white paper which bore to each other their messages of affection. It was really their wooing time, and never lover was half so impatient to claim his bride, as Jan was to see again his fair, sweet Margaret. But it was not likely that he could return for another year, and Margaret set herself to pass the time as wisely and happily as possible.

Nor did she feel life to be a dreary or monotonous affair. She was far too busy for morbid regrets or longings, for ennui, or impatience. Between Dr. Balloch, little Jan, the "Tulloch Homes," and her own house, the days were far too short. They slipped quickly into weeks, and the weeks into months, and the months grew to a year, and then every morning she awoke with the same thought—"Even to-day Jan might come." Little Jan shared her joyous expectations. He was always watching the horizon for any strange-looking craft. The last thing at night, the first in the morning, sometimes during the night, he scanned the bay, which was now filling fast with fishing boats from all quarters.

One Sunday morning very, very early, he came to his mother's bedside. "Wake, my mother! There is a strange ship in the bay. She is coming straight to harbor. Oh! I feel surely in my heart, that it is my father's ship! Let me go. Let me go now, I ask thee."

Margaret was at the window ere the child ceased speaking. "Thou may go," she said, "for I certainly think it is 'The Lapwing.'"

He had fled at the first words, and Margaret awoke Elga, and the fires were kindled, and the breakfast prepared, and the happy wife dressed herself in the pale blue color that Jan loved; and she smiled gladly to see how beautifully it contrasted with the golden-brown of her hair, and the delicate pink in her cheeks.

As for the child, his clear, sharp eyes soon saw very plainly that the vessel had come to anchor in the bay. "Well," he said, "that will be because the tide does not serve yet." John Semple, an old Scot from Ayrshire, was on the pier, the only soul in sight. "John, thou loose the boat, and row me out to 'The Lapwing.' It is 'The Lapwing.' I know it is. Come, thou must be in a hurry."

"'Hurry' is the deil's ain word, and I'll hurry for naebody; forbye, I wadna lift an oar for man nor bairn on the Sawbath day."

"Dost thou think it is 'The Lapwing?'"

"It may be: I'll no say it isn't."

The child had unfastened the boat while he was talking; he leaped into it, and lifted an oar. "Then I must scull, John. Thou might go with me!"

"I'm no gaun to break the Sawbath, an' a water way is waur than a land way, for then you'll be atween the deil an' the deep sea. Bide at hame, Jan, an' ye'll be a wise lad."

Jan shook his head, and went away by himself. The bay was smooth as glass, and he paddled with marvelous ease and speed. Very soon he came alongside the yacht: the sailors were holystoning the deck, but there was not a face looked over the side that little Jan knew.

"Well, then, is this 'The Lapwing?'" he asked.

"That's her name; what's your name, you little monkey?"

"Jan Vedder. Throw me a rope."

The men laughed as if at some excellent joke, and taunted and teased the child until he was in a passion. In the middle of the quarrel Jan himself came on deck.

"A lad as wants to come on board, Captain."

Jan looked down at the lad who wanted to come on board, and the bright, eager face gave him a sudden suspicion. "What is thy name?" he asked.

"Jan Vedder. Wilt thou throw me a rope?"

Then the captain turned and gave some orders, and in a few minutes little Jan stood on the deck of "The Lapwing." His first glance, his first movement was toward the handsomely dressed officer who was watching him with such a smiling, loving face.

"Thou art my father! I know thou art!" and with the words he lifted up his face and arms as if to be kissed and embraced.

Then they went into the cabin and Snorro was called, and perhaps Jan had a little pang of jealousy when he witnessed the joy of the child, and saw him folded to Snorro's big heart. Jan and Snorro were already dressed in their finest uniforms. They had only been waiting for the daybreak to row into harbor. But now there was no need of delay. "My mother is waiting for thee," said little Jan, anxiously. "Come, let us go to her."

It was still very early. John Semple had disappeared, and not a soul else was stirring. But this

time when Jan approached his old home, the welcome was evident from afar. The chimneys were smoking, the blinds raised, the door wide open, and Margaret, beautiful and loving, stood in it, with beaming face and open arms to welcome him.

Then there was a wonderful breakfast, and they sat over it until the bells were ringing for church. "There will be time to talk afterward," said Snorro, "but now, what better thing can be done than to go to church? It will be the best place of all, and it is well said, 'for a happy hour a holy roof.' What dost thou think, Jan?"

"I think as thou dost, and I see the same answer in my Margaret's face. Well, then, we will take that road."

So Jan, with his wife upon his arm, went first, and Snorro, holding little Jan by the hand, followed. The congregation were singing a psalm, a joyful one, it seemed to Jan, and they quietly walked to the minister's pew, which was always reserved for strangers.

Ere they reached it there was a profound sensation, and Dr. Balloch slightly raised himself and looked at the party. Jan was in his full uniform, and so was Snorro, but there was no mistaking either of the men. And no mistaking the tone of the service which followed! It seemed as if the minister had flung off fifty years, and was again talking to his flock with the fire and enthusiasm of his youth. His prayer was like a song of triumph; his sermon, the old joyful invitation of the heart that had found its lost treasure, and called upon its neighbors to come and rejoice with it. The service ended in a song that was a benediction, and a benediction that was a song.

Then Dr. Balloch hastened to come down, and Jan, seeing how he trembled with joy, went to meet and support him; and so there, even on the pulpit stairs, the good minister kissed and blessed him, and called him, "my dear son." Peter put out both hands to Jan, and Margaret embraced Suneva, and in the church-yard the whole congregation waited, and there was scarcely a dry eye among either men or women.

"Thou come home to my house to-night, Jan," said Peter, "thou, and thy wife and child; come, and be gladly welcome, for this is a great day to me."

"Come, all of you," said Suneva, "and Snorro, he must come too."

So they spent the night at Peter's house, and the next morning Peter walked to his store between his son-in-law and his grandson, the proudest and happiest man in Shetland. All, and far more than all of his old love for Jan had come back to his heart. Jan could have asked him now for the half of his fortune, and it would have been given cheerfully.

CHAPTER XV.

LABOR AND REST.

"Turning to the celestial city, to infinite serenities, to love without limit, to perfect joy."

The next evening Peter and Suneva and Dr. Balloch sat around Jan's hearth, and talked of all that he had seen and done during his absence. "But where is Michael Snorro?" asked the doctor. "I thought to have heard him talk to-night."

"Snorro stays by the yacht. His quarters are on her, and she is in his charge. No one finds Snorro far from the post of duty," answered Jan proudly. "He is the best sailor in her Majesty's service, and the best fighter."

"That is likely," said Peter. "Since the days of Harold Halfager, the Snorros have been called good fighters."

"And why not?" asked Suneva, with a proud toss of her handsome head. "He is pure Norse. Will a Norseman turn from any fight in a good cause? That he will not Peter, there is none can tell us better what the Norseman is than thou can. Speak out now, for Jan and the minister will be glad to hear thee."

Every Shetlander can recite. Suneva had taught Peter to believe that no one could recite as well as he could; so he laid down his pipe, and, with great spirit and enthusiasm, spoke thus:

"A swarthy strength with face of light,
As dark sword-iron is beaten bright;
A brave, frank look, with health aglow,
Bonny blue eyes and open brow;
A man who'll face to his last breath
The sternest facts of life and death;
His friend he welcomes heart-in-hand,
But foot to foot his foe must stand;
This is the daring Norseman.

The wild wave motion, weird and
strange,
Rocks in him: seaward he must range.
He hides at heart of his rough life
A world of sweetness for his wife;

From his rude breast a babe can press
Soft milk of human tenderness,
Make his eyes water, his heart dance,
And sunrise in his countenance;
The mild, great-hearted
Norseman.

Valiant and true, as Sagas tell,
The Norseman hateth lies like hell;
Hardy from cradle to the grave,
'Tis his religion to be brave;
Great, silent, fighting men, whose
words
Were few, soon said, and out with
swords!
One saw his heart cut from his side
Living—and smiled, and smiling, died,
The unconquerable Norseman!

Still in our race the Norse king reigns,
His best blood beats along our veins;
With his old glory we can glow,
And surely sail where he could row.
Is danger stirring? Up from sleep
Our war-dog wakes the watch to keep,
Stands with our banner over him,
True as of old, and stern and grim;
The brave, true-hearted
Norseman.

When swords are gleaming you shall
see
The Norseman's face flash gloriously;
With look that makes the foeman reel:
His mirror from of old was steel.
And still he wields, in battle's hour,
That old Thor's hammer of Norse
power;
Strikes with a desperate arm of might,
And at the last tug turns the fight:
For never yields the Norseman."

"That is true," said Jan; "and Snorro knows not the way to yield. Once, on the river Songibusar, when we were attacking Sherif Osman, there was danger that a battery would be taken in reverse. 'The Ajax' had come up to assist the 'Hydra,' and her commander sent a sergeant to tell Snorro that he had better spike his gun and retreat."

Suneva laughed scornfully, and asked, "Well, then, what did Snorro answer?"

"'Thou tell him that sent thee, that Michael Snorro takes his orders only from Captain Jan Vedder, and Captain Vedder has not said "retreat." No, indeed!' Then he got his gun round to bear on the enemy, and he poured such a fire down on them that they fled, fled quick enough. As for Snorro, he did things almost impossible."

"Well, Jan, Osman was a very bad man. It is not well to pity the downfall of tyrants. He had made Borneo, it seems, a hell upon earth."

"My minister, he was a devil and no man. But five hundred free blue jackets were more than he could bear. We utterly destroyed all his forts, and took all his cannon, and made the coast habitable."

"To-day," said Margaret, "I heard thee say to Snorro, 'when thou comes next on shore, bring with thee that idol of Chappo's for the minister.' Who then is Chappo?"

"A wretch worth fighting. A Chinese pirate who came out against us with forty junks, each junk carrying ten guns and a crew of fifty men. He had been blockading the island of Potoo, where many English ladies had taken refuge. It is not fit to name the deeds of these devils. We took from them sixty wretched captives, destroyed one hundred of their crafts and two hundred of their guns, and thus enabled a large number of merchant vessels which had been shut up in different rivers for ransom, to escape. There was even a worse state of affairs on the Sarabas. There we were assisted by an American ship called 'The Manhattan,' and with her aid destroyed a piratical expedition numbering one hundred and twenty proas carrying more than twelve hundred men. These wretches before starting beheaded and mutilated all their women captives,

and left their bodies with that of a child about six years old upon the beach. Snorro's wrath that day was terrible. He shut his ears to every cry for mercy. I do not blame him; indeed, no."

Thus they talked, until the minister said, "Now I must go to my own house, for Hamish is full of fears for me if I am late." So Jan walked with him. It was midnight, but the moon was high in the zenith, and the larks singing rapturously in mid-air. A tender, mystical glow was over earth and sea, and both were as still as if they were a picture. Many good words were said on that walk, and the man who was saved and the man who saved him both lay down upon their beds that night with full and thankful hearts.

For two months, full of quiet joy, Jan and Margaret occupied their old home. They were almost as much alone as in their honeymoon; for little Jan spent most of his time with his friend Snorro, on board "The Lapwing." Snorro had been much pleased to join his old mates in the fishing boats, but he could not bear to put off, even for a day, his uniform. However, Jan and he and little Jan often sailed in advance of the fleet, and found the herring, and brought word back what course to steer. For this knowledge was a kind of instinct with Jan; he could stand and look east and west, north and south, and then by some occult premonition, strike the belt of fish.

Never had Jan dreamed of such happiness as came at last to him in that humble home of his early married life. It was a late harvest of joy, but it was a sure one. Margaret had wept tears of fond regret in all its rooms; its hearth had been an altar of perpetual repentance to her. But the sorrow had been followed by the joy of forgiveness, and the bliss of re-union. Its walls now echoed the fond words of mutual trust and affection, and the hearty communings of friendship. There was no stint in its hospitality; no worry over trivial matters. Margaret had learned that in true marriage the wife must give as well as take—give love and forbearance, and help and comfort.

Jan's and Snorro's visit was a kind of festival for Lerwick. Though it was the busy season, Peter and Suneva kept open house. Never had Peter been so generous both in friendship and in business; never had Suneva dressed so gayly, or set such plenteous feasts. She was very proud of Margaret's position, and paid her unconsciously a vast respect; but she opened all her warm heart to little Jan, and every thing that was hers she determined to give him.

Dr. Balloch, in his quiet way, enjoyed the visit equally. He went very often to sea in the yacht with Jan and Snorro, and, in the happy intercourse with them, the long days were short ones to him. He saw the full fruition of his faith and charity, and was satisfied.

Fortunately, after this event Jan was never very long away at one time. Until the Russian war he made short cruises in the African seas, and Snorro had many opportunities of realizing the joy of liberating the slave, and punishing the oppressor. In the toil and suffering of the Crimea, Jan and Snorro bore their part bravely. Jan had charge of a naval brigade formed of contingents from the ships of the allied fleets. No men did a greater variety of duties or behaved more gallantly than these blue jackets on shore. They dragged the heavy guns from their ships, and they fought in the batteries. They carried the scaling ladders in assaults. They landed the stores. They cheerfully worked as common laborers on that famous road between Balaclava and Sebastopol, for they knew that on its completion depended the lives of the brave men famishing and dying on the heights.

But after many happy, busy years, Jan came home one day and found only Margaret to welcome him. His son Jan was commanding his own vessel in Australian waters; his son Peter was in the East Indies. His daughters' homes were far apart, Margaret, with fast silvering hair, and the heavy step of advancing years, longed greatly for the solace and strength of his constant presence; and Jan confessed that he was a little weary of the toil, and even of the glory of his life.

The fact once admitted, the desire for retirement grew with its discussion. In a little while Jan and Snorro returned to Shetland for the evening of their lives. They had been twenty years away, but Lerwick was very little changed. The old world had not been invaded by the new one. Here and there the busy spirit of the age had left a finger-mark; no more. The changes were mostly those which under any circumstances would have come. Doctor Balloch had finished his work, and gone to his reward. Peter's store was in another name, but Peter, though a very old man, was bright and hale, and quite able to take an almost childlike interest in all Jan's plans and amusements.

At first Jan thought of occupying himself with building a fine new house; but after he had been a week in Shetland, his ambitious project seemed almost ridiculous. He noticed also that Margaret's heart clung to her old home, the plain little house in which she had suffered, and enjoyed, and learned so much. So he sat down contentedly on the hearth from which he began a life whose troubled dawning had been succeeded by a day so brilliant, and an evening so calm.

Snorro, never far away, and never long away, from his "dear captain," his "dear Jan," bought the little cottage in which he had once lived. There he hung again the pictured Christ, and there he arranged, in his own way, all the treasures he had gathered during his roving life. Snorro's house was a wonderful place to the boys of Lerwick. They entered it with an almost awful delight. They sat hour after hour, listening to the kind, brave, good man, in whom every child found a friend and comforter. His old mates also dearly loved to spend their evenings with Snorro, and hear him tell about the dangers he had passed through, and the deeds he had done.

How fair! how calm and happy was this evening of a busy day! Yet in its sweet repose many a voice from the outside world reached the tired wayfarers. There were frequent letters from Jan's children, and they came from all countries, and brought all kinds of strange news. There

were rare visits from old friends, messages and tokens of remembrance, and numerous books and papers that kept for them the echoes of the places they had left.

Neither did they feel the days long, or grow weary with inaction. Jan and Snorro, like the majority of men, whose life-work is finished, conceived a late but ardent affection for their mother earth. They each had gardens and small hot-houses, and they were always making experiments with vegetables and flowers. It was wonderful how much pleasure they got out of the patches of ground they tried to beautify. Then the fishing season always renewed their youth. The boats in which Jan or Snorro took a place were the lucky boats, and often both men sat together during the watch, as they had done long years before, and talked softly in the exquisite Shetland night of all the good that had come to them.

For the companionship between these two souls grew closer and fonder as they drew nearer to the heavenly horizon. They were more and more together, they walked the long watches again, and fought over their battles, and recalled the hours which had been link after link in that chain of truest love which had bound their hearts and lives together.

And Margaret, still beautiful, with hair as white as snow, and a face as fair and pink as a pale rose-leaf, sat smiling, and listening, and knitting beside them; no fears in any of their hearts to beat away, no strife to heal, the past unsighed for, the future sure, they made a picture of old age, well won,

“Serene and bright
And lovely as a Shetland night.”

Transcriber's note:

Archaic spellings have been preserved, including *rereward*, *throstle*, *wadmall*, and *lish*.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JAN VEDDER'S WIFE ***

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