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She's All the World to Me
, by Sir Hall Caine**

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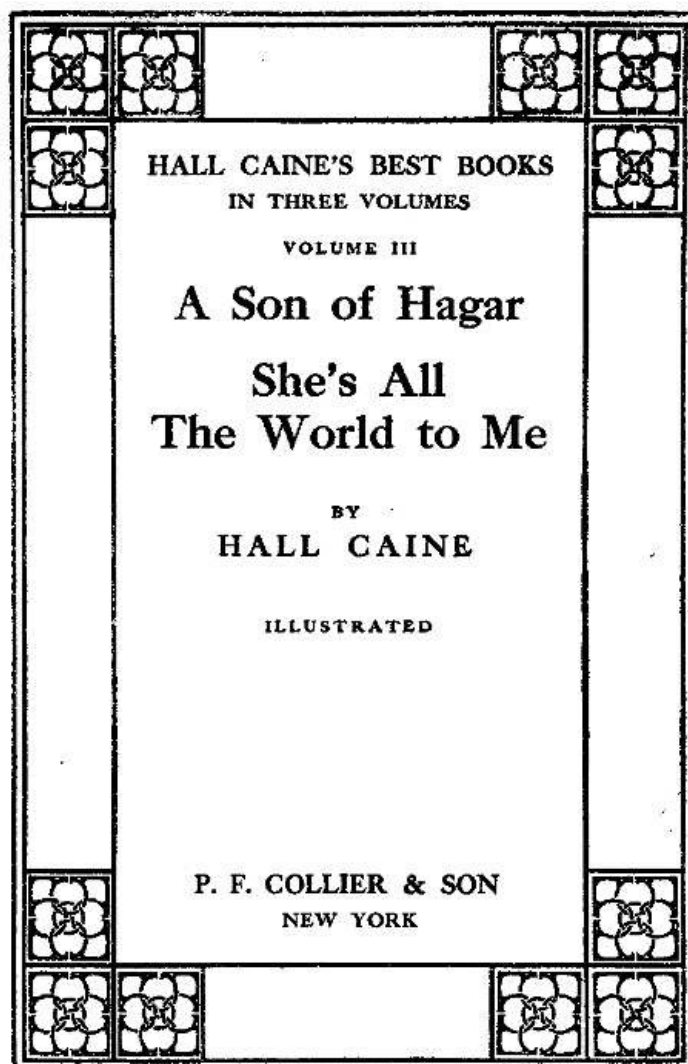
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SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO ME

BY

Hall Caine

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| PROEM | 361 |
| I MYLREA BALLADHOO | 362 |
| II IN PEEL CASTLE | 367 |
| III "MACK'REL—MACKER-EL—MACK-ER-EL!" | 373 |
| IV THE FIRST OF "THE HERRINGS" | 376 |
| V CHRISTIAN MYLREA | 379 |
| VI THE NET FACTORY | 381 |
| VII THE LAST OF "THE HERRINGS" | 390 |
| VIII "SEEMS TO ME IT'S ALL NATHUR" | 396 |
| IX THE HERRING MEAILLEY | 399 |
| X "THERE IS SORROW ON THE SEA" | 406 |
| XI THE SHOCKIN' POWERFUL SKAME | 414 |
| XII STRONG KNOTS OF LOVE | 417 |
| XIII THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT | 421 |
| XIV "BILL IS GONE TO BED" | 426 |
| XV A RESURRECTION INDEED | 431 |
| XVI GOD'S WRITING ON THE SEA | 438 |
| XVII "OH, ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON" | 444 |
| XVIII SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO ME | 451 |
| XIX THE WORLD'S WANT IS MEN | 457 |
| XX THE FAIRY THAT CAME FOR RUBY | 461 |
| XXI OIEL VERREE | 467 |
| XXII ON THE MOAR REEF | 472 |
| XXIII THREE YEARS AFTER | 479 |

PROEM

This is the story of how a woman's love triumphed over neglect and wrong, and of how the unrequited passion in the great heart of a boy trod its devious paths in the way to death, until it stood alone with its burden of sin before God and the pitiless deep.

In the middle of the Irish Sea there is, as every one knows, an island which for many ages has had its own people, with their own language and laws, their own judges and governor, their own lords and kings, their own customs and superstitions, their own proverbs and saws, their own ballads and songs. On the west coast of the Isle of Man stands the town of Peel. Though clean and sweet, it is not even yet much of a place to look at with its nooks and corners, its blind lanes and dark alleys, its narrow, crooked, crabbed streets. Thirty-five years ago it was a poor little hungry fishing port, chill and cheerless enough, staring straight out over miles and miles of bleak sea. To the north of Peel stretches a broad shore; to the south lies the harbor with a rocky headland and bare mountain beyond. In front—divided from the mainland by a narrow strait—is a rugged island rock, on which stand the ruins of a castle. At the back rises a gentle slope dotted over with gray houses.

This is the scene of the following history of the love that was won and the love that was lost, of death that had no sting and the grave that had no victory. Wild and eery as the coast on which I learned it is this story of love and death; but it is true as Truth and what it owes to him who writes it now with feelings deeper than he can say is less than it asks of all by whom it is read in sympathy and simple faith.

CHAPTER I

MYLREA BALLADHOO

The season was early summer; the year 1850. The morning had been bright and calm, but a mist had crept up from the sea as the day wore on, and the night, when it came, was close, dark, and dumb. Laden with its salt scent, the dank vapor had enveloped an old house on the "brew" behind the town. It was a curious place—ugly, long, loose, and straggling. One might say it was a featureless and irresolute old fabric. Over the porch was printed, "Prepare to meet thy God." It was called Balladhoo, and, with its lands, it had been for ages the holding of the Mylreas, an ancient Manx family, once rich and consequently revered, now notoriously less wealthy and proportionately more fallible.

In this house there was a parlor that faced the bay and looked out towards the old castle and the pier at the mouth of the harbor. Over the mantel-piece was carved "God's Providence is Mine Inheritance." One might add that it was a melancholy old mansion.

A gentleman was busy at a table in the bay window sorting and arranging papers by the last glimmering daylight. He was a man of sixty-five, stout, yet flaccid, and slack, and wearing a suit of coarse blue homespun that lay loosely upon him. His white hair hung about a face that bespoke an unusual combination of traits. The eyes and forehead were full of benevolence, but the mouth was alternately strong and weak, harsh and tender, uncertain whether the proper function of its mobile corners was to turn up in laughter or down in disdain.

This was Evan Mylrea, member of the House of Keys, Harbor Commissioner, and boat-owner, philanthropist and magistrate, coroner, constable and "local" for the Wesleyan body, and commonly known by his surname coupled with the name of his estate—Mylrea Balladhoo. Mylrea Balladhoo did not belie his face. He was the sort of man who gives his dog one blow for snapping at his hand, and then two more for not coming back to be caressed. Rightly understood, the theory of morals that an act like this implies tells the whole story of Mylrea's life and character, so far as either of these concerns the present history. It was the rule on which this man, now grown old, had lived with the young, reckless, light-hearted, thoughtless, beautiful, and darling wife whom he had brought from England thirty years ago, and buried at home five years afterwards. It was the principle on which he had brought up her only son.

[Pg 363]

Just now there came from some remote part of the house the most doleful wails that ever arrested mortal ears. At times they resembled the scream of the cormorant as he wheels over a rock at sea. At other times they recalled more precisely the plaintive appeal of the tailless tabby when she is pressed hard for time and space. Mylrea Balladhoo was conscious of these noises. Glancing once at his face, you might have thought it had dropped to a stern frown. Glancing twice, you must have seen that it had risen to a broad grin. One might certainly say that this was a gruesome dwelling.

There was a loud banging of doors, the distant screeches were suddenly abridged; there was the tread of an uncertain foot in the passage without, the door opened, and an elderly man entered, carrying a lamp, which he placed on the table. It was James Quark, the gardener, commonly called Jemmy Balladhoo. That mention of the cormorant was lucky; this man's eyes had just the sea-bird's wild stare. The two little gray-green globes of fire were, however, set in a face of the most flabby amiability. His hair, which was thin and weak, traveled straight down his forehead due for his eyes. In one hand he carried something by the neck, which, as he entered, he made late and futile efforts to conceal behind his back.

"It's Mr. Kerruish Kinvig, sir, that's coming up to see you," said the man in a meek voice.

"Show him in," said Mylrea Balladhoo; "and, Jemmy," he added, shouting in the man's ear, "for mercy's sake take that fiddle to the barn."

"Take him to the barn?" said Jemmy, with an affrighted stare. "Why, it's coming here he is, this very minute."

"The fiddle, the fiddle!" shouted Mr. Mylrea. "I always had my doubts about the music that's in it, and now I see there's none."

Jemmy took himself off, carrying his fiddle very tenderly in both hands. He was all but stone deaf, poor fellow, and had never yet known the full enjoyment of his own music. That's why he was so liberal of it with people more happily endowed.

A big blustering fellow then dashed into the parlor without ceremony.

"Balladhoo," he shouted, in a voice that rang through the house, "why don't you have the life of that howling demon? Here, take my clasp-knife at it and silence it forever."

[Pg 364]

"It's gone to the barn," said Mylrea Balladhoo, quietly, in reply to these bloodthirsty proposals.

The newcomer, Kerruish Kinvig, was a prosperous net-maker in Peel, and a thorn in the side of every public official within a radius of miles. The joy of his life was to have a delightful row with a magistrate, a coroner, a commissioner, or perhaps a parson by preference. When there was never a public meeting to be interrupted, never a "vestry" to be broken up, Kerruish Kinvig became as flat and stale as an old dog, and was forced to come up and visit his friend Mylrea Balladhoo, just by way of keeping his hand in.

On the present occasion he had scarcely seated himself, when he leaped up, rushed to the window, peered into the night, and shouted that the light on the harbor pier was out once more. He declared that this was the third time within a month; prophesied endless catastrophes; didn't

know for his part what in the name of common-sense the commissioners were about; could swear that smuggling was going on under their very noses.

"I'll have the law on the lot of you," bellowed Kinvig at the full pitch of his voice, and meantime he helped himself to the whisky on the table, and filled his pipe from the domestic bowl. "It's the truth, I'll fling you all out," he shouted through a cloud of smoke.

"Eh, you'll have your fling," replied the unperturbed Mylrea.

Then, going to the door, the master of Balladhoo recalled the gardener.

From the subsequent conversation it appeared that, to prevent illicit trading, the Imperial Government had been compelled to station a cutter in every harbor of the island; that the cutter stationed at Peel, having come by some injury a month ago, had been removed to England for repairs, and had not yet been brought back. Kerruish Kinvig declared that some gang of scoundrels, perceiving the incompetence of the home officials, were availing themselves of the absence of the Government ship to run vessels laden with contraband goods under the cover of the darkness.

Jemmy came back, and Mr. Mylrea sent him to fetch his son Christian.

Jemmy went off for that purpose.

Some talk of the young man then ensued between his father and Kinvig. It transpired that Christian had had a somewhat questionable career—was his father's only son, and had well-nigh ruined the old man with debts contracted during a mysterious absence of six years. Christian had just returned home, and Mylrea Balladhoo, stern on the outside, tender at the core, loving his son as the one thing left to him to love, had forgiven everything—disgrace, ingratitude, and impoverishment—and taken back the prodigal without a word.

[Pg 365]

And, in truth, there was something so winsome in the young fellow's reckless, devil-may-care indifference that he got at the right side of people's affections in spite of themselves. Only those who come close to this type of character can recognise the rift of weakness or wilfulness, or it may be of selfishness, that runs through the fair vein of so much good-nature. And if Mylrea Balladhoo saw nothing, who then should complain?

Now, Kerruish Kinvig was just as fond of Christian as anybody else, but that was no just cause and impediment why he should hold his peace as to the young man's manifold weaknesses. So it was—

"Look here, Balladhoo. I've something to say about that fine son of yours, and it's middling strange too."

"Drop it, Kerruish," muttered Mylrea.

"So I will, but it's into your ear I'll drop it. Do you know he's hanging round one of my net-makers—eh?"

"You're fond of a spell at the joking, Kerruish, but in a general way, you know, a man doesn't like to look like a fool. You've got too much fun in you, Kerruish; that's *your* fault, and I've always said so."

There was a twinkle in the old man's eye, but it went off like summer lightning. "Who is she?" he asked, in another tone.

"Mona Cregeen they're calling her," said Kinvig.

"What is she?"

"Don't I tell you—one of my net-makers!" thundered Kinvig.

"Who are her people? Where does she come from? What do you know about her? What has Christian had to say to her—"

"Hold on; that's a middling tidy lot to begin with," shouted Kinvig.

Then it was explained that Mona Cregeen was a young woman of perhaps three-and-twenty, who had recently come to Peel from somewhere in the south of the island, accompanied by her aged mother and little sister, a child of five, closely resembling her.

Jemmy, the gardener, returned to say that Christian was not at home; left an hour ago; said he would be back before bedtime.

"Ah! it's the 'Jolly Herrings' he's off to," said Kinvig. The "Jolly Herrings" was a low hovel of an inn down in the town.

[Pg 366]

"As I say, you've a fine feeling for the fun, Kerruish," said Mylrea; "Jemmy, put on your coat quick. You have to carry a message to the harbor-master. It can't wait for Master Christian."

Now, Jemmy Balladhoo had, as we have seen, one weakness, but it was not work. He remembered quite opportunely that there was a boy in the kitchen who had just come up on an errand from the town, and must of course go back again. It was quite an inspiration, but none the less plainly evident that the boy was the very person to carry the message to the harbor-master.

"Who is he?" shouted Kerruish Kinvig.

"Danny Fayle," answered Jemmy.

"Pshaw! he'll never get there," bawled Kinvig.

"Bring him up," said Mylrea Balladhoo.

A minute later, a fisher-lad of eighteen shambled into the room. You might have said he was long rather than tall. He wore a guernsey and fumbled with a soft blue seaman's cap in one hand. His fair hair clustered in tangled curls over his face, which was sweet and comely, but had a simple vacant look from a lagging lower lip.

Danny was an orphan, and had been brought up none too tenderly by an uncle and aunt. The uncle, Bill Kisseck, was admiral of the fishing-fleet, and master of a fishing-lugger belonging to Mr. Mylrea. To-morrow was to be the first day of the herring season, and it was relative to that event that Danny had been sent up to Balladhoo. The lad received from Mr. Mylrea, in his capacity as harbor commissioner, a message of stern reproof and warning, which he was to convey to the official whose lack of watchfulness had allowed the light on the harbor pier to go out.

"Run straight to his house, Danny, my lad," said Mylrea Balladhoo.

"And don't go cooling your heels round that cottage of the Cregeens," put in Kerruish Kinvig.

A faint smile that had rested like a ray of pale sunshine on the lad's simple face suddenly vanished. He hung his head, touched his forehead with the hand holding the cap, and disappeared.

CHAPTER II

[Pg 367]

IN PEEL CASTLE

When Danny reached the outside of the house, the night was even more dark and dumb than before. He turned to the right under the hill known as the Giant's Fingers, and took the cliff road to the town. The deep boom of the waters rolling slowly on the sand below came up to him through the dense air. He could hear the little sandpiper screaming at Orry's Head across the bay. The sea-swallow shot past him, too, with its low mournful cry. Save for these, everything was still.

Danny had walked about a quarter of a mile, when he paused for a moment at the gate of a cottage that stood halfway down the hill to the town. There was a light in the kitchen, and from where he stood in the road Danny could see those who were within. As if by an involuntary movement, his cap was lifted from his head and fumbled in his fingers, while his eyes gazed yearningly in at the curtainless window. Then he remembered the harsh word of Kerruish Kinvig, and started off again more rapidly. It was as though he had been kneeling at a fair shrine when a cruel hand befouled and blurred it.

Danny was superstitious. He was full to the throat of fairy lore and stories of witchcraft. The night was dark; the road was lonely; hardly a sound save that of his own footsteps broke the stillness, and the ghostly memories would arise. To banish them Danny began to whistle, and, failing with that form of musical society, to sing. His selection of a song was not the happiest under the circumstances. Oddly enough, it was the doleful ballad of Myle Charaine. Danny sang it in Manx, but here is a stave of it in the lusty tones of the fine old "Lavengro"—

"O, Myle Charaine, where got you your gold?
Lone, lone, you have left me here.
O, not in the curragh, deep under the mold,
Lone, lone, and void of cheer."

There was not much cheer that Danny could get out of Myle Charaine's company, but he could not at the moment think of any ballad hero who was much more heartsome. He had a good step of the road to go yet. Somehow the wild legend of the Moddey Dhoo would creep up into Danny's mind. In the days when the old castle was garrisoned, the soldiers in the guardroom were curious about a strange black dog that came every night and lay in their midst. "It's a devil," said one. "I'll follow it and see," said another. When the dog arose to go, the intrepid soldier went out after it. His comrades tried to prevent him. "I'll follow it," he said, "if it leads to hell." A minute afterward there was an unearthly scream; the soldier rushed back pale as a corpse, and with great staring eyes. He said not a word, and died within the hour. The Moddey Dhoo kept tormenting poor Danny to-night. So he set up the song afresh, and to heighten the sportive soul of it, he began to run. Once having taken to his heels, Danny ran as if the black dog itself had been behind him. By the time he reached the town he was fairly spent. Myle Charaine and the Moddey Dhoo together had been too much for Danny. What with the combined exertion of legs and lungs, the lad was perspiring from head to foot.

[Pg 368]

The house of the harbor-master was a little ivy-covered cottage that stood on the east end of the quay, near the bridge that crossed the river. The harbor-master himself was an unmarried elderly man, who enjoyed the curious distinction of having always worn short petticoats. His full and correct name seems almost to have been lost. He was known as Tommy-Bill-beg, a by-name which had at least a certain genealogical value in showing that the harbor-master was Tommy the son of Little Bill. When Danny reached the cottage he knocked, and had no answer. Then he lifted the latch and walked in. The house was empty, though a light was burning. It had two rooms and no more. One was a dark closet of a sleeping-crib. The other, the living room, was choked with nearly every conceivable article of furniture and species of domestic ornament. Shells, fish-bones, bits of iron and lead ore, sticks and pipes lay on tables, chairs, chests, settles, and corner cupboards. A three-legged stool stood before the fire-place; and with all his wealth of rickety furniture, this was probably the sole article which the harbor-master used.

There was a facetious-faced timepiece on the mantel-piece; and when folks pitied the isolation of Tommy-Bill-beg, and asked him if he never felt lonely, he always replied, "Not while I hear the clock tick." But Tommy-Bill-beg had not heard the clock tick for twenty years. He resembled Jemmy Quark in being almost stone-deaf, and had a further bond of union with the gardener of Balladhoo in being musical. He played no instrument, however, except his voice, which he believed to be of the finest quality and compass. The harbor-master was woefully wrong as to the former, but right as to the latter; he had a voice like a rasp, and as loud as a fog-horn. Printed copies of ballads were pinned up on various parts of the wall of his kitchen. Tommy-Bill-beg could not read a line; but he would rather have died than allow that this was so, and he never sang except from print.

[Pg 369]

Danny Fayle knew well how often the musical weakness of the harbor-master was played upon by the Peel men; and when he found the cottage empty he suspected that some wags of fisher-fellows had decoyed Tommy-Bill-beg away to the "Jolly Herrings" for the sport of having him sing on this their last night ashore. Danny set off for the inn, which was in Castle Street. He walked along the quay, intending to turn up a passage.

The night seemed darker than ever now, and not a breath of wind was stirring. The harbor on Danny's left was some twenty yards across, and another twenty yards divided the mainland from the island rock, on which stood the ruins of the old fortress. The tide was out, and the fishing-luggers lay at secure anchorage on the shingle, and in six inches of mud. The pier was straight ahead, and there the light should now be burning.

As Danny approached the passage that led up to Castle Street he heard the distant rumble of noisy singing. Yes, it came from the "Jolly Herrings" beyond question, and Tommy-Bill-beg was there airing his single vanity.

Danny was about to turn up the passage when, in a lull in the singing, he thought he caught the sound of voices and of the tread of feet. Both came from the rock outside, and Danny could not resist the temptation to walk on and listen.

There could be no doubt of it. Some people were going up to the castle. What could they want in that desolate place at night, and thus late? In Danny's mind the ancient castle had always been encircled by ghostly imaginings. Perhaps it was fear that drew him to it now. Probably ordinary common-sense would have suggested that Danny should run off first to the harbor-master with the message that he had been charged to deliver, but Danny had neither part nor lot in that ordinary inheritance.

Near the bottom of the ebb tide the neck that divided the pier from the castle could be forded. Danny stole down the pier steps and crossed the ford as noiselessly as he could. A flight of other steps hewn out of the rock went up from the water's edge to the deep portcullis. Danny crept up. He found that the old notched and barred door leading into the castle stood open. Danny stood and listened. The footsteps that he heard before were now far ahead of him. It was darkest of all under these thick walls. Danny had to pass the doorway of the ruined guardroom, terrible with the tradition of the black dog. As he went by the door he turned his head toward it in the darkness. At that instant he thought he heard something stir. He gasped, but could not scream. He stretched his arms fearfully toward the sound. There was nothing. All was still once more; only the receding footsteps dying away. Danny thought he had deceived himself. It was as though he had heard the rustle of a dress, but it must have been the soft rustle of leaves.

[Pg 370]

Yet there were no trees in the castle.

Danny stepped forward into the courtyard. His feet fell softly on the grass that now grew there. But he stopped again, and his heart seemed to stand still. He could have sworn that behind him he heard a light stealthy tread. Danny dropped to his knees, breathless and trembling.

It was gone. The deep, thick boom of the sea came from the shore far behind, and the thin, low splash of broken waters from the rocks beneath. The footsteps had ceased now, but Danny could hear voices. He rose to his feet and walked toward whence they came.

He found himself outside the crumbling walls of the roofless chapel of St. Patrick. He heard noises from within, and crouched behind a stone. Presently a light was struck. It lighted all the air above it. Danny crept up to the chapel wall and peered in at one of the lancet windows.

A company of men were there, but he could not distinguish their faces. The single lantern they carried was now turned with its face to the ground. One of them had a crowbar with which he

was prizing up a stone. It was a gravestone. The men were tearing open an old vault.

There was some muttering, and one of the men seemed to protest. "Stop!" he cried; "I'm not going to have a hand in a job like this. I'm bad enough, God knows, but no man shall say that I helped to violate a grave."

Danny shook from head to foot. He knew that voice. Just then the sea-swallow shot again overhead, uttering its low, mournful cry. At the same instant Danny thought he heard a half-stiffed moan not far from his side, and once more his ear caught that soft rustling sound. Quivering in every limb, he could not stir. He must stand and be silent. He clung to the stone wall with convulsive fingers.

[Pg 371]

The man with the crowbar laughed. "Dowse that now," he said, and laughed again.

"Och, the timid he is to be sure, and the religious, too, all at once."

Danny knew that voice also, and knew as well that to utter a word or sound at that moment might be as much as his life was worth. The men were raising the stone.

"Here, bear a hand," said one.

"Never," said the first speaker.

There was a low, grating laugh. One of the men leaped into the vault.

"Now, then, tail on here more hands. Let's have it, quick."

Then Danny saw that, lying on the ground, was something that he had not observed before. It was like a thick black roll some four feet long. Two of the men got hold of it to hand it to the man below.

"Come! lay down, d'ye hear?"

Danny's terror mastered him. He turned to run. Then the man who had spoken first cried, "What's that?"

There was a moment's pause.

"What's what?" said the man in the vault.

"I'll swear on my soul I saw a woman pass the porch."

A bitter little laugh followed.

"Och, it's always a woman he's seeing."

Danny had found his legs at last. Flying along the grass as softly as a lapwing, he reached the old gate. Then he turned and listened. No; there was nothing to show that he had been heard. He crept down the steps to the water's edge. There in a creek he saw a boat which he had not observed on going up. He looked at the name.

It was "Ben-my-Chree."

Danny turned to the ford. The tide had risen a foot since he crossed, but he paddled through the water and gained the pier. Then he ran home as fast as his long legs would carry him, wet with sweat and speechless with dismay.

Next morning Danny remembered that he had forgotten all about the harbor-master and the light.

"Och, the cursed young imp that he is," cried his uncle, Bill Kisseck, hitching his hand into Danny's guernsey at the neck, and steadying him as if he had been a sack with an open mouth. "Aw, the booby; just taking a rovin' commission and snappin' his finger at the ould masther. What d'ye think would a happent to you, ye beach-comber, if some ship had run ashore and been wrecked and scuttled and all hands lost, and not a pound of cargo left at her, and never a light on the pier, and all along of you, ye idiot waistrel!"

[Pg 372]

CHAPTER III

[Pg 373]

"MACK'REL—MACKER-EL—MACK-ER-EL!"

It was a brilliant morning. The sea lay like a glass floor, and the sunshine, like a million fairies, danced on it. The town looked as bright as it was possible for Peel to look. The smoke was only beginning to coil upward from the chimney stacks and the streets were yet quiet when the silvery voice of a child was heard to cry—

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

It was a little auburn-haired lassie of five, with ruddy cheeks, and laughing lips, and sparkling

brown eyes. She wore a clean white apron that covered her skirt, which was tucked up and pinned in fish-wife fashion in front. Her head was bare; she carried a basket over one arm, and a straw hat that swung on the other hand.

The basket contained flowers which the child was selling: "A ha'penny a bunch, ma'am, only a ha'penny!" The little thing was as bright as the sunlight that glistened over her head. She had made a song of her sweet call, and chanted the simple words with a rhythmic swing—

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

"Ruby," cried a gentleman at the door of a house facing the sea. "Here, little one, give me a bunch of your falderolls. What? No! not falderolls? Is that it, little one, eh?"

It was Mr. Kerruish Kinvig.

The child pouted prettily and drew back her basket.

"What! not sell to me this morning! Oh, I see you choose *your* customers, *you* do, my lady. But I'll have the law on you, I will."

Ruby looked up fearlessly into the face of the dread iconoclast.

"I don't love you," she said.

"No—eh? And why not, now?"

"Because you call the flowers bad names."

"Oh, I do, do I? Well never mind, little one. Say we strike a peace—eh?"

[Pg 374]

"I don't like people that strike," said Ruby, with averted eyes.

"Well, then, cry a truce—anything you like."

Ruby knew what crying a flower or a fish meant.

"Here, now, little one, here's a penny; that's double wages, you know. Don't you think the law would uphold me if I asked for a—"

"A what?" asked the child, with innocent eyes.

"Well, say a kiss."

The bargain was concluded and the purchase ratified. In another minute the little feet were tripping away, and from a side street came the silvery voice that sang—

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

At the next corner the lassie's childlike tones were suddenly drowned by a lustier voice which cried, "Mack'rel! Macker—el! Fine, ladies—fresh, ladies—and bellies as big as bishops'—Mack—er—el!"

It was Danny Fayle with a board on his head containing his last instalment of the season's mackerel. When the two street-venders came together they stopped.

"Aw now, the fresh you're looking this morning, Ruby veg—as fresh as a dewdrop, my chree!"

The little one lifted her eyes and laughed. Then she plunged her hand into her basket and brought out a bunch of wild roses.

"That's for you, Danny," she said.

"Och, for me is it now? Aw, and is it for me it is?" said Danny, with wondering eyes. "The clean ruined it would be in half a minute, though, at the likes of me, Ruby veg. Keep it for yourself, woman." *Louder*: "Mack'rel—fine, ladies—fresh, ladies—Macker-el!" *Then lower*: "Aw now, the sweet and tidy they'd be lookin' in your own breast, my chree—the sweet extraordinary!"

The child looked up and smiled, looked down and pondered: then half reluctantly, half coquettishly, fixed the flowers in her bosom.

"Danny, I love you," she said, simply.

The object of Ruby's affection blushed violently and was silent.

"And so does Sissy," added the little one.

"Mona?" asked Danny, and his tongue seemed to cleave to his mouth.

"Yes, and mama too."

Danny's face, which had begun to brighten, suddenly lost its sunshine. His lower lip was lagging wofully. [Pg 375]

"Yes, Mona and mama, and—and everybody," said the child, with ungrudging spontaneity.

"No, Ruby ven."

Danny's voice was breaking. He tried to conquer this weakness by shouting aloud, "Mack-er—Mack—" Then, in a softer tone, "Not everybody, my chree."

"Well," said the child in earnest defense, "everybody except your uncle Kisseck."

"Bill? Bill? What about Bill?" said Danny, hoarsely.

"Why don't you fight into him, Danny? You're a big boy now, Danny. Why don't you fight into him?"

Danny's simple face grew very grave. The soft blue eyes had an uncertain look.

"Did Sissy say that, Ruby veg?"

"No, but she said Bill Kisseck was a—was a—"

"A what, Rue?"

"A brute—to *you*, Danny."

The lad's face trembled. The hanging lower lip quivered, and the whole countenance became charged with sudden energy. Lifting his board from his head, and taking up the finest of the fish, he said:

"Ruby, take this home to Mona. Here now; it's at the bottom of your basket I'm putting it."

"My flowers, Danny!" cried Ruby, anxiously.

"Aw, what's the harm they'll take at all. There—there" (fixing some seaweed over the mackerel) —"nice, extraordinary—nice, nice!"

"But what will your uncle Bill say, Danny?" asked the little one with the shadow of fear in her eyes.

"Bill? Bill? Oh, Bill," said Danny, turning away his eyes for a moment. Then, with an access of strength as he lifted his board onto his head and turned to go, "if Bill says anything, I'll—I'll—"

"No, don't, Danny; no, don't," cried Ruby, the tears rising to her eyes.

"Just a minute since," said Danny, "there came a sort of a flash, like that" (he swung one arm across his eyes), "and all of a sudden I knew middlin' well what to do with Bill."

"Don't fight, Danny," cried Ruby; but Danny was gone, and from another street came "Mack'rel—fine, ladies—fresh, ladies—and bellies as big as bishops'—Mack-er-el!"

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 376]

THE FIRST OF "THE HERRINGS"

Later in the day the final preparations were being made for the departure of the herring fleet. Tommy-Bill-beg, the harbor-master, in his short petticoat, was bawling all over the quay, first at this man in the harbor and then at that. Bill Kisseck was also there in his capacity as admiral of the fleet—an insular office for which he had been duly sworn in, and for which he received his five pounds a year. Bill was a big black-bearded creature in top-boots—a relic of the reign of the Norseman in Man. Tommy-Bill-beg was chaffed about the light going out on the pier. He looked grave, declared there was "something in it." Something supernatural, Tommy meant. Tommy-Bill-beg believed in his heart it was "all along of the spite of Gentleman Johnny"—now a boggy, erst a thief who in the flesh had been put into a spiked barrel and rolled over the pier into the sea, swearing furiously, as long as he could be heard, that to prove his innocence it was his fixed intention to haunt forever the scene of his martyrdom.

Kerruish Kinvig was standing by, and heard the harbor-master's explanation of the going out of the light.

"It's middling strange," shouted Kinvig, "that the ghost should potter about only when the Government cutter happens to be out of the way, and Tommy-Bill-beg is yelping and screeching at the 'Jolly Herrings.' I'd have a law on such bogies, and clap them in Castle Rushen," bawled Kinvig, "and all the fiddlers and carol-singers along with them," he added.

The harbor-master shook his head, apparently more in sorrow than in anger, and whispered Bill Kisseck that, as "the good ould book" says, "Bad is the man that has never no music in his sowl."

It was one of Tommy-Bill-beg's peculiarities of mental twist that he was full of quotations, and never by any chance failed to misascribe, misquote, and misapply them.

The fishing-boats were rolling gently with the motion of the rising tide. When everything had been made ready, and the flood was at hand, the fishermen, to the number of several hundred men and boys, trooped off to the shore of the bay. There they were joined by a great multitude of women and children. Presently the vicar appeared, and, standing in an open boat, he offered the

[Pg 377]

customary prayer for the blessing of God on the fishing expedition which was now setting out.

"Restore and continue to us the harvest of the sea!"

And the men, on their knees in the sand, with uncovered heads, and faces in their hats, murmured "*Yn Meailley*."

Then they separated, the fishermen returning to their boats.

Bill Kisseck leaped aboard the lugger that lay at the mouth of the harbor. His six men followed him. "See all clear," he shouted to Danny, who sailed with him as boy. Danny stood on the quay with the duty of clearing ropes from blocks, and then following in the dingey that was moored to the steps.

Among the women who had come down to the harbor to see the departure of the fleet were two who bore no very close resemblance to the great body of the townswomen. One was an elderly woman, with a thin sad face. The other was a young woman, of perhaps two or three and twenty, tall and muscular, with a pale cast of countenance, large brown eyes, and rich auburn hair. The face, though strong and beautiful, was not radiant with happiness, and yet it recalled very vividly a glint of human sunshine that we have known before.

In another moment little Ruby, red with running, pranced up to their side, crying, "Mona, come and see Danny Fayle's boat. Here, look, there; that one with the color on the deck."

The admiral's boat was to carry a flag.

The two women were pulled along by the little sprite and stopped just where Danny himself was untying a knot in a rope. Danny recognized them, lifted his hat, blushed, looked confused, and seemed for the moment to forget the cable.

"Tail on there!" shouted Bill Kisseck from the lugger. "Show a leg there, if you don't want the rat's tail. D'ye hear?"

Danny was fumbling with his cap. That poor lagging lower lip was giving a yearning look to the lad's simple face. He muttered some commonplace to Mona, and then dropped his head. At that instant his eyes fell on the lower part of her dress. The blue serge of her gown was bleached near her feet. Danny, who could think of nothing else to say, mumbled something about the salt water having taken the color out of Mona's dress. The girl looked down, and then said quietly:

"Yes, I was caught by the tide last night—I mean to say, I was—"

She was clearly trying to recall her words, but poor Danny had hardly heard them.

[Pg 378]

"You cursed booby!" cried Bill Kisseck, leaping ashore, "prating with a pack of women when I'm a-waiting for you. I'll make you walk handsome over the bricks, my man."

With that he struck Danny a terrible blow and felled him.

The lad got up abashed, and without a word turned to his work. Kisseck, still in a tempest of wrath, was leaping back to the lugger, when the young woman stepped up to him, looked fearlessly in his face, seemed about to speak, checked herself, and turned away.

Kisseck stood measuring her from head to foot with his eyes, broke into a little bitter laugh, and said:

"I'm right up and down like a yard of pumpwater; that's what I am."

He jumped aboard again. Danny ran the rope from the blocks, the admiral's boat cleared away, and the flag shot up to the mast-head. The other boats followed one after one to the number of nearly one hundred. The bay was full of them.

When Kisseck's boat had cleared the harbor, Danny ran down the steps of the pier with eyes still averted from the two women and the child, got into the dingey, took an oar and began to scull after it.

"Sissy, Sissy," cried Ruby, tugging at Mona's dress, "look at Danny's little boat. What's the name that is on it in red letters?"

"Ben-my-Chree," the young woman answered.

Then the herring fleet sailed away under the glow of the setting sun.

CHAPTER V

[Pg 379]

CHRISTIAN MYLREA

It was late when young Christian Mylrea got back to Balladhoo that night of Kerruish Kinvig's visit. "I've been up for a walk to the Monument on Horse Hill," he remarked, carelessly, as he sat down at the piano and touched it lightly to the tune of "Drink to me only with thine eyes." "Poor

old Corrin," he said, pausing with two fingers on the keyboard, "what a crazy old heretic he must have been to elect to bury himself up yonder." Then, in a rich full tenor, Christian sang a bar or two of "Sally in our Alley."

The two older men were still seated at opposite sides of the table smoking leisurely. Mylrea Balladhoo told Christian of the errand on which he had wished to send him.

"The light? Ah, yes," said Christian, turning his head between the rests in his song, "curious, that, wasn't it? Do you know that coming round by the pier I noticed that the light had gone out; so"—(a run up the piano)—"so, after ineffectual attempts to rouse that sad dog of a harbor-master of yours, dad, I went up into the box and lit it myself. You see it's burning now."

"Humph! so it is," grunted Kerruish Kinvig, who had got up in the hope of discrediting the statement.

"Only the wick run down, that was all," said Christian, who had turned to the piano again, and was rattling off a lively French catch.

Christian Mylrea was a handsome young fellow of five or six and twenty, with a refined expression and easy manner, educated, genial, somewhat irresolute one might say, with a weak corner to his mouth; naturally of a sportive disposition, but having an occasional cast of thoughtfulness; loving a laugh, but finding it rather apt of late to die away abruptly on his lips.

Getting up to go, Kinvig said, "Christian, my man, you've not seen my new net-looms since you came home. Wonderful inventions! Wonderful! Extraordinary! Talk of your locomotive—pshaw! Come down, man, and see them at work in the morning."

Christian reflected for a moment. "I will," he said, in a more serious tone than the occasion seemed to require. "Yes, I'll do that," he said. [Pg 380]

"In the morning!" said Mylrea Balladhoo. "To-morrow is the first day of the herrings—no time for new net-looms to-morrow at all."

"The herrings!" shouted Kinvig from the door in an accent of high disdain.

"Nothing like leather," said Christian laughing. "Let it be the morning after," he added; and so it was agreed.

Next day Christian busied himself a little among the fishing-smacks that were the property of his father, or were, at least, known by his father's name. He went in and sat among the fisher-fellows with a cheery voice and pleasant face. Everywhere he was a favorite. When his back was turned it was: "None o' yer ransy-tansy-tisimitee about Misther Christian; none o' yer 'Well, my good man,' and the like o' that; awful big and could, sem as if they'd jist riz from the dead." Or perhaps, "No criss-crossing about the young masther; allis preachin'; and 'I'll kermoonicate yer bad behavior' and all that jaw." Or again, more plaintively, "I wish he were a bit more studdy-like, and savin'. Of coorse, of coorse, me and him's allis been middlin' well acquent."

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 381]

THE NET FACTORY

The morning after the fleet left the harbor, Christian walked down to Kerruish Kinvig's house, and together they went over the net factory. In a large room facing the sea a dozen hand-looms for the manufacture of drift-nets had been set up. Each loom was worked by a young woman, and she had three levers to keep in action—one with the hand and the others with the feet.

Kinvig explained, with all the ardor of an enthusiast, the manifold advantage of the new loom over the old one with which Christian was familiar; dwelt on the knots, the ties and the speed; exhibited a new reel for the unwinding of the cotton thread from the skein, and described a new method of barking when the nets come off the looms. Pausing now and then with the light of triumph in his eyes, he shouted, "Where's your Geordie Stephenson now? Eh?"

Christian listened with every appearance of rapt attention, and from time to time put questions which were at least respectably relevant. A quicker eye than Kerruish Kinvig's might perhaps have seen that the young man's attention was on the whole more occupied with the net-makers than with their looms, and that his quick gaze glanced from face to face with an inquiring expression.

A child of very tender years was working a little thread reel at the end of the room, and, on some pretense, Christian left Kinvig's side, stepped up to the child, and spoke to her about the click-clack of the levers and cranks. The little woman lifted her head to reply; but having a full view of her face, Christian turned away without waiting for her answer.

After a quarter of an hour, all Christian's show of interest could not quite conceal a look of weariness. One would have said that he had somehow been disappointed in this factory and its contents. Something that he had expected to see he had not seen. Just then Kinvig announced

that the choicest of his looms was in another room. This one would not only make a special knot, but would cut and finish.

"It is a delicate instrument, and wants great care in the working," said Kinvig. In that regard the net-maker considered himself fortunate, for he had just hit on a wonderfully smart young woman who could work it as well, Kinvig verily believed, as he could work it himself.

[Pg 382]

"Who is she?" said Christian.

"A stranger in these parts—came from the south somewhere—Castletown way," said Kinvig; and he added with a grin, "Haven't you heard of her?"

Christian gave no direct reply, but displayed the profoundest curiosity as to this latest development in net-making ingenuity. He was forthwith carried off to inspect Kinvig's first treasure in looms.

The two men stepped into a little room apart, and there, working at the only loom that the room contained, was little Ruby's sister, Mona Cregeen. The young woman was putting her foot on one of the lower treadles when they entered. She made a slight but perceptible start, and the lever went up with a bang.

"Tut, my girl, how's this?" said Kinvig. "See—you've let that line of meshes off the hooks."

The girl stopped, replaced the threads one after one with nervous fingers, and then proceeded with her work in silence.

Kinvig was beginning an elaborate engineering disquisition for Christian's benefit—Christian's head certainly did hang rather too low for Kinvig's satisfaction—when a girl comes in from the outer factory to say that a man at the gate would like to see the master.

"Botheration!" shouted Kinvig; "but wait here, Christian, and I'll be back." Then, turning to the young weaver—"Show this gentleman the action of the loom, my girl."

* * * * *

When the door had closed behind Mr. Kinvig, Christian raised his eyes to the young woman's face. There was silence between them for a moment. The window of the room was open, and the salt breath of the ocean floated in. The sea's deep murmur was all that could be heard between the clicks of the levers. Then Christian said, softly:

"Mona, have you decided? Will you go back?"

The girl lifted her eyes to his. "No," she answered, quietly.

"Think again, Mona; think of me. It isn't that I couldn't wish to have you here—always here—always with me—"

The girl gave a little hard laugh.

"But think of the risk!" continued Christian, more eagerly. "Is it nothing that I am tortured with suspense already, but that you should follow me?"

"And do *I* suffer nothing?" said she.

[Pg 383]

There was no laughter on Christian's lips now. The transformation to earnest pallor was startling.

"Think of my father," he said, evading the girl's question. "I have all but impoverished him already with my cursed follies, and little does he dream, poor old dad, of the utter ruin that yet hangs over his head."

There was a pause. Then, in a tenderer tone:

"Mona, don't add to my eternal worries. Go back to Derby Haven, like the dear girl that you are. And when this storm blows over—and it will soon be past—then all shall be made right. Yes, it shall, believe me."

There was no answer. Christian continued.

"Go at once, my girl. Here," (diving into his pockets), "I've precious little money left, God help me, but here's enough to pay your way, and something to spare."

He offered a purse in his palm. The girl tossed up his hand with a disdainful gesture.

"It's not money I want from you," she said. Christian looked at her for a moment with blank amazement. She caught the expression, and answered it with a haughty curl of the lip. The sneer died off her face on the instant, and the tears began to gather in her eyes.

"It's not love a girl wants, then?" she said struggling to curl her lip again. "It's not love, then, that a girl like me can want," she said.

She had stopped the loom and covered up her face in her hands.

"No, no," she added, with a stifled sob, "love is for ladies—fine ladies in silks and satins—pure—virtuous.... Christian," she exclaimed, dropping her hands and looking into his face with indignant eyes, "I suppose there's a sort of woman that wants nothing of a man but money, is there?"

Christian's lips were livid. "That's not what I meant, Mona, believe me," he said.

The loom was still. The sweet serenity of the air left hardly a sense of motion.

"You talk of your father, too," the girl continued, lifting her voice. "What of my mother? You don't think of her. No, but I do, and it goes nigh to making my heart bleed."

"Hush, Mona," whispered Christian; but, heedless of the warning, she continued:

"To be torn away from the place where she was born and bred, where kith and kin still live, where kith and kin lie dead—that was hard. But it would have been harder, far harder, to remain, with shame cast at her from every face, as it has been every day for these five years."

[Pg 384]

She paused. A soft boom came up to them from the sea, where the unruffled waters rested under the morning sun.

"Yes, we have both suffered," said Christian. "What I have suffered God knows. Yes, yes; the man who lives two lives knows what it is to suffer. Talk of crime! no need of that, as the good, goody, charitable world counts crime. Let it be only a hidden thing, that's enough. Only a secret, and yet how it kills the sunshine off the green fields!" Christian laughed—a hollow, hard, cynical laugh.

"To find the thing creep up behind every thought, lie in ambush behind every smile, break out in mockery behind every innocent laugh. To have the dark thing with you in the dark night. No sleep so sweet but that it is haunted by this nightmare. No dream so fair but that an ugly memory steals up at first awakening—that, yes, that is to suffer!"

Just then a flight of sea-gulls disporting on a rock in the bay sent up a wild, jabbering noise.

"To know that you are not the man men take you for; that dear souls that cling to you would shudder at your touch if the scales could fall from their eyes, or if for an instant—as by a flash of lightning—the mask fell from your face."

Christian's voice deepened, and he added:

"Yet to know that bad as one act of your life may have been, that life has not been all bad; that if men could but see you as Heaven sees you, perhaps—perhaps—you would have acquittal—"

His voice trembled and he stopped. Mona was gazing out over the sea with blurred eyes that saw nothing.

Christian had been resting one foot on the loom. Lifting himself he stamped on the floor, threw back his head with a sudden movement, and laughed again, slightly.

"Something too much of this," he said. Then sobering once more, "Go back, Mona. It shan't be for long. I swear to you it shan't. But what must I do with debts hanging over me—"

"I'll tell you what you must *not* do," said the girl with energy.

Christian's eyes but not his lips asked "What?"

"You must not link yourself with that Bill Kisseck and his Curragh gang."

A puzzled look crossed Christian's face.

"Oh, I know their doings, don't you doubt it," said the girl.

"What do you know of Bill Kisseck?" said Christian with some perceptible severity. "Tell me, Mona, what harm do you know of Bill and his—his gang, as you call them?"

[Pg 385]

"I know this—I know they'll be in Castle Rushen one of these fine days."

Christian looked relieved. With a cold smile he said, "I dare say you're right, Mona. They *are* a rough lot, the Curragh fellows; but no harm in them that I know of."

"Harm!" Mona had started the loom afresh, but she stopped once more. "Harm!" she exclaimed again. Then in a quieter way, "Keep away from them, Christian. You've seen too much of them of late."

Christian started.

"Oh, I know it. But you can't touch pitch—you mind the old saying."

Mona had again started the loom, and was rattling at the levers with more than ordinary energy. Christian watched her for a minute with conflicting feelings. He felt that his manhood was being put to a severe strain. Therefore, assuming as much masculine superiority of manner as he could command, he said:

"We'll not talk about things that you don't quite understand, Mona. What Kisseck may do is no affair of ours, unless I choose to join him in any enterprise, and then I'm the best judge, you know."

The girl stopped. Resting her elbow on the upper lever, and gazing absently out at the window where the light waves in the bay were glistening through a drowsy haze, she said, quietly:

"The man that I could choose out of all the world is not one who lives on his father and waits for

the storm to blow over. No, nor one that clutches at every straw, no matter what. He's the man who'd put his hand to the boats, or the plow, or the reins; and if he hadn't enough to buy me a ribbon, I'd say to myself, proudly, "That man loves me!"

Christian winced. Then assuming afresh his loftier manner, "As I say, Mona, we won't talk of things you don't understand."

"I'll not go back!" said the girl, as if by a leap of thought. The loom was started afresh with vigor.

"Then let me beg of you to be secret," whispered Christian, coming close to her ear.

The girl laughed bitterly.

"Never fear," she said, "it's not for the woman to blab. No, the world is all for the man, and the law too. Men make the laws and women suffer under them—that's the way of it."

The girl laughed again, and continued in mocking tones, "'Poor fellow, he's been sorely tempted,' says the world; 'tut on her, never name her,' says the law." [Pg 386]

And once more the girl forced a hollow, bitter laugh.

Just then a child's silvery voice was heard in the street beneath. The blithe call was—

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

The little feet tripped under the window. The loom stopped, and they listened. Then Christian looked into the young woman's face, and blinding tears rose on the instant into the eyes of both.

"Mona!" he cried, in low passionate tones, and opened his arms. There was an unspeakable language in her face. She turned her head toward him longingly, yearningly, with heaving breast. He took one step toward her. She drew back. "No—not yet!" His arms fell, and he turned away.

* * * * *

Then the voice of Kerruish Kinvig could be heard in the outer factory.

"I've been middling long," he said, hurrying in, "but a man, a bailiff from England, came bothering about some young waistrel that I never heard of in my born days—had run away from his debts, and so on—had been traced to the Isle of Man, and on here to Peel. And think of that tomfool of a Tommy-Bill-beg sending the man to me. I bowled him off to your father."

"My father!" exclaimed Christian, who had listened to Kinvig's rambling account with an uneasy manner.

"Yes, surely, and the likeliest man too. What's a magistrate for at all if private people are to be moidered like yonder? But come, I'll show you the sweet action of this loom in unwinding. Look now—see—keep your eye on those hooks."

And Kerruish Kinvig rattled on with his explanation to a deaf ear.

"Mr. Kinvig," interrupted Christian, "I happened to know that father is not risen yet this morning. That bailiff—"

"More shame for him; let him be roused anyhow. See here, though, press your hand on that level—so. Now when Mona puts down that other level—do you see? No! Why don't you look closer?"

"Mr. Kinvig, do you know I half fancy that young fellow the man was asking for must have been an old college chum of mine. If you wouldn't mind sending one of your girls after him to Balladhoo to ask him to meet me in half an hour at the harbor-master's cottage on the quay—" [Pg 387]

"Here! Let it be here;" calling "Jane!"

"No, let it be on the quay," said Christian; "I have to go there presently, and it will save time, you know."

"Bless me, man! have you come to your saving days at last?"

Kinvig turned aside, instructed Jane, and resumed the thread of his technical explanations.

"Let me show you this knot again; that bum-bailiff creature was bothering you before. Look now—stand here—so."

"Yes," said Christian, with the resignation of a martyr.

Then Kinvig explained everything afresh, but with an enthusiasm that was sadly damped by Christian's manifest inability to command the complexities of the invention.

"I thought once that you were going to be a bit of an engineer yourself, Christian. Bless me, the amazing learned you were at the wheels, and the cranks, and the axles when you were a lad in jackets; but"—with a suspicious smile—"it's likely you're doing something in the theology line now, and that's a sort of feeding and sucking and suction that won't go with the engineering anyhow." Christian smiled faintly, and Kinvig, as if by an after-thought shouted:

"Heigh-ho! Let's take the road for it. We've kept this young woman too long from her work already." (Going out.) "You didn't give her much of a spell at the work while I was away."

(Outside.) "Oh, I saw the little bit of your sweethearting as I came back. But it's wrong, Christian. It's a shame, man, and a middling big one, too."

"What's a shame?" asked Christian, gasping out the inquiry.

"Why, to moider a girl with the sweethearting when she's got her living to make. How would *you* like it, eh? Middling well? Oh, *would* you? All piecework, you know; so much a piece of net, a hundred yards long and two hundred meshes deep; work from eight to eight; fourteen shillings a week, and a widowed mother to keep, and a little sister as well. How would you like it, eh?"

Christian shrugged his shoulders and hung his head.

"Tut, man alive, you fine fellows browsing on your lands, you scarce know you're born. Come down and mix among poor folks like this girl, and her mother, and the little lammie, and you'll begin to know you're alive."

"I dare say," muttered Christian, making longish strides to the outer gate. A broad grin crossed the face of Kerruish Kinvig as he added: [Pg 388]

"But I tell you what, when you get your white choker under your gills, and you do come down among the like of these people with your tracts, and your hymns, and all those rigs, and your face uncommon solemn, and your voice like a gannet—none of your sweethearting, my man. Look at that girl Mona, now. It isn't reasonable to think you're not putting notions into the girl's head. It's a shame, man."

"You're right, Mr. Kinvig," said Christian, under his breath, "a cursed shame." And he stretched out his hand impatiently to bid good-by.

"No. I'll go with you to Tommy-Bill-beg's. Oh, don't mind me. I've nothing particular on hand, or I wouldn't waste my time on ye. Yes, as I say, it's wrong. Besides, Christian, what you want to do now is to marry a girl with a property. That's the only thing that will put yonder Balladhoo right again, and—in your ear, man—that's about what your father's looking for."

Christian winced, and then tried to laugh.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he said, absently.

"But leave the girls alone. They're amazin' like the ghos'es, are the girls; once you start them you never know where they'll stop, and they get into every skeleton closet about the house—but of course, of course, I'm an old bachelor, and as the saying is, I don't know nothin'."

"Ha! ha! ha! of course not," laughed Christian with a tragic effort.

They had stopped outside the ivy cottage of the harbor-master, and that worthy, who was standing there, had overheard the last loud words of Kinvig's conversation.

"What do *you* say, Tommy-Bill-beg?" asked Kinvig, giving him a prod in the ribs.

"I say that the gels in these days ought to get wedded while they're babbies in arms—"

"That'll do, that'll do," shouted Kinvig with a roar of laughter.

At the same moment one of the factory girls appeared side by side with a stranger.

"Good-by, Mr. Kinvig," said Christian.

"Good-day," Kinvig answered; and then shouting to the stranger, "this gentleman knows something of the young vagabond you want."

"So I see," answered the stranger with a cold smile, and Christian and the stranger stepped apart.

When they parted, the stranger said, "Well, one month let it be, and not a day longer." Christian nodded his head in assent, and turned toward Balladhoo. After dinner he said: [Pg 389]

"Father, I'd like to go out to the herrings this season. It would be a change."

"Humph!" grunted his father; "which boat?"

"Well, I thought of the 'Ben-my-Chree'; she's roomy, and, besides, she's the admiral's boat, and perhaps Kisseck wouldn't much like to hear that I'd sailed with another master."

"You'll soon tire of that amusement," mumbled Mylrea Balladhoo.

CHAPTER VII

[Pg 390]

THE LAST OF "THE HERRINGS"

Some months later, as the season was chilling down to winter, the "Ben-my-Chree," with the fleet behind her, was setting out from Peel for her last night at "the herrings." On the deck, among

others, was Christian Mylrea, in blue serge and guernsey, heavy sea-boots and sou'wester. It was past sundown; a smart breeze was blowing off the land as they rounded the Contrary Head and crossed the two streams that flow there. It was not yet too dark, however, to see the coast-line curved into covelets and promontories, and to look for miles over the hills where stretched the moles and hillocks of gorse and tussacs of long grass.

The twilight deepened as they rounded Niarbyl Point and left the Calf Islet on their lee, with Cronte-nay-Ivey-Lhaa towering into the gloomy sky. When they sailed through Fleshwick Bay the night gradually darkened, and they saw nothing of Ennyn Mooar. But the heavens lightened again and glittered with stars, and when they brought the lugger head to the wind in six fathoms of water outside Port Erin, the moon had risen behind Brada, and the steep and rugged headland showed clear against the sky.

"Have you found the herring on this ground at the same time in former seasons?" asked Christian of Kisseck.

"Not for seven years."

"Then why try now?"

"See the gull there. She's skipper to-night. She's showing us the fish."

And one after another the fleet brought to about them.

Danny Fayle had been leaning over the bow, and occasionally rapping with a stick at the timbers near the water.

"Any signs?" shouted Kisseck.

"Ay," said Danny, "the mar-fire's risin'."

The wind had dropped, and luminous patches of phosphorescent light in the water were showing Danny that the herring were stirring.

"Let's make a shot; up with the gear," said Kisseck; and preparations were made for shooting the nets over the quarter.

"Davy Cain (the mate), you see to the lint. Tommy Tear, look after the corks. Danny—where's that lad?—look to the seizings; d'ye hear?"

Then the nets were hauled from below and passed over a bank board placed between the hatchway and the top of the bulwark. Davy and Tommy shot the gear, and as the seizings came up, Danny ran aft and made them fast to the warp near the taffrail.

[Pg 391]

When the nets were all paid out, every net in the drift being tied to the next, and a solid wall of meshes nine feet deep had been swept away for half a mile behind them, Kisseck shouted, "Down with the sheets."

The sails were taken in, the mainmast—made to lower backward—was dropped, and only the drift-mizzen was left to keep the boat's head to the wind.

"Up with the light there," shouted Kisseck.

On hearing this Danny popped his head out of the hatchways.

"Ah! to be sure, that lad's never ready. Gerr out of that, quick."

Danny took a lantern and fixed it on the top of the mitch-board.

Then vessel and nets drifted together. Christian and the skipper went below.

It was now a calm, clear night, with just light enough to show two or three of the buoys on the back of the first net as they floated under water. The skipper had not mistaken his ground. Large white patches came moving out of the surrounding pavement of deep black, lightened only with the occasional image of a star where the vanishing ripples left the sea smooth. Once or twice countless faint popping sounds were heard, and minute points of silver were seen in the water around. The herrings were at play about them. Shoals on shoals were breaking the sea into glistening foam.

After an hour had passed, Kisseck popped his head out of the hatchways, and cried, "Try the look-on."

The warp was hauled in until the first net was reached. It came up as black as coal, save for a dog-fish or two that had broken a mesh here and there.

"Too much moon to-night," said Kisseck; "they see the nets, and the 'cute they are extraordinary."

Half an hour later the moon went out behind a thick ridge of cloud that floated over the land. The sky became gray and leaden, and a rising breeze ruffled the sea. Some of the men on deck began to sing.

"Hould on there," shouted Kisseck, "d'ye want to frighten all the herrin' for ten miles?"

Hour after hour wore on, and not a fish came to the "look-on" net. Toward one o'clock in the morning the moon broke out again in full splendor.

"There'll be a heavy strike now," said Kisseck; and in another instant a luminous patch floated across the line of nets, sank, disappeared, and pulled three of the buoys down with them. [Pg 392]

"Pull up now," shouted Kisseck.

Then the nets were hauled. It was Danny Fayle's duty to lead the warp through a snatch-block fixed to the mast-hole on to the capstan. Davy Cain disconnected the nets from the warps, and Tommy Tear and Mark Crennel pulled the nets over the gunwale. They came up, white in the moonlight, as a solid block of fish. Bill Kisseck and Christian passed the nets over the scudding pole and shook the herrings into the hold.

"Five barrels at least," said Kisseck. "Try again." And once more the nets were shot. The other boats of the fleet were signaled that the "Ben-my-Chree" had discovered a scale of fish. The blue light was answered by other blue lights on every side. The fishing was faring well.

One, two, three o'clock. The night was wearing on. The moon went out once more, and in the darkness that preceded the dawn the lanterns burning on the drifting boats gave out an eery glow. At last the gray light came in the east, and the sun rose over the land. The breeze was now fresh, and it was time to haul in the nets for the last time.

In accordance with ancient custom, the admiral's flag went up to the mast-head, and at this sign every man in the fleet dropped on one knee, with his face in his cap, to offer his silent thanksgiving for the blessings of the season.

"Tumble up the sheets—bear a hand there—d—— the lad —gerr out of the way."

In five minutes the lugger was running home before a stiff breeze.

"Nine barrels—not bad for the last night," said Christian.

"Souise them well," said Kisseck, and Davy Corteen sprinkled salt on the herrings as they lay in the hold.

Mark Crennel, who acted as slushy, otherwise cook, came up from below with a huge saucepan, which he filled with the fish. As he did so, the ear was conscious of a faint "cheep, cheep"—the herrings were still alive.

All hands then went below for a smoke, except the man at the tiller, and Kisseck and Christian, who stood talking at the bow. It is true that Danny Fayle lay on the deck, but the lad was hardly an entity. His uncle and Christian heeded him not at all, yet Danny heard their conversation, and, without thought of mischief, remembered what he heard.

Christian was talking earnestly of some impending disaster, of debts, and the near approach of the time when his father must be told. [Pg 393]

"I've put that man off time after time," he said; "he'll not wait much longer, and then—God help us all!"

Kisseck laughed. "You're allis in Paddy's hurricane—right up and down," he said, jeeringly. "Yer raely wuss till ever."

"I tell you the storm is coming," said Christian, with some vexation.

"Then keep your weather eye liftin', that's all," said Kisseck, loftily.

Christian turned aside with an impatient gesture. After a pause he said, "You wouldn't talk to me like that, Kisseck, if I hadn't been a weak fool with you. It's a true saying that when you tell your servant your secret you make him your master."

Then Kisseck altered his manner and became suave.

"What's to be done?" said Christian, irritated at some humiliating compliments.

"I've somethin' terrible fine up here," said Kisseck, tapping his forehead mysteriously. Christian smiled rather doubtfully.

"It'll get you out of this shoal water, anyhow," said the skipper.

"What is it?" asked Christian.

"The tack we've been on lately isn't worth workin'. It isn't what it was in the good ould days, when the Frenchmen and the Dutchmen came along with the Injin and Chinee goods, and we just run alongside in wherries and whipped them up. Too many hands at the trade now."

"So, smuggling, like everything else, has gone to the dogs," said Christian, with another grim smile.

"But I've a big consarn on now," whispered Kisseck.

"What?"

"Och, a shockin' powerful skame! Listen!"

And Kisseck whispered again in Christian's ear, but the words escaped Danny.

"No, no, that'll not do," said Christian, emphatically.

"Aw, and why not at all?"

"Why not? *Why* not? Because it's murder, nothing less."

"Now, what's the use of sayin' the lek o' that. Aw, the shockin' notions. Well, well, and do ye raely think a person's got no feelin's? Murder? Aw, well now, well now! I didn't think it of you, Christian, that I didn't."

And Kisseck took a step or two up and down the deck with the air of an injured man.

Just then Crennel, the cook, came up to say breakfast was ready. All hands, save the men at the tiller, went below. A huge dish of herrings and a similar dish of potatoes stood on the table. Each man dipped in with his hands, lifted his herrings onto his plate, ran his fingers from tail to head, swept all the flesh off the fresh fish, and threw away the bare backbone. Such was the breakfast; and while it was being eaten there was much chaff among the men at Danny Fayle's expense. It was—

[Pg 394]

"Aw, you wouldn't think it's true, would ye now?"

"And what's that?" with a "glime" at Danny.

"Why, that the lek o' yander is tackin' round the gels."

"Do ye raely mane it?"

"Yes, though, and sniffin' and snuffin' abaft of them astonishin'."

"Aw, well, well, well."

Not a sign from Danny.

"Yes, yes, the craythur's doin' somethin' in the spoony line," said Kisseck. "Him as hasn't got the hayseed out of his hair yet."

"And who's the lady, Danny?" asked Christian, with a smile.

Danny was silent.

"Why, who else but that gel of Kinvig's, Mona Cregeen," said Kisseck.

Christian dropped his herring.

"Aw, well," said Tommy Tear, "d'ye mane that gal on the brew with the widda, and the wee craythur?"

"Yes, the little skite and the ould sukee, the mawther," said Kisseck.

Davy Cain pretended to come to Danny's relief.

"And a raal good gel, anyhow, Danny," he said in a patronizing way.

"Amazin' thick they are. Oh, ay, Danny got to the lee of her—takes a cup of tay up there, and the like of that."

"Aw, well, it isn't reasonable but the lad should be coortin' some gel now," said Davy.

"What's that?" shouted Kisseck, dropping the banter rather suddenly. "What, and not a farthin' at him? And owin' me a fortune for the bringin' up?"

"No matter, Bill, and don't ride a man down like a maintack. One of these fine mornings Danny will be payin' his debt to you with the foretopsail."

"And look at him there," said Tommy Tear, reaching round Davy Cain to prod Danny in the ribs—"look at him pretendin' he never knows nothin'."

But the big tears were near to toppling out of Danny's eyes. He got up, and leaving his unfinished breakfast, began to climb the hatchway.

[Pg 395]

"Aw, now, look at that," cried Tommy Tear, with affected solemnity.

Davy Cain followed Danny, put an arm round his waist, and tried to draw him back. "Don't mind the loblolly-boys, Danny veg," said Davy coaxingly. Danny pushed him away with an angry word.

"What's that he said?" asked Kisseck.

"Nothin'; he only cussed a bit," said Davy.

Christian got up too. "I'll tell you what it is, mates," he said, "there's not a man among you. You're a lot of skulking cowards."

And Christian jumped on deck.

"What's agate of the young masther at all, at all?"

Then followed some talk of the herring *Meailley* (harvest home) which was to be celebrated that

night at the "Jolly Herrings."

When the boats ran into Peel harbor, of course Tommy-Bill-beg was on the quay, shouting at this man and that. As each boat got into its moorings the men set off to their owner's house for a final squaring up of the season's accounts. Kerruish and his men, with Christian, walked up to Balladhoo. Danny was sent home by his uncle. The men laughed, but the lad was accustomed to be ignored in these reckonings. His share never yet reached him. The fishermen's wives had come down on this occasion, and they went off with their husbands—Bridget, Kisseck's wife, being among them.

When they got to Balladhoo the calculation was made. The boat had earned in all three hundred pounds. Of this the master took four shares for himself and his nets, the owner eight shares, every man two shares, a share for the boy, and a share for the boat. The men grumbled when Christian took up his two shares like another man. He asked if he had not done a man's work. They answered that he had kept a regular fisherman off the boat. Kisseck grumbled also; said he brought home three hundred pounds and got less than thirty pounds of it. "The provisioning has cost too much," said Mylrea Balladhoo. "Your tea is at four shillings a pound, besides fresh meat and fine-flour biscuits. What can you expect?" Christian offered to give half his share to the man whose berth he took, and the other half to Danny Fayle. This quieted Kisseck, but the others laughed and muttered among themselves, "Two more shares for Kisseck."

Then the men, closely encircled by their wives, moved off.

"Remember the *Meailley*!"

"To-night. Aw, sure, sure!"

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 396]

"SEEMS TO ME IT'S ALL NATHUR"

When Danny left the boat he threw his oilskins over his arm and trudged along the quay. Bill Kisseck's cottage stood alone under the Horse Hill, and to get to it Danny had to walk round by the bridge that crossed the river. On the way thither he met Ruby Cregeen, red with running. She had sighted the boats from the cottage on the hill, and was hurrying down to see them come into the harbor. The little woman was looking this morning like something between a glint of sunshine and a flash of quicksilver. On the way down she had pulled three stalks of the foxglove bell, and stuck them jauntily in her hat, their long swan-like necks drooping over her sunny face. She had come too late for her purpose, but Danny took her hand and said he would see her back before going off home to bed. The little one prattled every inch of the way.

"Did you catch many herrings, Danny?"

"Nine barrels."

"Isn't it cruel to catch herrings?"

"Why cruel, Ruby veg?"

"I don't know. Don't the herrings want to stay in the water, Danny?"

"Lave them alone for that. You should see the shoals of them lying round the nets, watching the others—their mothers and sisters, as you might say—who've got their gills 'tangled. And when you haul the net up, away they go at a slant in millions and millions—just like lightning firing through the water. Och, 'deed now, they've got their feelings same as anybody else. Yes, yes, yes!"

"What a shame!"

"What's a shame, Ruby? What a sollum face, though."

"Why, to catch them."

Danny looked puzzled. He was obviously reasoning out a great problem.

"Well, woman, that's the mortal strange part of it. It does look cruel, sarten sure, but then the herrings themselves catch the sand-eels, and the cod catch the herrings, and the porpoises and grampuses catch the cod. Aw, that's the truth, little big-eyes. It's wonderful strange, but I suppose it's all nathur. You see, Ruby veg, we do the same ourselves."

[Pg 397]

Ruby looks horrified. "How do you mean, Danny? We don't eat one another."

"Oh, don't we, though? leave us alone for that."

Ruby is aghast.

"Well, of course, not to say *ate*, not 'xactly *ate*; but the biggest chap allis rigs the rest. And the next biggest chap allis rigs a littler one, you know; and the littlest chap he gets rigged by

everybody all round, doesn't he?"

Danny had clearly got a grip of the problem, but his poor simple face looked sadly burdened.

"Seems to me it must be all nathur somehow, Ruby."

"Do you think it is, Danny?"

"Well, well—I do, you know," with a grave shake of the head over this summary of the philosophy of life.

"Then nature is very cruel, and I don't love it."

"Cruel? Well, pozzible, pozzible. It does make me fit to cry a bit; but it must be nathur somehow, Ruby."

Danny's eyes were looking very hazy, when the little one, who didn't love nature, caught sight of some corn-poppies and bounded after them. "The darlings! oh the loves!" And one or two were immediately intertwined with the foxgloves in the hat.

Just then Mona came down the hill. Danny saw her at a distance, but gave no sign. He contrived to lead Ruby to the other side of the road from that on which Mona was walking, so that when they came abreast there was a dozen yards between them. Mona stopped. "Good-morning, Danny."

Danny's eyes were on his heavy sea-boots, and he did not answer.

"Why, it's only Mona," cried Ruby, tugging at Danny's oil-skins.

Mona crossed the road, and Danny ventured to lift his eyes to the level of her neck. Then she asked about the fishing. Danny answered in monosyllables. She colored slightly, and spoke of Christian being in the boat. "Strange, wasn't it?"

"Seems to me," answered Danny, "that there's somethin' afoot between Uncle Bill and the young mather."

Mona's curiosity was aroused by the reply, and she probed Danny with searching questions. Then he told her of the conversation of the deck that morning. She perceived that mischief was brewing. Yet Danny could give her nothing that served as a clue. If only some one of sharper wit could overhear such a conversation, then perhaps the mischief might be prevented. Suddenly Mona conceived a daring idea, which was partly suggested by the sight of an old disused barn that stood in a field close at hand.

[Pg 398]

"Everybody is talking of some supper to-night to finish the season. Will Christian be there?"

"I heard him say so," said Danny.

"And your uncle, Bill Kisseck?"

"Aw, 'deed, for sure. He's allis where there's guzzlin'."

"Could you lend me your oil-skins, Danny?"

Danny looked puzzled. Mona smiled in his troubled face. "Do, that's a good Danny," she said, taking his big rough hand. Danny drew it away.

"Yes," he said, looking vacantly over the sea.

Then they arranged that the oil-skins and cap with a pair of sea-boots were to be left in the barn, and that not a word was to be said to a living soul about them.

"Good-by," said Mona, holding out her hand.

It was not at first that Danny realized what he ought to do when a lady offered her hand. Having taken it, he did not quite know what it was right to do next. So he held it a moment and lifted his eyes to hers. "Good-by, Danny," she said, and there was a tremor in her voice.

She had gone—Danny never knew how. He walked a little farther with Ruby, who pranced and sang. On the way home he stopped and repeated to himself in a whisper, "Mona, Mona, Mona." He looked at his hand. It was coarse and horny. He lifted it to his lips and kissed it. Then he began to run. Suddenly he stopped, and muttered, "But what for did she want the oil-skins?"

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 399]

THE HERRING MEAILLEY

There was high sport at the "Jolly Herrings" that night. Christian was there, more than half ashamed of his surroundings, but too amiably irresolute, as usual, to imperil by absence from this annual gathering his old reputation for good-fellowship.

"Aw, the gentleman he is, isn't he? And him straight from Oxford College, too."

"What's that they're sayin'? Oxford College? Och, no; not that at all."

"But the fine English tongue at him, anyway. It's just a pleasure to hear him spake. Smooth as oil, and sweet astonishin'. Bill Kisseck—I say, Bill, there—why didn't you put up the young mather for the chair?"

"Aw, lave me alone," answered Kisseck, with a contemptuous toss of the head. "Him an' me's same as brothers."

"Bill's proud uncommon of the mather, and middlin' jealous too. Aw, well! who's wonderin' at it?"

"It's a bit free them chaps are making," whispered Kisseck to Christian. Then rising to his feet with gravity, "Gentlemen," he said, "what d'ye say to Misther Christian Mylrea Balladhoo for the elber-chair yander?"

"Hooraa! Hooraa!"

Kisseck resumed his seat with a lofty glance of patronage at the men about him, which said, as plainly as words themselves, "I tould ye to lave it all to me."

"Proud, d'ye say? Look at him," whispered Davy Cain.

The "Jolly Herrings" was perhaps the most ludicrous and incongruous house of entertainment of which history records any veracious record. It was a very gargole on the fair fabric of the earth, except that it served the opposite uses of attracting rather than banishing the evil spirits about it. Thirty-five years ago it was to be found near the bottom of the narrow, crabbed little thoroughfare that winds and twists and descends to that part of the quay which overlooks the ruins of the castle. The gloomy pothouse was entered by a little porch. Two steps down led you into a room that was half parlor and half bar, and where only the fumes of tobacco-smoke were usually visible. Two more steps led you to an inner and much larger room, that was practically kitchen, living room, and room of special entertainment. This was the apartment in which the herring supper was always given. What a paradox the place was! All that belonged to the room itself was of the rudest and meanest kind. The floor was paved with stones, the walls were sparsely plastered, the ceiling was the bare wood hewn straight from the tree. But over these indications of poverty there was an extraordinary display of curious wealth. The little window behind Christian in his "elber-chair" was glazed with a rich piece of stained glass that had the Madonna and child for subject. The elbow-chair itself was of old oak deeply carved and bound with clamps of engraved brass. Bill Kisseck, who by virtue of his office sat at the opposite end of the table, occupied a small settee covered with gorgeous crimson velvet. On the mantelpiece were huddled in luxurious confusion sundry brass censers, medieval lamps, and an ivory crucifix. On the wall, and beside a piece of marble carved with a medallion, hung a skate that had been cut open to dry. A pair of bellows lay on an antique chest in the ingle. Into the mouth of the censers a bundle of pipe-lights had been methodically arranged. A ponderous silver watch hung round the arms of the crucifix, and a frying-pan was suspended in the recess of the window that was consecrated to the Madonna.

[Pg 400]

Such was the kitchen and stateroom of the "Jolly Herrings"; and no apartment ever spoke more plainly to those who had ears to hear of the character and habits of its owners. The house was kept by a woman who was thin, wrinkled, and blear-eyed; and by a man who was equally thin and no less wrinkled, but had quick, suspicious eyes, and a few spiky gray hairs about the chin that resembled the whiskers of a cat. As husband and wife this couple hold the little pot-house; but long years after the events now being narrated, it was discovered that husband and wife had both been women.

What sport! What noisy laughter! What singing and rollicking cheers! The men stood neither on the order of their coming nor their going, their sitting nor their standing. They wore their caps or not as pleased them, they sang or talked as suited them, they laughed or sneezed, they sulked or snarled, were noisy or silent precisely as the whim of the individual prescribed the Individual rule of manners. The chair at the "Jolly Herrings" was a position of more distinction than duty, and it was numbered among Christian's virtues that he had never attempted to exercise an arbitrary control over the liberties of free-born Manxmen. Jest or jeer, fun or fight, were alike free of the gathering where he presided; but everything had to be in conscience and reason, for Christian drew the line rigidly at marline-spikes and belaying pins.

[Pg 401]

Tommy-Bill-beg was there, and a fine scorn sat on his face. The reason of this was that, as a mistaken tribute to music, Jemmy Balladhoo had also been invited, and was sitting with his fiddle directly in front of the harbor-master, though that worthy disdained to take notice of the humiliating proximity. Danny Fayle was there. The lad sat quietly and meekly on a form near the door.

The supper was lifted direct on to the table from the pans and boilers that simmered on the hearth. First came the broth well loaded with barley and cabbage, but not destitute of the flavor of two sheep's heads. Then the suet pudding, round as a well-fed salmon and as long as a twenty-pound cod. After this came three legs of boiled mutton and a square block of roast beef. Last of all the frying-pan was taken from the niche of the Madonna, and two or three dozen of fresh herrings were made to frizzle and crackle and bark and sputter over the fire.

Away went the dishes, away went the cloth, an oil lamp with its open mouth—a relic, perhaps, of some monkish sanctuary of the Middle Ages—was lifted from the mantelpiece and put on the table for the receipt of customs; the censer with the spills was placed beside it, pipes emerged from the waistcoat pockets, and pots of liquor with glasses and bottles came in from the outer bar.

"Is it heavy on the beer you're going to be, Bill?" said Davy Cain.

Kisseck replied with a superior smile and the lifting up of a whisky bottle from which he had just drawn the cork.

Then came the toasts. The chairman rose, amid "Hip, hip, hooraa," to give "Life to man and death to fish." Kisseck gave "Death to the head that never wore hair." Tommy-Bill-beg responded to loud requests for "The Ladies." He reminded the company then, with some pardonable discursiveness, he said he was "terrible glad" to have the fleet around Peel, and not away in those outlandish foreign parts, Kinsale and Scotland; for when they were there he felt like the chairman's namesake, Christian, in the "Pilgrim's Progress." "And what is it he is saying in the good ould Book?" exclaimed Tommy?—"My occipation's gone!"

Then came more liquor and some singing. Christian sang too. He sang "Black-Eyed Sue," amid [Pg 402] audible sobs.

"The voice he has, anyway; and the loud it is, and the tender, and the way he slidders up and down, and no squeaks and jumps; no, no, nothin' lek squeezin' a tune out of an ould sow by pullin' the tail at her, and a sorter of a rippin' up her innards to get the hook out of her gills."

"Aw, lovely he sang—lovely, uncommon."

"Well, I tould you so. I allis said it."

Kisseck listened to this dialogue at his end of the table with a lofty smile. "It's nothin'," he said, condescendingly. "That's nothin'. You should hear him out on the boat, when we're lyin' at anchor, and me and him together, and the stars just makin' a peep, and the moon, and the mar-fire, and all to that, and me and him lyin' aft and smokin' and havin' a glass maybe; but nothin' to do no harm at all—that's when you should hear him."

"More liquor there," shouted Tommy-Bill-beg, climbing with difficulty to his feet—"more liquor for the chair. And for some one beside—is that what they're saying? Well, look here! bad sess to it—of coorse, some for me too. It's terrible good for the narves, and they're telling me it's mortal good for studdyin' the vice. What's that from the chair? Enemy—eh? Confound it, that's true, though. What's that it's saying—'Who's fool enough to put the enemy into his mouth to stale away his brains?' Aw, now, it's the good ould Book that's fine at summin' it all up."

Still more liquor, and Jemmy Balladhoo comes forth with his fiddle. Immediate and complete capitulation of Tommy-Bill-beg ensues. The harbor-master never yet heard a squeak from his rival's fiddle; but the bare idea that Jemmy Quark Balladhoo should play it was really of itself too ridiculous.

"Aw, the rispen and the raspen. It's the moo of a cow he's on for making now. No? Then it's the sweet hoot of the donkey. Not that? Och, then it's safe to be the grunt of Jemmy's ould pig, anyways."

The violinist had by this time finished an elaborate movement, and called on the chairman to tell the company what it was. Christian, who had been hard put-to to preserve his gravity during the extraordinary musical display, and had not the very vaguest idea of what it was supposed to stand for, thought to get out of the difficulty by flattering the performer. "Oh, that?—what's that you say?—oh, of course—why that's, of course, the Pastoral Symphony from the 'Messiah.'"

"Not at all," shouted the irate fiddler, "it's 'Rule Britannia!'"

Still more noise and more liquor, and a good deal of both in the vicinity of the chair. Kisseck, who [Pg 403] had drunk heavily, struggled his way to the head of the table.

There were several strangers present, for it was the custom to welcome as many of the Cornish, Irish, or Scotch fishermen as happened to be at Peel and cared to join in the dubious thanksgiving, in the form of a noisy orgie. Among the rest was a young fellow in oil-skins and a glengarry, which, being several sizes too big for him, fell low over his forehead and almost covered his eyes. He sat near to Christian, drank little, and spoke not at all. When Kisseck made his way to Christian's side he had to pass this stranger. "Who have we here at all?" he said, trying to tip up the glengarry. The young fellow's well-timed jerk of the head defeated Kisseck's tipsy intention.

"Aw, Christian, man," said Kisseck in a whisper that was scarcely pitched with prudent moderation even in that tumultuous assembly, "it's a nice nate berth I've found for us at last—nice, extraordinary." Christian motioned his head in the direction of the young stranger; but heedless of the warning Kisseck continued, "No need goin' messin' around graves in the ould castle and all to that. And it isn't religious as you were sayin', and I'm one that stands up for religion, and singin' hymns at whites, and a bit of a spell at the ould Book sometimes. Aw, yes, though I am—(Louder.) Look here! D'ye hear down yander. Give us a swipe of them sperrits. Right. Let us fill up your glass, Christian. (Coming closer.) Aw, as I was sayin', it's in the Poolvash

—Lockjaw they're callin' it now, and as nate for stowin' a box of tay or a roll of silk or lace, or maybe a keg of brandy, and no one never knowin' nothin'."

The young fellow in oil-skins had dropped his empty pewter at that moment, and it rolled behind Christian's chair. As he stooped to recover it the chairman wheeled round to give him room, and coming up again, their eyes met for an instant. Christian made a perceptible start. "Strange at least," he muttered to himself.

More liquor and yet more, till the mouth of the monastic lamp ran over with chinking coin.

"Silence!" shouted Bill Kisseck, struggling up to speak. "Aisy there! Here's to Christian Mylrea Balladhoo; and when he gets among them Kays I'm calkerlatin' it'll be all up with the lot o' them, and their laws agen honest tradin', and their by-laws agen the countin' of the herrin', and their new copper money, and all the rest of their messin'. What d'ye say, men? And what's that you're grinnin' and winkin' at, Davy Cain? It's middlin' free you're gettin' with the masther anyhow, and if it wasn't for me he wouldn't bemane himself by comin' among the lek of you, singin' and makin' aisy. Chaps, fill up your glasses, every man of you, d'ye hear? Here's to the best gentleman in the island, bar none—hip, hip, hooraa!"

[Pg 404]

Among the few who had not responded with becoming alacrity to Kisseck's request was the young stranger. Observing this as he shuffled back to his seat, Kisseck reached over and struck at the glengarry, which tumbled on the floor, and revealed a comely face and a rich mass of auburn hair. The stranger rose at this indignity and made his way to the door. When he got there Danny Fayle, who was leaning against the door-jamb, looked closely into his face and reeled back with a startled cry. The stranger was gone the next instant.

"See yander. What's agate of the lad?" cried Kisseck. And every one turned to Danny, whose cheeks were as pale as death. "What's it that's ailin' you at all?" shouted Kisseck.

"I—I thought it was—was—a *woman*," stammered Danny, with eyes still fixed on the door.

Loud peals of laughter followed. But wait—what was now going on at the head of the table? When the stranger rose, Christian had risen too. It was the moment to respond to the toast, but Christian glared wildly about him with a tongue that seemed to cleave to his mouth. His glass fell from his fingers. Every eye was fixed on his face. That face quivered and turned white. Laughter died away on the lip, and the voices were hushed. At last Christian spoke. His words came slowly, and fell on the ear like the clank of a chain across snow.

"Men," he said, "you've been drinking my health. You call me a good fellow. That's wrong. I'm the worst man among you." (Murmurs of dissent and some faint smiles of incredulity.) "Bill says I'm going to the House of Keys one of these days. That's wrong too. Shall I tell you where I *am* going?" (Christian put one hand up to his head; you could see the throbbing of his temples.) "Shall I tell you?" he cried in a hollow voice and with staring eyes; "I'm going to the devil," and amid the breathless silence he dropped back in his seat and buried his head in his hands.

No one spoke. The fair hair lay on the table among broken pipes and the refuse of spilled beer. Then every man rose to his feet. There could be no more drinking to-night. One after one shambled out. In two minutes the room was empty except for the stricken man, who lay there with hidden face, and Danny Fayle, who, with a big glistening tear in his eye, was stroking the tangled curls.

[Pg 405]

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"Strange now, wasn't it?—strange, uncommon! He's been heavy on the beer lately they're tellin' me. Well, well, it isn't right, and him a gentleman. Not lek as if he was one of us."

"And goin' to be a parson, too, so they're sayin'. It's middlin' wicked anyway, and no disrepec'. *Oie Vie!* Good-night!"

"Pazon, is it?" says Tommy-Bill-beg. "Never a pazon will they make of his mother's son. What's that they're sayin', 'Never no duck wasn't hatched by a drake.'"

CHAPTER X

[Pg 406]

"THERE IS SORROW ON THE SEA"

Two months passed away, and the mists from the sea were chased by the winds of winter. It was the twenty-third of December. In the two days that followed between that day and Christmas morning occurred the whole series of appalling events which it now remains to us to narrate.

Mona Cregeen and Danny Fayle, with Ruby between them, were walking along the shore from Orry's Head toward the south. The little one prattled and sang, shook out her hair in the wind, and flew down the sand; ran back and clasped a hand of each; and dragged Danny aside to look at this sea-weed, or pulled Mona along to look at that shell; tripped down to the water's edge until the big waves touched her boots, and then back once more with a half-frightened, half-affected laughter-loaded scream.

Mona was serious and even sad, and Danny wore a dejected look in his simple face which added a melancholy interest to its vacant expression. Since we saw him first in the house of Mylrea Balladhoo, Danny had passed through a bitter experience. There was no tangible sorrow, yet who shall measure the depth of his suffering?

When the new element of love first entered into Danny's life, he knew nothing of what it was. A glance out of woman's eyes had in an instant penetrated his nature. He was helpless and passive. He would stand for an hour neither thinking nor feeling, but with a look of sheer stupidity. If this was love, Danny knew it by no such name. But presently a ray of sunlight floated into the lad's poor, dense intelligence and everything around was bathed in a new, glad light. The vacant look died away from his face. He smiled and laughed. He ran here and there with a jovial willingness. Even Kisseck's sneers and curses, his threats and blows became all at once easier to bear. "Be aisy with me, Uncle Bill," he would say; "be aisy, uncle, and I'll do it smart and quick astonishin'." People marked the change. "It's none so daft the lad is at all, at all," they said sometimes. This was the second stage of Danny's passion—and presently came the third. Then arose a vague yearning not only to love but to be loved. The satisfied heart had not asked so much before, but now it needed this further sustenance. Curious and pathetic were the simple appeals made by Danny for the affection of the woman he loved. Sometimes he took up a huge fish to the cottage of the Cregeens, threw it on the floor, and vanished. Sometimes he talked to Mona of what great things he had done in his time—what fish he had caught, how fast he had rowed, and what weather he had faced. There was not a lad in Peel more modest than Danny, but his simple soul was struggling in this way with a desire to make itself seem worthy of Mona's love. The girl would listen in silence to the accounts of his daring deeds, and when she would look up with a glance of pity into his animated eyes, the eyes of Danny would be brave no more, but fall in confusion to his feet.

[Pg 407]

Then, bit by bit, it was borne in on Danny that his great, strong, simple love could never be returned; and this was the last stage of his affection. The idea of love had itself been hard to realize, but much harder to understand was the strange and solemn idea of unrequited passion. Twenty times had Mona tried in vain to convey this idea to his mind without doing violence to the tenderness of the lad's nature. But that which no artifice could achieve time itself accomplished. Danny began to stay away from the cottage on the "brew," and when, in pity for that unspeakable sorrow which Mona herself knew but too well, the girl asked him why he did not come up as often as before, he answered, "I'm thinking it's not me you're wanting up there." And Danny felt as if the words would choke him.

Then the whole world, which had seemed brighter, or at least less cruel, became bathed in gloom. The lad haunted the seashore. The moan of the long dead sea seemed to speak to him in a voice not indeed of cheer but of comforting grief. The white curves of the breakers had something in them that suited better with his mood than the sunlit ripples of a summer sea. The dapple-gray clouds that scudded across the leaden sky, the chill wind that scattered the salt spray and whistled along the gunwale of his boat, the mist, the scream of the sea-bird—all these spoke to his desolate heart in an inarticulate language that was answered by tears.

Poor Danny, a hurricane had uprooted the only idol of your soul, and for you the one flower of life, the flower of love, was torn up and withered forever!

Love? Yes, even the image of a happy love had at length stood up for one moment before his mind, even before his mind. That love itself might have been possible to him, yes, possible to such a one as he was, though laughed at—"rigged" as he called it—here, there, and everywhere—this was the blessed vision of one brief instant. He thought of how he might have clasped her hands by the bright sea, and looked lovingly into her eyes. But no, no, no; not for him had God sent the gracious love, and Danny turned in his dumb despair to the cold winter sea, shrinking from every human face.

[Pg 408]

"Is there not a storm coming?" said Mona to Danny, as she and Ruby overtook the boy on the shore that morning.

"Ay, the long cat's tail was going off at a slant a while ago, and now the round thick skate yonder is hanging very low."

As he spoke, Danny turned about and looked at the clouds which we have been taught to know by less homely names.

"Danny, Danny," interrupted the little one, "what is that funny thing you told me the sailors say when the wind is getting up?"

"Davy's putting on the coppers for the parson," answered the lad, absently, and without the semblance of a smile. For the twentieth time Ruby laughed and crowed over the dubious epigram.

Mona glanced sometimes at Danny's listless face as they walked together along the shore with the child between them. His look was dull and at certain moments even silly. Once she thought she saw a tear glistening in his eye, but he had turned his head away in an instant. There were moments when her heart bled for him. People thought her harsh and even cynical. "Aw, allis cowl'd and freezin' is the air she keeps about her," they would say. Perhaps some bitter experience of the past had not a little to do with this. Nothing so sure to petrify the warmer sensibilities as neglect and wrong. But in the presence of Danny's silent sorrow the girl's heart melted, and the almost habitual upward curve at one corner of her mouth disappeared. She knew

something of his suffering. She could read it in her own. At some thrilling moment, if Heaven had so ordered it, they two, she and this simple lad, might have uncovered to the other the bleeding wound that each carried hidden in the breast. And that great moment was yet to come, though she knew it not.

Love is a selfish thing, let us say what we will of it besides.

"Danny," said Mona, "have you seen anything more of Christian?"

"Yes," said the lad. Some momentary remorse on Mona's part compelled her to glance into Danny's face. There was no trace of feeling there. It was baffled love, and not jealousy, that had taken the joy out of Danny's life. And as yet the lad had not once reflected that if Mona did not love him it was, perhaps, because she loved another.

[Pg 409]

"He isn't going," continued Danny.

"Thank God," said Mona, fervently. "And Kisseck, does he still mean to go?"

"Ay, of course he's going. It'll be to-morrow, it seems. I'm to go, too."

"Danny, you must not go," said Mona, dropping Ruby's hand to take hold of the lad's arm. He glanced up vacantly.

"Seems to me it doesn't matter much what I do," he said.

"But it does matter, Danny. What these men are attempting is crime—black, cruel, pitiless crime—murder, no less."

"That's what the young masther was sayin'," answered the lad, absently; "and the one of them hadn't a word to say agen it."

Ruby had tripped away for a moment. Returning with a little oval thing in her hand, she cried, "Danny, what's this? I found it under a stone, and its gills were shining like fire."

"A sea-mouse," said the lad, and taking it out of the child's hand, he added, "I'm less nor this worm to our Bill."

"Danny, would it hurt you much if you were to hear that your uncle Kisseck was being punished?"

The lad lifted his eyes with a bewildered stare. The idea that Bill Kisseck could be punished had never really come to him as within the limits of possibility. Once, indeed, he had thought of something that he might himself do, but the wild notion had vanished with the next glance at Kisseck's face.

"He could be punished," said Mona, "and must be."

Then Danny's eyes glittered and looked strange, but he said not a word. They walked on, the happy child once more taking a hand from each, and laughing, prattling, leaping, and making little runs between them. Ruby was in a deeper sense the link that bound them, and in the deepest sense of all she was the link that held them apart forever. They had walked to the mouth of the harbor, and Mona held out her hand to say good-bye. Danny looked beyond her over the sea. There was something in his face that Mona had never before seen there. What it meant she knew not then, except that in a moment he had grown to look old. "The storm is coming," said Mona. "I see the diver out at sea. Do you hear his wild note?"

"Ay, and ye see Mother Carey's chicken yonder," said Danny, pointing where the stormy petrel was scudding close to a white wave and uttering a dismal cry. Then, absently and in a low tone, "I think at whiles I'd like to die in a big sea like that," said the lad.

[Pg 410]

Mona looked for a moment in silence into the lad's hopeless eyes. Danny turned back with his hand in his pockets and his face toward the sand.

Truly a storm was coming, and it was a storm more terrible than wind and rain.

Mona and Ruby continued their walk. It was the slack season at the factory, and Mr. Kinvig's jewel in looms was compelled to stand idle three working days out of the six. The young woman and the child passed down the quay to the bridge, crossed to the foot of the Horse Hill, and walked along the south side of the harbor—now full of idle luggers—toward Contrary Head. When they reached the narrow strait which cut off the Castle Isle from the mainland, they took a path that led upward over Contrary Head. A little way up the hill they passed Bill Kisseck's cottage. The house stood on a wild headland, and faced nothing but the ruined castle and the open sea. An old quarry had once been worked on the spot, and Kisseck's cottage stood with its front to what must have been the level cutting, and its back to the straight wall of rock. A path wound round the house and came close to the edge of the little precipice. Mona took this path, and as they walked past the back part of the roof a woman's head looked out of a little dormered window that stood in the thatch.

"Good-morning, Bridget," said Mona, cheerfully.

"Good-mornin'," answered Bridget, morosely. "It's middlin' cowld, isn't it, missis, for you and that poor babby to be walkin' up there?"

"It's a sharp morning, but we're strong and well, Ruby and I," said Mona, going on.

"The craythur!" mumbled Bridget to herself when they were gone, "it's not lookin' like it she is anyway, with a face as white as a haddick."

Mona and the little one walked briskly along the path, which from Kisseck's cottage was nearly level, and cut across the Head toward the south. There was a second path a few yards below them, and between these two, at a distance of some five or six hundred yards from the house, was the open shaft of an old disused lead mine which has since been filled up.

"What a dreadful pit," said Ruby, clinging to Mona's skirts in the wind. They continued their walk until they came to a steep path that led down to a little bay. Then they paused, and looked back, around, and beneath. Overhead were the drifting black clouds, heavy, wide, and low. Behind was the Horse Hill, purple to the summit with gorse. To the north was the Castle Island, with its Fennella's Tower against the sky, and the black rocks, fringed at the water's edge with white spray. Beneath was the narrow covelet cleft out of the hillside, and apparently accessible only from the sea. In front was the ocean, whose moan came up to them mingled with the shrill cry of the long-necked birds that labored midway in the burdened air.

[Pg 411]

"What is the name of that pretty bay?" asked the child. "Poolvash," answered Mona.

"And what does it mean?" asked the little one.

"The Bay of Death," said Mona; "that's what they used to call it long ago, but they call it the Lockjaw now."

"And what does that mean?" asked Ruby again, with a child's tireless curiosity.

"It means, I suppose, that the tide comes up into it, and then no one can get either in or out."

"Oh, what a pity! Look at the lovely shells in the shingle," said Ruby.

Just then a step was heard on the path below, and in a moment Bill Kisseck came up beside them. He looked suspiciously at Mona and passed without a word.

"That gel of Kinvig's is sniffin' round," he said to his wife when he reached home. "She wouldn't be partikler what she'd do if she got a peep and a skute into anything."

"Didn't you say no one could get up or down the Lockjaw when the tide is up?" asked Ruby as she tripped home at Mona's side.

"Yes," said Mona, "except from the sea."

"And isn't the tide up now?" said Ruby. Mona did not answer.

That night the storm that Danny had predicted from the aspect of the "cat's tail" and the "skate" broke over Peel with terrific violence. When morning dawned it was found that barns had been unroofed and that luggers in the harbor had been torn from their moorings. The worst damage done was to the old wooden pier and the little wooden lighthouse. These had been torn entirely away, and nothing remained but the huge stone foundations which were visible now at the bottom of the ebb tide. The morning was clear and fine, the wind had dropped, and only the swelling billows in the bay and the timbers floating on every side remained to tell of last night's tempest.

Little Ruby was early stirring, and before Mona and her mother were awake she ran down the hill toward Peel. An hour passed and the little one had not returned. Two hours went by, and Mona could see no sign of the child from the corner of the road. Then she became anxious, and went in search of her.

[Pg 412]

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"Gerr out of this and take the boat round to the Lockjaw, d'ye hear?" shouted Bill Kisseck, "and see if any harm's been done down there. Take a rope or two and that tarpaulin and cover up anything that's wet."

Danny lifted the tarpaulin, and went quietly out of the house.

"I'll never make nothin' of that lad," said Kisseck; "he hasn't a word to chuck at a dog."

Danny walked down to the harbor, threw the tarpaulin and two ropes into the boat, got into it himself, took the oar, and began to scull toward the sea. As he passed the ruined end of the pier a voice hailed him. He looked up. It was Christian Mylrea.

"If you are going round the Head I'd like to go with you," said Christian. "I want to see what mischief the sea has done to the west wall of the castle. Five years ago a storm like this swept away ten yards of it at least."

Danny touched his cap and pulled up to the pier. Christian dropped, hand-under-hand, down a fixed wooden ladder, and into the boat. Then they sculled away. When they reached the west of the island, and had with difficulty brought-to against the rocks, Christian landed, and found the old boundary wall overlooking the traditional Giant's Grave torn down to the depth of several feet. His interest was so strongly aroused that he would have stayed longer than Danny's business allowed. "Leave me here and call as you return," he said, and then, with characteristic irresolution, he added, "No, take me with you."

The morning was fine but cold, and to keep up a comfortable warmth Christian took an oar, and they rowed.

"This pestilential hole, I hate it," said Christian, as they swept into the Lockjaw. "How high the tide is here," he added, in another tone.

They ran the boat up the shingle and jumped ashore. As they did so their ears became sensible of a feeble moan. Turning about they saw something lying on the stones. It was a child. Christian ran to it and picked it up. It was little Ruby. She was cold and apparently insensible. Christian's face was livid, and his eyes seemed to start from his head.

"Merciful God," he cried, "what can have happened?"

Then a torrent of emotion came over him, and, bending on one knee, with the child in his arms, the tears coursed down his cheeks. He hugged the little one to his breast to warm it; he chafed its little hands and kissed its pale lips, and cried, "Ruby, Ruby, my darling, my darling!"

[Pg 413]

Danny stood by with amazement written on his face. Rising to his feet, Christian bore his burden to the boat, and called on Danny to push off and away. The lad did so without a word. He felt as if something was choking him, and he could not speak. Christian stripped off his coat and wrapped it about the child. Presently the little one's eyes opened, and she whispered, "How cold!" and cried piteously. When the tears had ceased to flow, but still stood in big drops on the little face, Ruby looked up at Christian and then toward Danny, where he sculled at the stern.

"She wants to go to you," said Christian, after a pause, and with a great gulp in his throat. Danny dropped the oar and lifted the child very tenderly in his big horny hands. "Ruby ven, Ruby ven," he whispered hoarsely, and the little one put her arms about his neck and drew down his head to kiss him.

Christian turned his own head aside in agony. "Mercy, mercy, have mercy!" he cried, with his eyes toward the sky. "What have I lost! What love have I lost!"

He took the oars, and with head bent he pulled in silence toward the town. When they got there he took the little one again in his arms and carried her to the cottage on the "brew." Mona had newly returned from a fruitless search. She and her mother stood together with anxious faces as Christian, bearing the child, entered the cottage and stopped in the middle of the floor. Danny Fayle was behind him. There was a moment's silence. At length Christian said, huskily, "We found her in the Poolvash, cut off by the tide."

No one spoke. Mona took Ruby out of his arms and sat with her before the fire. Christian stepped to the back of the chair and looked down into the child's eyes, now wet with fresh tears. Mrs. Cregeen gazed into his face. Not a word was said to him. He took up his coat, turned aside, paused for an instant at the door, and then walked away.

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 414]

THE SHOCKIN' POWERFUL SKAME

"I've two mamas, haven't I?" cried Ruby, between her sobs, as Mona warmed her cold limbs and kissed her.

Danny had sat on the settle and looked on with wondering eyes. He glanced from Mona's face to Ruby's, and from Ruby's back to Mona's. Some vague and startling idea was struggling its way into his sluggish mind.

The child was warm and well in a little while, and turning to Danny, Mona said, "Is it all settled that you told me of?"

"Yes," answered the lad.

"Is it to be to-day?"

"Ay; they're to go out at high-water with the line for cod, and not come back till it's time to do it."

"Has any change been made in their arrangements?"

"No, 'cept that the pier bein' swept away they're to run down the lamp that the harbor-master has stuck up on a pole."

"Is it certain that Christian will not be with them?"

"Ay, full certain. They came nigh to blows over it last night."

"And *you* will not go, Danny?"

"No, no; when I take back the boat I'll get out of the road."

"The harbor-master is to be decoyed away to the carol-singing and the hunting of the wren?"

"Ay, Davy Cain and Tommy Tear are at that job."

"And when is it high-water to-night?"

"About eleven, but the Frenchman is meaning to run in at ten. I heard Bill say that, houldin' in his breath."

"You're quite sure about Christian?" asked Mona again.

"Aw yes, certain sure."

"Then will you come back here to-night at six o'clock, Danny?"

"Yes," said the lad, and he went out and down toward the shore.

Mona hastened with all speed to the house of Kerruish Kinvig. There in breathless haste, but in the most logical sequence, she disclosed the whole infamous scheme which was afoot to wreck a merchantman that was expected to run into port on a smuggling adventure at ten o'clock that night. This was the plot as Mona presented it to Mr. Kinvig. The harbor-master's musical weakness was to be played upon, and he was to be got out of the way, two of Kisseck's gang remaining ashore for that purpose. At mid-day (that was to say in two hours) Kisseck and six men were to set out in the "Ben-my-Chree" on pretense of line-fishing. At nine that night they were to return. Kisseck himself and three others were to put ashore in the dingy on the west coast of the Castle Isle, and there lie in wait. The other two were to take the lugger round to harbor, and in doing so were to run down the temporary light put up on the ruined end of the pier. False lights were then to be put on the southwest of the castle, and when the merchantman came up to discharge her contraband goods, she was to run on the rocks and be wrecked.

[Pg 415]

Such was the scheme as Mona expounded it. Kerruish Kinvig blustered and swore; wanted to know what the authorities were good for if private people had to bedevil themselves with these dastardly affairs. It was easy to see, however, that, despite his protestations, Mr. Kerruish, with this beautiful nut to crack and a terrific row to kick up, was in his joyful element. Away he scoured to the house of Mylrea Balladhoo, dragging Mona along with him. There the story was repeated, and various sapient suggestions were thrown out by Kinvig. Finally, and mainly at Mona's own instigation, a plan was concocted by which not only the wrecking would be prevented, but the would-be wreckers were to be captured. This was the scheme. The harbor-master was to be allowed to fall a prey to the device of the plotters. ("I'd have him in Castle Rushen, the stone-deaf scoundrel," shouted Kinvig.) Mr. Kinvig himself was to be the person to go to Castle Rushen. He was to set off at once and bring back under the darkness a posse of police or soldiers in private clothes. Eight of these were to be secreted in the ruined castle. Mona herself was to go on to the Contrary Head, and the instant the light on the pier had been run down she was to light a lamp as a signal to the police in ambush, and as a warning to the merchantman out at sea. Then the eight police were to pounce down on the wreckers lying in wait under the castle's western walls.

So it was agreed, and on a horse of Mylrea Balladhoo's Kerruish Kinvig started immediately for Castletown, taking the precaution not to pass through the town.

Mona hastened home, and there to her surprise found Danny. "The young master *is* to go," he cried. What had happened was this. On taking the boat back to its moorings, the lad had been making his way toward Orry's Head, as the remotest and most secluded quarter, when he passed Christian and a strange gentleman in the streets, and overheard fragments of their conversation. The stranger was protesting that he must see Christian's father. At length, and as if driven to despair, the young master said:

[Pg 416]

"Give me until to-morrow morning."

"Very good," the stranger answered, "but not an hour longer." They parted; immediately Bill Kisseck with Davy Cain and Tommy Tear came round a street corner and encountered Christian.

"I'll join you," Christian said with an oath. "When do you sail?"

"In half an hour," Kisseck answered, professing himself mightily pleased to have Christian's company. Then Christian turned away, and Kisseck grunted to the men.

"It was necessary to get that chap into it, you know. His father is the magistrate, and if anything should go wrong he'll have to hush it up." The others laughed.

Danny saw that there was not a moment to lose. In half an hour the young master would be aboard the "Ben-my-Chree" on pretense of going out with the lines. Danny started away, but Kisseck having seen him, hailed him, and threw down a pair of sea-boots for him to pick up and take down to the boat.

"And stay there till we come," Kisseck said in going off. The errand took several of Danny's precious minutes, but, throwing the boots down the hatchways, he set off for the "brew," taking care to run along the shore this time.

Mona heard his story with horror. She had already set the police on the crew of the lugger. She could not undo what she had done. Kerruish Kinvig must be already far on his way to Castle Rushen. It was certain that every man who went out in the boat must be captured on her return. The only thing left to do was to prevent Christian going out with her at all. "He shall not go,"

cried Mona, and she hurried away to the quay. "He shall *not* go," she murmured to herself once again; but as she reached the harbor, white and breathless, she saw the "Ben-my-Chree" sailing out into the bay, and Christian standing on her deck.

CHAPTER XII

[Pg 417]

STRONG KNOTS OF LOVE

At six o'clock the night had closed in. It was as black as ink. Not a star had appeared, but a sharp southwest wind was blowing, and the night might lighten later on. In the cottage on the "brew" a bright turf-fire was burning, and it filled the kitchen with a ruddy glow. Little Ruby was playing on a sheep-skin before the hearth. Old Mrs. Cregeen sat knitting in an armchair at one side of the ingle. Her grave face, always touching to look at, seemed more than ever drawn down with lines of pain. Every few minutes she stopped to listen for footsteps that did not come, or to gaze vacantly into the fire. Mona was standing at a table cutting slices of bread-and-butter. At some moments her lips quivered with agitation, but she held the knife with the steady grasp of a man's hand. Pale and quiet, with the courage and resolution on every feature, this was the woman for a great emergency. And her hour was at hand. Heaven grant that her fortitude may not desert her to-night. She needs it all.

A white face, with eyes full of fear, looked in at the dark window. It was Danny Fayle. "Come in," said Mona; but he would not come. He must speak with her outside. She went out to him. He was trembling with excitement. He told her that Kerruish Kinvig had returned, and brought with him the men from Castle Rushen. There were eight of them. They had been across to the old castle and had opened a vault in St. Patrick's chapel. There they had found rolls of thread lace, casks of wines and spirits, and boxes of tea. This was not important, but Danny had one fact to communicate which made Mona's excitement almost equal to his own. In a single particular the arrangement suggested by herself and agreed upon with Mylrea, the magistrate, had been altered. Instead of the whole eight men going over to the castle, four only, with Kinvig as guide, were to be stationed there. The other four were to be placed on the hill-side above Bill Kisseck's house to watch it.

This change was an unexpected and almost fatal blow to the scheme which Mona had all day been concocting for the relief of the men on the "Ben-my-Chree" from the meshes in which she herself had imprisoned them.

[Pg 418]

Mona's anxiety was greatest now that her hope seemed least. Rescue the men—Christian being one of them—she must, God helping her. Like a sorceress, whose charm has worked only too fatally, Mona's whole soul was engaged to break her own deadly spell. She conceived a means of escape, but she could not without help bring her design to bear. Would this lad help her? Danny? She had seen the agony of his despair wither up the last gleam of sunshine on his poor, helpless face.

"Did you say that Mr. Kinvig is to be with the men in the castle?"

"Yes," said Danny.

"Is Mr. Mylrea to be with others above your uncle's house?"

"No. They wanted him, but he was too old, he was sayin', and went off to find Christian and send him to be a guide to the strangers."

"That is very good," said Mona, "and we can manage it yet. Danny, do you go off to the castle—the tide is down; you can ford it, can't you?"

"If I'm quick. It's on the turn."

"Go at once. The men are not there now, are they?"

"No, they came across half an hour ago."

"Good. They'll return to the castle just before nine. Go you at this moment. Ford it, and they'll see no boat. Hide yourself among the ruins—in the guard-room—in the long passage—in the cell under the cathedral—in the sally-port—among the rocks outside—anywhere—and wait until the Castle Rushen men arrive. As soon as they are landed and out of sight, get you down to where they have moored their boat, jump into it and pull away. That will cut off five of the nine, and keep them prisoners on the Castle Rock until to-morrow morning's ebb tide."

"But where am I to go in the boat?" asked Danny.

Mona came closer. "Isn't it true," she whispered, "that Kisseck and the rest of them go frequently to the creek that they call the Lockjaw?"

"How did you know it, Mona?"

"Never mind, now, Danny. Do you pull down to the Lockjaw; run ashore there; climb the brow above, and wait."

"Wait?—why—until when?"

"Danny, from the head of the Lockjaw you can see the light on the end of the pier. I've been there myself and know you can. Keep your eye fixed on that light."

"Yes, yes; well, well?"

[Pg 419]

"The moment you see the light go down on the pier—no matter when—no matter what else has happened—do you that instant set fire to the gorse about you. Fire it here, there, everywhere, as if it were the night of May-day."

"Yes; what then?"

"Then creep down to the shore and wait again."

"What will happen, Mona?"

"This—Kisseck and the men with him will see your light over the Lockjaw, and guess that it is a signal of danger. If they have half wit they'll know that it must be meant for them. Then they'll jump into their boat and pull down to you."

"When they come, what am I to say?"

"Say that the police from Castle Rushen are after them; that four are cut off in the castle, and four more are on the Horse Hill above Contrary. Tell them to get back, every man of them, to Kisseck's house as fast as their legs will carry them."

Danny's intelligence might be sluggish at ordinary moments, but to-night it was suddenly charged with a ready man's swiftness and insight. "But the Castle Rushen men on the Horse Hill will see the burning gorse," he said.

"True—ah, yes, Danny, that's tr—. I have it! I have it!" exclaimed the girl. "There are two paths from the Lockjaw to Kisseck's house. I walked both of them with Ruby, yesterday. One goes above the open shaft of the old lead mine, the other below it. Tell the men to take the low road—the *low* road; be *sure* you say the low road—and if the police see your fire I'll send them along the high road, and so they will pass with a cliff between them. That's it, thank God. You understand me, Danny? Are you quite sure you understand everything—every little thing?"

"Yes, I do," said the lad, with the energy of a man.

"When they get to Kisseck's cottage let them smoke, drink, gamble, swear—anything—to make believe they have never been out to-night. You know what I mean?"

"I do," repeated the lad.

He was a new being. His former self seemed in that hour to drop from him like a garment.

Mona looked at him in the dim light shot through the window from the fire, and for an instant her heart smote her. What was she doing with this lad? What was he doing for her? Love was her pole-star. What was his? Only the blank self-abandonment of despair. For love of Christian she was risking all this. But the wild force that inspired the heart of this simple lad was love for her who loved another. Whose was the nobler part, hers who hoped all, or his who hoped nothing? In the darkness she felt her face flush deep. Oh, what a great little heart was here—here, in this outcast boy; this neglected, down-trodden, despised, and rejected, poor, pitiful waif of humanity.

[Pg 420]

"Danny," she murmured, with plaintive tenderness, "it is wrong of me to ask you to do this for me—very, very wrong."

His eyes were dilated. The face, hitherto unutterably mournful to see, was alive with a strange fire. But he said nothing. He turned his head toward the lonely sea, whose low moan came up through the dark night.

She caught both his hands with a passionate grasp. "Danny," she murmured again, "if there was another name for love that is not—"

She stopped, but her eyes were close to his.

He turned. "Don't look like that," he cried, in a voice that went to the girl's heart like an arrow.

She dropped his hands. She trembled and glowed. "Oh, my own heart will break," she said; "to love and not be loved, to be loved and not to love—"

* * * * *

["I think at whiles I'd like to die in a big sea like that."]

Mona started. What had recalled Danny's strange words? Had he spoken them afresh? No.

* * * * *

"Danny," she murmured once more, in tones of endearment, and again she grasped his hands. Their eyes met. The longing, yearning look in hers answered to the wild glare in his.

"Don't look at me like that," he repeated, with the same low moan.

Mona felt as if that were the last she was ever to see of the lad in this weary world. He loved her with all his great, broken, bleeding heart. Her lips quivered. Then the brave, fearless, stainless girl put her quivering lips to his.

To Danny that touch was as fire. With a passionate cry he flung his arms about her. For an instant her head lay on his breast. "Now go," she whispered, and broke from his embrace.

CHAPTER XIII

[Pg 421]

THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT

Danny tore himself away with heart and brain aflame. Were they to meet again? Yes. For one terrible and perilous moment they were yet to stand face to face. As he ran down the road toward the town, Danny encountered a gang of men with lanterns, whooping, laughing, singing carols, and beating the bushes. It was the night before Christmas-eve, and they were "hunting the wren." Tommy Tear and Davy Cain were among them. Danny heard their loud voices, and knew they had trapped the harbor-master. The first act in to-night's tragedy had begun.

Two hours and a half later Mona passed the same troop of men. They were now standing in the Market-place. Tommy Tear and Davy Cain had a long pole from shoulder to shoulder, and from this huge bracket a tiny bird—a wren—was suspended. It was one of their Christmas customs. Their companions came up at intervals and plucked a feather from the wren's breast. Tommy-Bill-beg was singing a carol. A boy held a lantern to a crumpled paper, from which the unlettered coxcomb pretended to sing.

Mona hurried on. Her immediate destination was the net factory. There she found the company of nine or ten men. She was taken into the midst of them. "This is the young woman," shouted Kerruish Kinvig; "and when some of you fellows," he added, "have been police for fifty years, and are grown gray in the service, you may do worse than come here and go to school to this girl of two-and-twenty."

There was some superior and depreciatory laughter, and then Mona was required to repeat what she knew. When she had done so she did not wait for official instructions. She quietly and resolutely announced her intention of going on to the cliff-head above Contrary with a lantern in hand. When the light on the pier was run down by the fishing-boat, she would light her lantern and turn it toward the castle as a sign to the men in hiding there. The determination and decision of this girl brooked no question. The police agreed to her scheme. And had she not been the root and origin of all their movements, and the sole cause that they were there at all?

[Pg 422]

But Mona had yet another proposal, and to herself this last was the most vital of all. The four men who were to watch Bill Kisseck's house must have a guide, or by their lumbering movements they would awaken suspicion, and the birds would be frightened and not snared. Christian had not been found. "He's off to Ramsey, no doubt," suggested Kinvig. "I'll be guide to you myself," said Mona. "I'll take you to the Head, place you there, and then go off to my own station." And so it was agreed. It is not usually a man's shrewdness that can match a woman's wit at an emergency like this. And then the men in this case were police—a palliating circumstance!

Half an hour passed, and Mona was on the cliff-head. She had so placed the four men that they could not see her own position or know whether she duly and promptly lit her lantern or not. The night was still very dark. Not a star was shining; no moon appeared. Yet, standing where she stood, with the black hill behind her, she could at least descry something of the sea in front. The water, lighter than the land, showed faintly below. Mona could trace the line of white breakers around the Castle Isle. If a boat's sail came close to the coast, she could see that also. The darkness of the night might aid her. There was light enough for her movements, but too little for the movements of the four strangers behind her.

Mona saw the boat leave the shore that carried Kinvig and his four assistants across the strait to the castle. In a moment she lost it in the black shadow. Then she heard the grating of its keel on the shingle, and the clank of the little chain that moored it.

Now everything depended on Danny. Had the lad wit enough to comprehend all her meaning? Even if so, was it in human nature to do so much as she expected him to do from no motive, but such as sprang from hopeless love? God brighten the lad's dense intellect for this night at least! Heaven ennoble our poor, selfish, uncertain human nature for one brief hour!

Mona strained her ear for the splash of an oar. Danny ought to be stirring now. But no; Mona could hear nothing but the murmur of the waters on the pebbles and their distant boom in the bay.

Look! coming up to the west coast of the castle were the sails of a fishing-boat silhouetted against the leaden sky. It was a lugger. Mona could see both mainmast and mizzen with mainsail and yawl. It was the "Ben-my-Chree." Christian was there, and he was in deadly peril. She herself had endangered his liberty and life. The girl was almost beside herself with terror.

[Pg 423]

But look again! Though no sound of oars could reach her, she could now see the clear outline of a

boat scudding through the lighter patch of water just inside the castle's shadow. It was Danny! God bless and keep him on earth and in heaven! How the lad rowed! Light as the dip of a feather, and swift as the eagle flies! Bravely, Danny, bravely!

The clock in the tower of the old church in the Market-place was striking. How the bell echoed on this lonely height!—six, seven, eight, nine! Nine o'clock? Then the merchantman ought to be near at hand. Mona strained her eyes into the darkness. She could see nothing. Perhaps the ship would not come. Perhaps Heaven itself had ordered that the man she loved should be guiltless of this crime. Merciful Heaven, let it be so! let it be so!

The fishing-boat had disappeared. Yes, her sails were gone. But out at sea, far out, half a league away—what black thing was there? Oh, it must be a cloud; that was all. No doubt a storm was brewing. What was the funny sailor's saying that Ruby laughed at when Danny repeated it? No, no! it was looming larger and larger, and it was nearer than she had thought. It was—yes, it was a sail. There could be no doubt of it now. The merchantman was outside, and she was less than half a mile away.

Bill Kisseck and the three men who were to go ashore on the west of the Castle Isle must now have landed. Christian was one of them. Within fifty yards five men lay in wait to capture them. See, the "Ben-my-Chree" was fetching away to leeward. She was doubling the island rock and coming into harbor. How awkwardly the man at the tiller was tacking. That was a ruse, lest he was watched. To Mona the suspense of the moment was terrible. The very silence was awful. She felt an impulse to scream.

What about Danny? Had he reached the Lockjaw?

He must have rowed like a man possessed, to be there already. The "Ben-my-Chree" would sweep into harbor at the next tack. Could Danny get up onto the pier in time to see the lamp on the pier go down?

Mona could see the black outline of the Lockjaw headland from where she was stationed. Her heart seemed to stand still. She turned her eyes first to the pier, then to the Lockjaw, and then to the cloud of black sail outside that grew larger every instant.

Look again—the fishing-boat is coming in; she is almost covering the lamp on the pier; she has swept it down; it is gone, and all is blank, palpable darkness. Mona covers her eyes with her hands.

[Pg 424]

Is Danny ready? Quick, quick, Danny; one minute lost and all is lost! No light yet on the Lockjaw.

Bravo! Mona's heart leaps to her mouth. There *is* a light on the Lockjaw Head! Thank God and poor dear Danny forever and ever.

And now, the lamp down, the gorse burning, the merchantman drawing nearer and nearer, what must Mona herself do? She had promised to give the sign to the men in the castle the instant the light on the pier was run down. Then they would know that it was not too soon to pounce down on Kisseck and his men, with part of their plot—the least dangerous part, but still a punishable part—carried into effect. But Mona did not light her lantern. She never meant to do it so soon. She must first see some reason to believe that Christian and his companions had taken Danny's warning.

She waited one minute—two, three. No sign yet. Meantime the black cloud of sail in the bay was drawing closer. There were living men aboard of that ship, and they were running on to the rocks. This suspense was agony. Mona felt that she must do something. But what?

If she were to light her lantern now, she might save the merchantman; but then Christian would be pounced upon and taken. If she were not to light her lantern soon, the ship would be gored to pieces on the Castle Isle, and perhaps all hands would be lost. What was Mona to do? The tension was terrible.

She strode up and down the hillside—up and down, up and down.

Three minutes gone—a fourth minute going. Not a sound from the west coast of the castle. Perhaps Christian, Kisseck, and the rest had not landed. She must not let the merchantman be wrecked. Her lantern must be lighted for the crew's sake. Yes; they were men, living men—men with wives who loved them, and children who climbed to their knees. Mona thought of Christian and of Ruby. It was a fierce moment of conflicting passion.

Four minutes at least had gone. Mona had decided to light her lantern, come what would or could. She was in the act of doing so, when she heard footsteps on the cliff behind her. The four strangers had seen the light on the pier go down. They thought it must be time for them to be moving. Either Kinvig and the other four in the castle had taken their men, or they had missed them. In either case their own time for action had gone.

Mona, in a fever of excitement, affected certain knowledge that Kisseck's men must be captured. She recommended the police to go down to the shore and wait quietly for their friends. But at that moment they caught sight of Danny's fire on the Lockjaw Head. They suspected mischief, and declared their intention of going off to it.

[Pg 425]

At the same moment Mona's quicker eyes, now preternaturally quick, caught sight of a boat clearing the west coast of the Castle Rock, and sailing fast toward the Lockjaw. It was Christian's

boat. Again Mona felt an impulse to scream.

And now there came loud shouts from the castle. At the sign of Mona's lantern, Kinvig and his followers had leaped out of their ambush, only to find their men gone. Then they had run off to the creek in which they had left their boat, meaning to give chase—only to find that the boat had disappeared. There had been treachery somewhere. They were imprisoned on the Castle Rock, and so they shouted, loud and long, to their comrades on the cliff.

Mona thought she would have laughed yet louder and longer had she dared. But the police were still with her, and the desire to laugh was quickly swallowed up in fresh fear. She took the strangers to the high path that led to the Lockjaw. "Follow this," she said, "and take no other, as you value your limbs and necks." She told them to be very careful as they passed the open shaft of the old lead mine. It would lie three yards on their right. Away they went.

What had happened to the merchantman? She had seen danger, and was already beating down the bay. She and her crew were safe. Putting down the lantern on the hillside, Mona ran with all speed to Kisseck's cottage. In the darkness she almost stumbled down the little precipice on to the back of the roof. Running round the path, she pushed her way into the house. Bridget Kisseck was there. In breathless haste Mona told the woman that the police were after Kisseck and his friends; urged her to get pipes, tobacco, cards, ale, spirits, and the like on the table. The men would be here in three minutes. They must make pretense that they had never been out.

Then Mona ran back to the angle of the two mountain paths, the high path and the low one.

Bridget, who had not comprehended Mona's instructions, took fright at her intelligence, put on her shawl and bonnet, and, without waiting for her husband, hurried away to the town.

CHAPTER XIV

[Pg 426]

"BILL IS GONE TO BED"

What was happening to Danny at the Lockjaw Creek?

Throughout two hours and a half he had lain in the cold, motionless and silent, among the rocks outside the castle. When the time came he had leaped into the boat which the police brought with them, and pulled away. He had strained every muscle to reach the Poolvash, knowing full well that if he gained it one minute late it might be indeed the bay of death. Before he had crossed that point at which the two streams meet midway in the strait he could see the "Ben-my-Chree" tacking into the harbor. Then, indeed, he sculled with all his strength. He ran ashore. He mounted to the cliff-head. With the matches in his hand he peered through the darkness to where the lamp still burned on the end of the pier. Yes, he was in time. But what was the red riot that was now rising in his heart?

It was then, and not till then, that the thought came to him, "What am I here for?" What for? Who for? Why? It was a moment of blank bewilderment. Then in an instant, as if by a flash of lightning, everything became plain. Mona, Christian, Ruby—these three, linked together for the first time in the lad's mind, flashed the truth, the fact, the secret upon him. Danny had at length stumbled into the hidden grave. He saw it all now. What had lain concealed from other and wiser heads, vainer heads, heads lifted above his in lofty pride, was revealed to his simple intelligence and great yearning heart.

Yes, Danny knew now why he was there. It was to save the life of the man who was beloved by the woman whom he loved.

The world seemed in that moment to crumble beneath his feet. He dropped his eyes in deep self-abasement, but he raised them again in self-sacrifice and unselfish love. There was no doubt as to what he should do. No, not even now, with the life of Christian in the palm of his hand. Some power above himself controlled him.

"For her sake," he whispered. "Oh, for her sake, for all," he murmured, and at that moment the light on the pier went down.

He struck his matches and lighted the gorse. It was damp, and at first it would not burn. It dried at last and burst into flame. Then the lad crept down to the water's edge and waited.

[Pg 427]

The water lay black as the raven outside, but the light of the burning gorse overhead gilded the rolling wavelets at his feet.

In five minutes the dingey of the "Ben-my-Chree" shot into the creek, and four men leaped ashore. One was Kisseck, another Christian, and the other two were Paul Corteen and Luke Killip. All were violently agitated.

"What for is all this, you young devil?" cried Kisseck. "What does it all mean?—out with it, quick!—what tricks have you been playing? Damn his fool's face, why doesn't he speak?"

And Kisseck struck the lad, and he fell. Danny got up strangely quiet, strangely calm, with great

wide eyes, and a face that no man could look on without fear. Kisseck trembled before it, but—from dread alone and without waiting for a word of explanation—he raised his hand once more.

Christian interposed. Danny told his story; how the police were on the cliff-head as well as the island; how they would certainly make for this spot; how Mona Cregeen would send them along the high path; and how they—Kisseck, Christian, and the others—were to take the low path, get back with all haste to the cottage, and make pretense that they had never been out.

Christian started away. He had climbed the precipitous cliff-head in a minute, the others following. When they reached the top, Danny was side by side with his uncle, staring with wild eyes into his face. Kisseck stopped.

"—, what for do you look at me?" he cried. Then again he lifted his hand and struck the lad and threw him. When Danny rose to his feet after this second blow he laughed aloud. It was a laugh to freeze the blood. Christian turned back. He took Kisseck by the shoulder. "By —," he said, between gusts of breath, "touch him again and I'll pitch you into the sea."

Kisseck was silent and cowed. There was no time to stand quarreling there. "Come on," cried Christian, and he set off to run. He speedily outran the rest, and they lost sight of him.

The two paths that led to the Lockjaw came together within a hundred yards at the end. In the darkness, in the confusion, in the turmoil of soul, Christian missed the lower path and followed the higher one. He did not realize his mistake. Running at his utmost speed, however, he heard footsteps in front of him. They were coming toward him. They were the footsteps of the police. Christian was uncertain what to do. For himself he cared little. But he thought of his father, of Mona, of little Ruby, and then life and fame were dear. [Pg 428]

The cliff was on the right of him, as he supposed, the sea on the left. He reckoned that he must be near to Kisseck's cottage now. Perhaps he could reach it before the men came up to it. They were drawing very close. Along the higher path Christian ran at his utmost speed.

Ah! here is the cottage, nearer than he had expected. He must have run faster than he supposed. In the uncertain light Christian sees what he takes to be the old quarry. There is no time to go round by the road and in at the front. He must leap down the back of the shallow quarry, light on the thatch, and lie there for a minute until the men have passed.

He runs, he leaps, but—he has jumped down the open shaft of the old disused lead mine.

* * * * *

Meantime Kisseck and Danny Fayle, with Corteen and Killip, found the low path and followed it. They heard the strangers pass on the high path, but they were themselves running softly on the thin grass, and a cliff was between the police and them. When they got to the angle of the roads and turned down the footpath in front of the house they passed Mona. As they entered, "Who was that woman?" said Kisseck.

"Mona," answered Danny.

"Damn her, I'll lay my soul that craythur is at the bottom of it all."

Danny's dilated eyes flashed fire. But he was otherwise outwardly quiet and calm.

"Where's that other fellow—Christian?" said Kisseck. "*He* has led me into all this cursed mess."

"That's a lie," said Danny, with the color gone from his cheeks.

Kisseck walked across to him with uplifted arm. Never flinching, the lad waited for the blow. Kisseck dropped his hand. Curling his lip in biting mockery, he said, "What for is that she-devil sthrowling around here?"

One bright spot of blood came into the lad's face, and as he drew in his breath it went through his teeth. But he was silent still.

"She has the imperience of sin," said Kisseck. "If she comes here she'll suffer for it."

Danny walked to the door and pushed the bolt. Kisseck laughed bitterly. [Pg 429]

"I knew it," he said. "I knew she was in it. But I'll punish her. Out of the way, you idiot waistrel."

There was a hurried step on the road outside.

Danny put his back to the door. His eyes melted, and he cried beseechingly:

"You'll not do that, Uncle Bill?"

"Out of the road, you young pauper," cried Kisseck; and he took hold of Danny and thrust him aside.

"You *shall not* do it," screamed the lad, running to the hearth and snatching up a poker.

All Danny's unnatural quiet had forsaken him.

There was a knock at the door, and an impatient footstep to and fro.

Kisseck walked into an inner room, and came back with a pistol in his hand.

"Men, don't you see it plain? That woman is at the bottom of it all," he said, turning to Corteen and Killip, and pointing, as he spoke, to the door. "She brought us here to trap us, and now she has come to see if we are at home. She has the men from Castle Rushen behind her; but she shall pay for it with her life. Out of the way, I say. Out—of—the—way."

Danny was standing again with his back to the door. He had the poker in his hand. Kisseck put the pistol on a table, and closed with Danny to push him aside. There was a terrible struggle. Amid curses from Kisseck and shouts from Corteen and Killip, the poker was wrenched from Danny's grasp and thrown on the floor. The lad himself was dragged away from the door, and the bolt was drawn.

Then in an instant Danny rushed to the table and picked up the pistol. There was a flash, a deafening explosion, a shriek, a heavy fall, and Kisseck rolled on the floor dead.

Danny staggered back to the door, the hot pistol still in his hand. He was petrified. His great eyes seemed to leap out of his head. When the smoke cleared he saw what he had done. His lips moved, but no words came from him. The other men were speechless. There was a moment of awful silence. Then, once more, there came a knock at the door against which Danny leaned.

Another knock. No answer. Another—louder. Still no reply.

"Bridget," cried a voice from without. It was Mona's voice.

"Bridget, let me in. What has happened?"

[Pg 430]

No one stirred.

"Bridget, they are coming. Tell the men to go off to sea."

None spoke or moved. The latch was lifted, but in vain.

"Bridget—Christian—Christian!"—(knocking continued).

"Kisseck—Kisseck—Bill Kisseck—Bill!"

At last one of the men found his voice:

"Bill is gone to bed," he said, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 431]

A RESURRECTION INDEED

"The night is long that never finds the day."—*Macbeth*

The shaft of the old lead-mine down which Christian leaped was forty-five feet deep, yet he was not killed; he was not even hurt. At the bottom were fifteen feet of water, and this had broken his dreadful fall. On coming to the surface, one stroke in the first instant of dazed consciousness had landed him on a narrow ledge of rock that raked downward with the seam. But what was his position when he realized it? It seemed to be worse than death itself; it was a living death; it was life in the arms of death; it was burial in an open grave. He heard steps overhead, and in the agony of fear he shouted. But the steps went by like a swift breath of wind, and no one answered. Then he reflected that these must have been the footsteps of the police. Thank God they had not heard his voice. To be rescued by them must have been ruin more terrible than all. Doubtless they knew of his share in to-night's attempted crime. Knowing this they must know by what fatality he was buried here. Christian now realized that death encircled him on every side. To remain in this pit was death; to be lifted out of it was death no less surely. To escape was hopeless. He looked up at the sky. It was a small square patch of leaden gray against the impenetrable blackness of his prison walls.

Standing on the ledge of rock, and steadying himself with one hand, he lifted the other stealthily upward to feel the sides of the shaft. They were of rock and were precipitous, but had rugged projecting pieces on which it was possible to lay hold. As he grasped one of these, a sickening pang of hope shot through him and wounded him worse than despair. But it was swift; it was gone in an instant. The piece of rock gave way in his hand and tumbled into the water below him with a hollow splash! The sides of the shaft were of a crumbling stone.

Now, indeed, he knew how hopeless was his plight. He dare not cry for help. He must stand still as death in this deep tomb. To attract attention would of itself be death. To remain down the shaft would also be certain death. To climb to the surface was impossible. Christian's heart sank. His position was terrible.

[Pg 432]

This conflict of soul did not last long. The heart soon clung to the nearest hope. Cry for help he must; be dragged out of this grave he should, let the issue be what it could or would. To lie here and die was not human. To live in the living present was the first duty, the first necessity, be the price of life no less than future death.

Christian reflected that the police, when he heard their footsteps, had been running to Lockjaw Creek. It would take them five minutes to reach it. When they got there and saw the boats on the shingle they would know that their men had escaped them. Then they would hasten back. In ten minutes they would pass the mouth of the shaft again. Five of these ten minutes must have gone already. If he were to be rescued he must know nearabouts when they ought to return, so that he might shout when they were within hail. He remembered that their footsteps had gone from him like the wind. The long shaft and sixty feet of dull dead rock and earth had carried them off in an instant.

Christian began to reckon the moments. His thoughts came too fast. He knew they must deceive him as to time. Minutes in this perilous position might count with him for hours. He took out his watch, meaning to listen for the beat of its seconds. The watch had stopped. No doubt it was full of water. Christian's heart beat loud enough. Then he began to count—one, two, three. But his mind was in a whirl. He lost his reckoning. He found that he had stopped counting and forgotten the number. Whether five minutes or fifty had passed he could not be sure.

Hark! He heard something overhead. Were they footsteps, those thuds that fell on the ear like the first rumble of a distant thunder-cloud? Yes, some one was near him. Now was his time to call, but his tongue was cleaving to his mouth. Then he heard words spoken at the mouth of the shaft. They rumbled down to him like words shouted through a hollow black pillar.

"Here, men," said one, "let's tumble him into the lead mine. No harm will it do him now, poor craythur."

But another voice, laden with the note of fearful agony, cried, "No, no, no!"

"We must do something. No time to lose now. The fac's is agen us. Let's make a slant for it, anyway. Lift again—up!"

Christian shuddered at the sound of human voices. Buried, as he was, sixty feet beneath the earth, they came to him like the voice that the wind might make on a tempestuous night if, as it reached your ear, it whispered words and fled away.

[Pg 433]

The men were gone. Christian's blood was chilled. What had happened? Was some one dead? Who was it? Christian shuddered at the thought of what might have occurred if the dead body had been tossed over him into the pit. Had the police overstepped their duty? *Were* they the police? Did he not remember one of the voices—or both? Christian's entempest soul was overwhelmed with agony. He could not be sure that in very truth he was conscious of anything that occurred.

Time passed—he knew not how long or short—and again he heard voices overhead. They were not the voices that he had heard before.

"They have escaped us," said one. "Their boats are gone from the creek now."

These, then, were the police; and, with a fresh flood of agony, Christian realized that the other men had been his friends. What fatality had prevented him from crying aloud to the only persons on earth who could, in very truth, have rescued and saved him?

The voices above were dying away. "Stop!" cried Christian. Despair made him brave; fear made him fearless. But none answered. Then he was conscious that a footstep approached the top of the shaft. Had he been heard? Now he prayed to God that he had not.

"What a gulf," said one. "Lucky we didn't tumble down. The young woman warned us, you remember."

There was a short laugh at the mouth of Christian's open grave. He did not call again. The voices ceased, the footsteps died off.

He was alone once more; but death was with him. The police had gone. Kisseck and his men had gone. They were no doubt out at sea by this time if, as the police said, the boats had been taken from the creek. Christian remembered now that the voices he had heard first were those of Corteen and Danny Fayle. This recovered consciousness enabled him to recall the fearful memory of what had been said. Cold as he was, the sweat stood in big drops on Christian's forehead. One of their own men was dead; one of the companions in this night's black adventure. A bad man perhaps, or perhaps merely a weak victim, but his own associate, whatever else he had been.

Now, if he were to escape from his death in life it must be by his own unaided energies alone. It was best so; best that he should climb to the top without help, or be lost without detection. After all, it was a superior Power that had governed this dread eventuality and silenced his impotent tongue.

[Pg 434]

An hour passed. The wind began to rise. At first Christian felt nothing of it as he stood in his deep tomb. He could hear its thin hiss over the mouth of the shaft, and that was all. But presently the hiss deepened to a sough. Christian had often heard of the wind's sob. It was a reality, and no metaphor, as he listened to the wind now. The wind began to descend. With a great swoop it came down the shaft, licked the walls, gathered voice from the echoing water at the bottom, struggled for escape, roared like a caged beast and was once more sucked up to the surface with a noise like the breaking of a huge wave over a reef. The tumult of the wind in the shaft was hard to bear, but when it was gone it was the silence that seemed to be deafening.

Sometimes the gusts were laden with the smoke of burning gorse. It came from the fire that Danny had kindled on the head of the Poolvash. Would the fire reach the pit, encircle it, descend in it?

Then the rain began to fall. Christian knew this by the quick monotonous patter overhead. But no rain touched him. It was being driven aslant by the wind, and fell only against the uppermost part of the walls of the shaft. Sometimes a soft thin shower fell over him. It was like the spray from a cataract except that the volume of water from which it came was above and not beneath him.

Christian had begun to contemplate measures for escape. That unexpected softness of the rock which had at first appalled him began now to give him some painful glimmerings of hope. If the sides of the shaft had been uniformly of the gray slate rock of the district, the ledge he had laid hold of would not have crumbled in his hand. Being soft, there must be a vein of sandstone running across the shaft. Christian's bewildered memory recalled what he must have heard many times of the rift of redstone which lay under the headland south of Peel. If this vein were but deep enough, his safety was assured. He could cut niches into it with a knife, and so, perhaps, after infinite pain and labor, reach the surface. Steadying himself with one hand, Christian felt in his pockets for his knife. It was not there! Now death indeed was certain. Despair began to take hold of him.

He was icy cold and feverishly hot at intervals. His clothes were wet; the water still dripped from them, and fell at intervals into the hidden tarn beneath in hollow drops.

But not so soon is hope conquered, when it is hope of life. Not to hope now would have been not to fear. Christian remembered that he had a pair of small scissors attached to a button-hook. When searching for his knife he had felt it in his pocket, and spurned it for resembling the knife to the touch of his nervous fingers. Now it was his sole instrument. He found it again, opened it, and with this paltry help he set himself to his work of escape from this dark, deep tunnel that stood upright.

[Pg 435]

The night twas wearing on; hour after hour passed. The wind dropped; the rain ceased to patter overhead. Christian toiled on step over step; resting sometimes on the largest and firmest of the projecting ledges, he looked up at the sky. Its leaden gray had changed to a dark blue studded with stars. The moon arose and shone a little way down his prison, lighting all the rest. He knew it must be early morning. One star, a large, full globe of light, twinkled directly above him. His eye was fascinated by that star. He sat long and watched it. He turned again and again in his toilsome journey to look at it. Was it a symbol of hope? Pshaw! Christian twisted back to his work. When he looked for the star again it was gone. It had moved beyond his ken; it had passed out of range of his narrow spot of heaven. Somehow it had been a mute companion. Christian's heart sank yet lower in his cheerless solitude.

Still he toiled on. His strength was far spent. The moon died off, and the stars went out one after one. Then a deep, impenetrable cloud of darkness overspread the little sky above. Christian knew it must be the darkness that precedes the dawn. He had reached a ledge of rock wider than any that were beneath it. Clearly enough a wooden rafter had lain along it.

Christian rested and looked up. At that moment he heard the light patter of four little feet overhead, and a poor stray sheep, a lamb of last spring's flock, bleated down the shaft. The melancholy call of the lost creature in that dismal place touched Christian deeply. What was it that made the tears start to his eyes and his whole soul shake with a new agony? The outcast lamb wandering over this trackless waste in the night had touched an old scar in Christian's heart, and made the wound bleed afresh. Was it strange that in that hour his thoughts turned involuntarily to little Ruby Cregeen? The darling child, caressed by the salt breath of the sea, and with the sunlight dancing in her eyes and glistening on her ruby lips, had she then anything in common with the little wanderer that sent up her pitiful cry into the night? Too much, too much, for the man who heard it, and he was buried in a living grave, with the tombstones of dead joys rising everywhere around, with the fire that had for years been kept close burning now most of all. Oh, these dead joys, they want the deepest grave.

[Pg 436]

Christian turned again to his weary task. To live was a duty, and live he must. His fingers were chilled to the bone. His clothes still clung like damp cerements to his body. The meagre blades of the scissors were worn short. They could not last long. Christian rose to his feet on the ledge of rock and plunged the scissors into the blank wall above him. Ah! what fresh disaster was this? His hand went deep into soft earth; the vein of rock had finished, and all that was above it must be loose, uncertain mold!

He gasped at the discovery. A minute since life had looked very dear. Must he abandon his hope of it after all? He paused and reflected. As nearly as he could remember, he had made twenty niches in the rock. Hence he must be fully thirty-five feet from the water, and ten from the surface. Only ten feet, and then—freedom! Yet these ten seemed to represent an impossibility. To ascend by holes dug deep in the soft earth was a perilous enterprise. A great clod of soil might at any moment give way above or beneath him, and then he would be plunged once more into the pit. If he fell from the side of the shaft, he would be more likely than at first to strike one of the projecting ledges, and be killed before he reached the water. There was nothing left but to wait for the dawn. Perhaps the daylight would reveal some less hazardous method of escape.

Slowly the dull, dead, impenetrable blackness above him was lifted off. It was as though a spirit breathed on the night and it fled away. When the woolly hue of morning dappled his larger sky,

Christian could hear the slow beat of the waves on the shore. The coast rose up before his vision then, silent, solemn, alone with the dawn. The light crept into his prison-house. He looked down at the deep black tarn.

And now hope rose in his heart again. Overhead he saw timbers running around and across the shaft. These had been used to bank up the earth and to make two grooves in which the ascending and descending cages had once worked. Christian lifted up his soul in thankfulness. The world was once more full of grace, even for him. He could climb from stay to stay, and so reach the surface.

Catching one of the stays in his uplifted hands, he swung his knees on to another. One stage was accomplished, but how stiff were his joints and how sinewless his fingers! Another and another stage was reached, and then four feet and no more were between him and the gorse that waved in the light of the risen sun across the mouth of his night-long tomb.

But the rain of years had eaten into these timbers. In some places they crumbled and were rotten. God! how the one on which he rested creaked under him at that instant. Another minute, and then the toilsome journey would be over. Another minute, and his dead self would be left behind him, buried forever in this grave! Then there would be a resurrection in very truth! Yes, truly, God helping him.

[Pg 437]

Christian had swimming eyes and a big heart as he raised himself on to the topmost stay that crossed the shaft, and clutched the long tussacs of the clinging gorse. Then, at the last spring, he heard a creak—another—louder—the timbers were breaking beneath his feet. At the same moment he heard a half-stifled cry—saw a face—it was Mona's face—there was a breathless instant of bewildered consciousness.

In another moment Christian was standing on the hillside, close locked in Mona's arms.

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 438]

GOD'S WRITING ON THE SEA

When the knocking ceased at Kisseck's, and Mona's footsteps were heard to turn away, Corteen and Killip knelt on the floor and felt the body of the master, and knew that he was dead.

"Let's get off anyway," said one; "let's away to sea, as the gel said. The fac's is agen us all."

"Maybe the man was right," said the other. "It's like enough she's got the Castle Rushen fellows behind her, and they'll be on us quick. Come, bear a hand."

Their voices sounded hollow. They lifted Kisseck on to their shoulders. A thin red stream was flowing from his breast. Corteen picked up a cap from the floor, and stanchd the blood. It was Danny's cap, and as they passed out it fell again in the porch.

Danny himself stepped away from the door to let them pass. He had watched their movements with big wide eyes. They went by him without a word. When they were gone, he followed them mechanically, scarcely knowing what he did. With bare head, and the pistol still hanging in his rigid hand, he stepped out into the night.

It was very dark now. They could see nothing save the glow of the fire burning furiously over the Poolvash. And only the sharp crackle of the kindling gorse and the deep moan of the distant sea could they hear. They took the low path back to the Lockjaw, where they had left the boats. The body was heavy, their steps were uncertain in the darkness, and their capture seemed imminent. As they passed the mouth of the old pit, Corteen proposed to throw the body into it. Killip assented; but Danny, who had not uttered word or sound until now, cried, "No, no, no." Then they hurried along.

When they reached the Lockjaw they descended to the bay, got into one of the boats, and pushed off. The other boat—the police-boat that Danny had brought from the castle—they pulled into mid-stream, and there sent it adrift. It ran ashore at the next flood tide, two miles further up the shore. When they got clear outside of the two streams that flow round the Head, they were amazed to find the "Ben-my-Chree" bearing down on them in the uncertain light. What had happened was this:

[Pg 439]

On running down the lamp that was put up on the ruined end of the pier, the two men who had charge of the fishing-boat had lain-to and stayed aboard for some minutes. Davy Cain and Tommy Tear, having effected their purpose ashore, had stolen away from their simple companions, and were standing on the quay. The two couples of men were exchanging words in eager whispers when they heard shouts from the castle. "What's that? Kisseck's voice?" "No." "Something has gone wrong. Let us set sail and away." So they stood out again to sea, passing close by the Castle Rock. They now realized that the voice they had remembered was the voice of Kinvig. That was enough to tell them that mischief had been brewing. They rounded the island and saw the fire over the head of the Lockjaw. They filled away and kept the boat off to her course. Soon they saw the dingey athwart their hawse and pulled to. Corteen and Killip lifted the body of Kisseck into

the fishing-boat, and Danny Fayle, all but as silent and rigid, was pulled up after it. As the lad was dragged over the gunwale the pistol dropped from his hand and fell with a splash into the sea. A word of explanation ensued, and once more they were standing out to sea, with their dread freight of horror and crime.

The wind was fresh outside. It was on their starboard quarter as they now made for the north. They saw the fire burning to leeward. It sent a long, red sinuous track of light across the black water that flowed between them and the land. Danny stood forward, never speaking, never spoken to, gazing fixedly at that sinuous track. To his affrighted senses it was as the serpent of guilt that kept trailing behind him.

When they were well away, and the men had time to comprehend in its awful fulness what had occurred, they stood together aft and whispered. They had placed the body of the master by the hatchways, and again and again they turned their heads toward it in the darkness. It was as though the body might even yet stand up in their midst, and any man at any moment might find it face to face with him, eye to eye. The certainty that it was dead had not taken hold of all of them. It still bled, and one of the crew, Quilleash, an old man reputed to possess a charm to stop blood, knelt down beside Kisseck, and whispered in his ear.

"A few good words can do no harm anyway," said Tear, and even Davy Cain was too much aghast to jeer at the superstition.

"Sanguis mane in te, Sicut Christus se," whispered the old man in his native tongue into the deaf ear, and then followed a wild command to the blood to cease flowing in the name of the three godly men who came to Rome—Christ, Peter, and Paul. [Pg 440]

The blood stopped indeed. But "Chamarroo as clagh" ("As dead as a stone"), said the old man, looking up.

Danny stood and looked on in silence. His spirit seemed to be gone, as though it could awake to life again only in another world.

When death was certain the men began to mourn over Kisseck, and recount their memories concerning him.

"Well, Bill's cruise is up, poor fellow; and a rael good skipper anyway."

"Poor Bill! What's that it's sayin'?—'He who makes a ditch for another may fall into it himself.'"

None spoke to Danny. A kind of awe fell on them in their dealings with the lad. They let him alone. It was as if he had been the instrument in greater hands.

"He hadn't a lazy bone in him, hadn't Bill. Aw, well, God will be aisy on the poor chap."

"You have to summer and winter a man before you know him. And leave it to me to know Kisseck. I've shared work, shared meat with him this many a year."

"And a fine big chap, and as straight as the backbone of a herring. Aw, well, well, well."

"Still, for sure, Bill made a man toe the mark. I'm thinking, poor chap, he's got summat to answer for anyway. Well, well, every man must go to the mill with his own sack."

Then they compared memories of how the dead man had foreseen his end. One remembered that Kisseck had said he knew he should not die in his bed. Another recalled the fact that on Good Friday morning Kisseck struck the griddle that hung in the ingle and tumbled it into the fire. This tangible warning of approaching death the witness had seen with his own eyes. A third man remembered that Kisseck had met a cat when going home on *Oie houiney* (Hallow Eve). And if these prognostications had counted for little, there was the remaining and awful fact that on New Year's Eve Bridget Kisseck had raked the fire on going to bed, and spread the ashes on the floor with the tongs, and next morning had found that print of a foot pointing toward the door which was the certain forewarning of death in the household within a year.

They were doubling the Point of Ayre, with no clear purpose before them, and with some misgivings as to whether they had done wisely in setting out to sea at all, when the wind fell to a dead calm. Then through the silence and darkness they heard large drops of rain fall on the deck. Presently there came a torrent, which lasted nearly an hour. The men turned in; only Danny and the body remained on deck. Still the lad could see the glow of the fire on the cliff, which was now miles away. When the rain ceased, the darkness, which had been all but palpable, lifted away, and the stars came out. Toward three in the morning the moon rose, but it was soon concealed by a dense black turret cloud that reared itself upward from the horizon. All this time the fishing-boat lay motionless, with only the lap of the waters heard about her. [Pg 441]

The stars died off, the darkness came again, and then, far on in the night, the first gray streaks stretching along the east foretold the dawn. Over the confines of another night the soft daylight was breaking, but more utterly lonely, more void, more full of dread and foreboding, was the great waste of waters now that the striding light was chasing the curling mists than when the night was dead and darkness covered the sea. On one side of them no other object on the waters was visible until sky and ocean met in that great half-circle far away. On the other side was the land which they called home—from which they had fled, to which they dared not return.

Still not a breath of wind. The boat was drifting south. The men came up from below. The cold

white face on the deck looked up at them, and at heaven. "We must put it away," said one, in a low murmur. "Aye," said another. Not a second word was spoken. A man went below and brought up an old sail. Two heavy iron weights, used for holding down the nets, were fetched up from the hold. There was no singing out. They took up what lay there cold and stiff, and wrapped it in the canvas, putting one of the weights at the head and another at the feet. Silently one man sat down with a sail-maker's needle and string, and began to stitch it up.

"Will the string hold?" asked another; "is it strong enough?"

"It will last him this voyage out—it's a short one, poor fellow."

Awe and silence sat on the crew.

Danny, his eyes suffused with an unearthly light, watched their movements from the bow. When he was lifted aboard last night a dull, dense aching at his heart was all the consciousness he had, and then the world was dead to him. Later on a fluttering within him preceded the return of an agonizing sense. Had he not sent his uncle to perdition? That he had taken a warm human life; that Kisseck, who had been alive, lay dead a few feet away from him—this was as nothing to the horrible thought that his uncle, a hard man, a brutal man, a sinful man, had been sent by his hand, hot and unprepared, to an everlasting hell. "Oh, can this have happened?" his bewildered mind asked itself a thousand times, as it awoke as often from the half-dream of a stunned and paralyzed consciousness. Yes, it was true that such a thing had occurred. No, it was not a nightmare. He would never, never awake in the morning sunlight and smile to know that it was not true. No, no—true, true; true it was even until the day of judgment, and he and Kisseck stood once more face to face.

[Pg 442]

Danny watched the old man when he whispered into the dead ear the words of the mystic charm. He turned his eyes to the sinuous trail of light behind him. All night long he lay on deck with only the dead for company. He saw the other men, but did not speak to them. It was as though he himself were already a being of another world, and could hold no commerce with his kind.

He thought of Mona, and then his heart was near to breaking. With a dumb longing his eyes turned through the darkness toward the land. The boat that was sailing before the wind was carrying him away from her forever. To his spiritualized sense the water that divided them was as the river that would flow for all eternity between the blessed and the damned.

The last ray of hope was flying away. It had once visited him, like a gleam of sunlight, that though he might never clasp her hand on earth, in heaven she would yet be his, to love forever and ever. But now between them the great gulf was fixed.

When the gray dawn came in the east, Danny still lay in the bow, haggard and pale. The unearthly light that now fired his eyes was the first word of a fearful tale. A witch's Sabbath, a devil's revelry, had begun in his distracted brain. In a state of wild hallucination he saw his own spectre. It had gone into the body of Kisseck, and it was no longer his uncle but himself who lay there dead. He was cold; his face was white, and it stared straight up at the sky. He watched with quick eyes the movements of the crew. He saw them bring up the canvas and the weights. He knew what they were going to do; they were going to bury him in the sea.

* * * * *

Silently the men brought from below the bank-board used in shooting the nets. They lifted the body on to it, and then with the scudding-pole they raised one end of the board on to the gunwale.

The boat had drifted many miles. She was now almost due west off Peel. The heavy clouds of night still rolled before the dawn. A gentle breeze was rising in the southwest.

[Pg 443]

All hands stood round and lifted their caps. Then the old man Quilleash went down on one knee, and laid his right hand on the body. Two other men raised the other end of the board.

"*Dy bishee jeeah shin*," murmured the old fisherman.

"God prosper you," echoed the others.

Then down into the wide waste of still water slid the body of Kisseck.

* * * * *

Danny saw it done. The image that had possession of him stood up so vividly before him at that instant that he shrieked. He peered into the water as if his eyes would bring back what the immemorial sea had swallowed up forever.

Forever? No! Listen!

Listen to that rumble as the waves circle over the spot where the body has disappeared! It is the noise of the iron weights shifting from their places. They are tearing open the canvas in which the body is wrapped. They have rolled out of it and sunk into the sea.

And now look!

The body, free of the weights, has come up to the surface. It is floating like a boat. The torn canvas is opening out. It is spreading like a sail in the breeze. Away it goes over the sea! It is

flying across the waters, straight for the land.

* * * * *

The men stood and stared into each other's faces in speechless dismay. It was as though an avenging angel had torn the murdered man from their grasp and cried aloud in their ears, "Blood will have blood."

They strained their eyes to watch it until it became a speck in the twilight of the dawn, and could be seen no more.

Nor had the marvel ended yet. A great luminous line arose and stretched from their quarter toward the land, white as a moon's water-way, but with no moon to make it. Flashing along the sea's surface for several seconds, it seemed to the men like the finger of God marking the body's path on the waters.

The phenomenon will be understood by those only who have marked closely what has been said of the varying weather of this fearful night, and can interpret aright its many signs. To the crew of the "Ben-my-Chree" it had but one awful explanation.

CHAPTER XVII

[Pg 444]

"OH, ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON"

As Mona stood at the angle of the mountain-path and the road leading to the door of Kisseck's cottage, she saw four men pass her and run into the house. She recognized Danny and his uncle, but not Christian. Perhaps the darkness deceived her, but she thought the other two were Corteen and Killip. After a few minutes she heard loud voices from the cottage, mingled with terrific oaths. If the police returned suddenly, and were made witnesses of this turmoil, discovery and conviction were certain. Mona crept up, meaning to warn the men and get them to put out to sea. She knocked, and had no answer. She tried the door, and it was barred. Still the loud quarreling continued. Among other voices, she recognized Kisseck's and Danny's. Christian's voice she could not hear, but in her perturbation and the angry tumult any voice might escape her. Then came the pistol-shot, the cry, the fall, and a long silence. She knocked again, and yet again. She called on Christian. She had no reply. She called on Kisseck. Then came the words, "Bill is gone to bed." Somehow, she knew not why, the words chilled her to the heart's core. Fearful, distraught, in the agony of uncertainty she fled away to the town. Christian, where was *he*? Had he indeed passed her among the rest? Was he in that house when that shot was fired? At whom? by whom? wherefore? The suspense was more terrible than the reality could have been.

Through Peel and on to Balladhoo Mona ran with shuddering heart. She asked for Christian first. How well her fears told her that he was not there. She asked for the gardener. Jemmy Quark Balladhoo, like Tommy-Bill-beg, was away at the waits. Something must be done, for something terrible had occurred. The hour was late, but Mylrea Balladhoo would certainly be awake, and waiting the return of Kerruish Kinvig with intelligence of the expected capture.

"Tell Mr. Mylrea I wish to speak with him at once and alone," said Mona.

In another moment Mylrea Balladhoo came to the door with a lamp held above his head, to catch sight of his late visitor. [Pg 445]

"Ah, the young woman from Kinvig. Come in, my girl; come in, come in."

Mona followed the old gentleman into the house. Her face in the lamplight was ashy pale, the pupils of her eyes were dilated, her lips quivered, her fingers trembled and were intertwined.

"Is Mr. Christian at home, sir?" said Mona.

Mylrea Balladhoo glanced up under his spectacles. What Kerruish Kinvig had once said of Christian and this young woman flashed across his mind at that instant. "No, my girl, no. Christian is helping the Castle Rushen men to lay hands on that gang of scoundrels, you know."

"He is not with them, sir," said Mona, with a fearful effort.

"Oh, yes, though; I sent Jemmy after him to instruct him. But he'll be home soon; I expect him every minute. I hope they've captured the vagabonds."

It was terrible to go on. Mona lifted up her whole soul in prayer for this old man, whose hour of utmost need had now come. And she herself was to deal the blow that must shatter his happiness. "God help him," she muttered, passionately, and the involuntary prayer was made audible.

Mylrea Balladhoo rose stiffly to his feet. He looked for an instant and in silence into the pale face before him.

"What is it?" he faltered, with an affrighted stare. "What news? Is Christian—Where is Christian? Have the scoundrels—injured him?"

"He was one of themselves," said Mona, and dropped to her knees in the depth of her agony.

Then slowly, disjointedly, inconsequentially, repeating incident after incident, beginning again and again, explaining, excusing, praying for pardon, and clasping the old man's knees in the tempest of her passion, Mona told the whole story as she knew it: how she had heard too late that Christian had gone out in Kisseck's boat; how she tried to compass his rescue; how, at the very crown and top of what she mistook for her success, the hand of Fate itself seemed to have been thrust in, to the ruin of all. She finished with the story of the flight of the four men to Kisseck's cottage, the quarreling there, the pistol shot, and the strange answer to her knock.

Mylrea Balladhoo stood still with the stupid, bewildered look of one who has been dealt an unexpected and dreadful blow. The world seemed to be crumbling under him. At that first instant there was something like a ghastly smile playing over his pallid face. Then the truth came rolling over his soul. The sight was fearful to look upon. He fell back with a low moan. But the good God sent the stricken old man the gift of tears. He wept aloud, and cried that he could better have borne poverty than such disgrace. "Oh, my son, my son! how have you shortened my days; how you have clothed me with shame; oh, my son, my son!" But love was uppermost even in that bitter hour.

[Pg 446]

It was not for this that Mona had made her way to Balladhoo. She wanted help. She must find where Christian was, and whether in truth he had been one of the four who passed her on the mountain-path.

Together she and Mylrea Balladhoo set off for Kisseck's cottage. How the old father tottered on the way! How low his head was bent, as if the darkness itself had eyes to peer into his darkened soul!

When they reached the cottage in the quarry the door was wide open. All was silent now. No one was within. A candle burned low on the table. The fire was out. A soft seaman's cap lay near the porch. Mona picked it up. It was Danny Fayle's. They stepped into the kitchen. A shallow pool was in the middle of the floor, and the light from the candle flickered in it. It was a pool of blood.

"My son, my son!" cried Mylrea Balladhoo. His knees failed him, and he sank to the floor. Tortured by suspense, bewildered, distracted, in an agony of doubt, he had jumped to the conclusion that this was Christian's blood, and that he had been murdered. No protest from Mona, no argument, no entreaty, prevailed to disturb that instant inference.

"He is dead, he is dead!" he cried; "now is my heart smitten and withered like grass." Then, rising to his feet, and gazing through his poor blurred eyes into Mona's face with a look of reproach, "Young woman," he said, "why would you torture an old man with words of hope? Christian is dead. My son is dead. Dead? Can it be true? Yes, dead. Lord, Lord, now let me eat ashes for bread, and mingle my drink with weeping."

And so he poured out his soul in a torrent of wild laments. Debts were as trifles to this. Disgrace was but as a dream to this dread reality. "Oh, my son, my son. Would to God I had died for thee. Oh, my son, my son!"

Mona stood by, and saw the unassuageable grief shake him to the soul. Then she took his hand in silence, and together they stepped again into the night. Out of that chamber of death Mylrea went forth a shattered man. He would not return to Balladhoo. Side by side they tramped up and down the harbor quay the long night through. Up and down, up and down, through darkness and rain, and then under moonlight and the stars, until the day dawned and the cheerless sun rose over the sleeping town.

[Pg 447]

Very pitiful was it to see how the old man's soul struggled with a vain effort to glean comfort from his faith. Every text that rose to his heart seemed to wound it afresh.

"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth.... They shall not be ashamed.... Oh, Absalom, my son, my son.... For thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.... I am poor and needy; make haste unto me, O God.... Hide not Thy face from Thy servant, for I am in trouble.... Set thine house in order.... Oh, God, Thou knowest my foolishness.... The waters have overwhelmed me, the streams have gone over my soul, the proud waters have gone over my soul."

Thus hour after hour, tottering feebly at Mona's side, leaning sometimes on the girl's arm, the old man poured forth his grief. At one moment, as they stood by the ruined end of the pier, and Danny's gorse fire glowed red over the Lockjaw Creek, and the moon broke through a black rain-cloud over the town, the sorrowing man turned calmly to Mona and said, with a strange resignation: "I will be quiet. Christian is dead. Surely I shall quiet myself as a child that is weaned of its mother. Yes, my soul is even as a weaned child."

Just then two of the police who had been on the cliff-head came up and spoke.

"They have escaped us so far, sir," he said, "but we are certain to have them. The fire yonder was lit to warn them. Your fishing-boat, the "Ben-my-Chree," has been taken out to sea. Every man that is in her must be captured. Don't trouble to stay longer, sir. We are posted everywhere about. They are doomed men. Make your mind easy, sir, and go off to your bed. Good-night."

Mona felt the old man's arm tremble as it lay on hers.

The day dawned, and they parted. Mylrea Balladhoo said he would go home now, and away he started along the shore. With the coming of daylight his sorrow bled afresh, and he cried piteously.

* * * * *

Mona turned in the opposite direction. She, on her part, had not given up hope of Christian. She could not forget that she had not recognized him among the men who ran past her into Kisseck's house. Christian was still alive, but who was it that was dead?

[Pg 448]

Mona stopped. The seaman's cap which she had picked up at the porch of the deserted cottage in the quarry she had carried all night in her hand. At that instant she looked at it again, and seeing it for the first time in the daylight she saw that it was stained with spots of blood. It was Danny Fayle's cap. Then it must be Danny who was dead. The inference in her case was as swift as in the case of Mylrea Balladhoo. And as little would argument or entreaty have prevailed to disturb it.

Danny was dead, and it was she who had sent him to his death. His great little heart that had been broken for love of her, had also died for her sake.

And now the anguish of the girl was not less than that of the old man himself. Where was Christian? Did he know what Kisseck had done? It must have been Kisseck. But God would punish him. Had Christian gone out to sea?

Mona set off for the Lockjaw Creek, thinking that some trace of Christian might perhaps be found there.

She took the high path. The sun had risen, and the gorse fire burned blue. When she came by the mouth of the old mine she was thinking both of Danny and of Christian. "He will be cold now; he will be in heaven," she muttered to herself.

Then it was that, half-buried in the pit, she saw the pallid, deep-plowed face of Christian himself. She could not suppress a cry. Then she heard the creak and the fall of the timbers under him. For a moment she lost consciousness, and in another moment she was in Christian's arms.

Hardly had the bewildered senses of these two regained an instant's composure when a man came running toward them from the town. In disjointed words he told them that some fearful thing had washed ashore in the bay, and that Mylrea Balladhoo was there, raving over it like one mad. This is what had happened.

* * * * *

As Balladhoo turned along the shore toward his home, bemoaning what he believed to be the death of Christian, his dazed eyes caught sight of a curious object some distance out at sea. It might be a gig with a sail, but it looked too small. It might be a diver or a solan goose with outspread wings, but it looked too large. What it was mattered little to him. The world had lost its light. The sun that shone above him entered not into his soul. His days henceforth were to be but as a shadow that passeth away.

Balladhoo walked on, moaning and crying aloud. As he approached his house every step awoke a new grief; every stone, every hedge, was sacred to some memory. Here he had seen the lad playing with other lads. Here, laughing and calling, he had seen him ride the rough colt his father gave him. As he opened the gate he could almost imagine he saw a fair-haired boy running to meet him, a whip in one hand and a toy horse tumbling behind. Balladhoo lifted his head to brush away the blinding tears. As he did so his eyes fell on a window in the gable half-hidden by the leafless boughs of an old rose-tree. That awoke the bitterest and oldest memory of all. It was of a fair young woman's form, with joy in the blue eyes and laughter on the red lips. In her arms was a child, and she cried to it "Look," as the little one, plunging and leaping, called "Papa, papa," and clapped its tiny hands.

[Pg 449]

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed....

No, Mylrea Balladhoo could not enter his house. It was full of too many spectres.

He turned back. It was to be anywhere; he knew not where. Jemmy, the gardener, who had been awake all night in amazement and distress at his master's absence, saw him now approach the house, went up to his side, tried to speak to him, and, failing to get a word in reply, walked in silence by his side.

He returned along the shore. And now the white thing which he had seen before was within fifty yards of the beach, and was sailing due to land. What could it be? In a minute it drifted to Balladhoo's feet, and then he saw that it was a human body which had been bound in canvas for burial at sea, and had come ashore in this strange way. He gave it but one glance. He did not look to see whose body it was. He concluded at once that it must be the body of Christian. Had he not heard that the men had put out to sea? They had taken the body of his murdered son with them, and tried to bury it there and hide their crime forever. It was all so terribly plain to Balladhoo's bewildered mind. Then he cried aloud in a tempest of agony that nothing could restrain. His religion seemed to desert him. At least it gave no comfort. His face became suddenly and awfully discolored and stern, and, standing by the dread thing on the sand, the tottering old man lifted his clenched fist to the sky in silent imprecation of Heaven.

Jemmy Quark left him, and, rushing to the town, cried out that something horrible had washed ashore. One of those who heard him had seen Mona and Balladhoo part on the quay. This man went in pursuit of the young woman, who had been seen to take the path over Contrary.

And now Christian and Mona, with a group of others, hastened to the bay. There—seeing nothing but the dread thing lying on the shore—was Mylrea Balladhoo. He was crying aloud that if Heaven had spared his boy Hell might have taken all else he had.

[Pg 450]

"Oh, my son, my son, would to God I had died for you! Oh, my son, my son!"

Then the stricken father went down on his knees, and stretched out a feeble, trembling hand to draw aside the canvas that hid the face.

As he did so Mona and Christian came up. Christian stood opposite his father on the other side of the corpse; the old man on his knees, the son on his feet, the dead man between them.

The others stood around. None spoke. Then Mona, motioning Christian to silence, stepped up to Balladhoo and knelt beside him. It was better that he should realize the truth by degrees and not too suddenly. He would see the face, and know that it was not the face of his son. Mona, on her part, knew it would be Danny's face. And the boy was dead. The beating of her heart fell low.

There was a moment of unutterable suspense. Then, with rapid, audible breath, the old man stretched out a half-palsied hand and drew off the loose canvas.

They saw the face of Kisseck.

Balladhoo got up with great wide eyes. There before him, face to face with him, was Christian himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

[Pg 451]

SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO ME

When the crew of the "Ben-my-Chree" had recovered from their first consternation on seeing the body of Kisseck rise to the surface and shoot away like a spectre boat, they hoisted sail and stood once more out to sea. The gentle breeze filled the canvas, and for half an hour the jib lay over the side, while the fishing-boat scudded along like a startled bird.

The sun rose over the land, a thin gauze obscuring it. The red light flashed and died away as if the wind were the sunshine. The haggard faces of the men caught at moments a lurid glow from it. In the west a mass of bluish cloud rested a little while on the horizon, and then passed into a nimbus of gray rain-cloud that floated above it. Such was the dawn and sunrise of a fateful day.

They were sailing north; they had no haven in their view. But Peel was behind them. Think what home is to the fisherman who goes down into the great deep. Then know that to them home could be all this no longer. The silvery voices of girls, the innocent prattle of little children, the welcome of wife, the glowing hearth—these were theirs no more. Then belly out, brave sail, and back off with a noise like thunder; let the blocks creak, and the ropes strain. Anywhere, anywhere, away from the withering reproach of the crime of one and the guilt of all.

But they were standing only two miles off Jurby Point when once more the wind fell to a dead calm. The men looked into each other's faces. Here was the work of fate. There was to be no flying away; God meant them to die on these waters. The sail flapped idly; they furled it, and the boat drifted south.

Then one after one sat down on the deck, helpless and hopeless. Hours went by. The day wore on. A passing breath sometimes stirred the waters, and again all around was dumb, dead, pulseless peace. Hearing only the faint flap of the rippling tide, they drifted, drifted, drifted.

Then they thought of home once more, and now with other feelings. Death was before them—slow, sure, relentless death. There was to be no jugglery. Let it be death at home rather than death on this desert sea. Anything, anything but this blind end—this dumb end; this dying bit by bit on still waters. To see the darkness come again and the sun rise afresh, and once more the sun sink and the darkness deepen, and still to lie there with nothing around but the changeless sea, and nothing above but the empty sky, and only the eye of God upon them, while the winds and the waters lay in His avenging hand. Let it rather be death—swift death, just death—there where their crime was attempted, and one black deed was done.

[Pg 452]

Thus despair took hold of them and drove all fear away. Each hard man, with despair seated on his rugged face, longed, like a sick child, to lay his head in the lap of home.

"What's it saying?" muttered the old man Quilleash, "'A green hill when far away; bare, bare when it is near.'"

It was some vague sense of their hopelessness that was floating through the old man's mind as he recalled the pathetic Manx proverb. The others looked down at the deck with a stony stare.

Danny still lay forward. When the speck that had glided along the waters could be seen no more, he had turned and gazed in silence toward the eastern light and the distant shores of morning. If madness be the symbol on earth of the tortures of the damned, Danny had then a few hours' blessed respite. He saw calmly what he had done and why he had done it. "Surely, God is just," he thought: "surely He will not condemn me; surely, surely not." Then, amid surging inward tears, which his eyes refused to shed, the simple lad tried to recall the good words that he had heard in the course of his poor, neglected, battered life. One after one they came back to him, most of them from some far-away and hazy dream-world, strangely bright with the vision of a face that looked fondly upon him, and even kissed him tenderly. "Gentle Jesus!" and "Now I lay me down to sleep"—he could remember them both pretty well, and their simple words went up with the supplicatory ardor of his great grown heart to the sky on which his longing eyes were bent.

The thought of Mona intertwined itself with the yearning hope of pardon and peace. It sustained him now to think of her. She became part of his scheme of penitence. His love for her was to redeem him in the Father's eye. He was to take it to the foot of God's white throne, and when his guilt came up for judgment he was to lay it meekly there and look up into the good Father's face. God had sent him his great love, and it was not for his harm that he had sent it.

Then a film overspread his sight, and when he awoke he knew that he had slept. He had seen Mona in a dream. There was a happy thought in her face. She loved and was beloved. Everything about her spoke of peace. All her troubles were gone forever. No, not that either. In her eyes was the reflection of his own face, and sometimes it made them sad. At the memory of this the dried-up well of Danny's own eyes moistened at last to tears.

[Pg 453]

The cold, thick winter day was far worn toward sunset. Not a breath of wind was stirring. Gilded by the sun's rays, the waters to the west made a floor of bleared red. The fishing-boat had drifted nearly ten miles to the south. If she should drift two miles more she must float into the southeasterly current that flows under Contrary Head. The crew lay half-frozen on the deck. No one cared to go below. All was still around them, and silence was in their midst. At last a man lifted his head, and asked if any one could say what had become of Christian. No one knew. Old Quilleash thought he must have come by some mischief, and perhaps be captured or even dead. It was only the general hopelessness of their hearts that gave a ready consent to this view of the possibilities. Then they talked of Christian as if he were no longer a living man.

"He didn't want to be in it, didn't the young mather," said one.

"Did you see how he was for cris-crossin' and putting up obstacles at every turn?" said another.

"That was nothin' to the way he was glad when we saw the lad's fire over the Lockjaw, and had to make a slant for it and leave the thing not done."

"Aw, well, well," said Quilleash, "it was poor Bill that's gone, God help him, that led the young mather into the shoal water. What's it sayin'—'Black as is the raven, he'll get a partner;' but Bill, poor chap, he must be for makin' a raven out of a dove."

"God won't be hard on the mather. No, no, God'll never be hard on a good heart because it keeps company with a bad head."

"It'll be Bill, poor chap, that'll have to stand for it when the big days comes," said Davy Cain.

"No, not that anyway. Still, for sure, it's every herring must hang by his own gill. Aw, yes, man," said Tommy Tear.

"Poor Mather Christian," said Quilleash, "I remember him since he was a baby in his mother's arms—and a fine lady, too. And when he grew up it was, 'How are you, Billy Quilleash?' And when he came straight from Oxford College, and all the larning at him, and the fine English tongue, and all to that, it was, 'And how are you to-day, Billy?' 'I'm middlin' to-day, Mather Christian.' Aw, yes, yes, a tender heart at him anyhow, and no pride at all, at all."

[Pg 454]

The old man's memories were not thrilling to narrate, but they brought the tears to his eyes, and he brushed them away with his sleeve.

They were now drifting past Peel, two miles from the coast. It was Christmas Eve. Old Quilleash thought of this, and they talked of Christmas Eves gone by, and of what happy days there had been. This was too tender a chord, and they were soon silent once more. Then, while the waters lay cold and clear and still, and the sun was sinking in the west, there came floating to them from the land through the breathless air the sound of church-bells. It was the last drop in their cup. The rude men could bear up no longer. More than one dropped his head on to his knees and sobbed aloud. Then Quilleash, in a husky voice, and coarsely, as if ashamed of the impulse, said, "Some one pray, will you?" "Ay," said another. "Ay," said a third. But no one prayed.

"You, Billy," said one. The old man had never known a prayer.

"You, Davy." Davy shook his head. None could pray.

All lay quiet as death around them. Only the faint sound of the bells was borne to them as a mellow whisper.

Then Danny rose silently to his feet. No one had thought of asking him. With that longing look in his big eyes, he turned to the land and began to sing. He was thinking of Mona. All his soul was

going out to her. She was his anchor, his hope, his prayer. The lad's voice, laden with tears, floated away over the great waters. This was what he sang:

"Her brow is like the snaw-drift,
Her neck is like the swan,
Her face it is the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on;
That e'er the sun shone on.

* * * * *

"And she's a' the world to me;
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee."

The boy's eyes were bright with a radiant brightness, and glistening tears ran down his face in gracious drops like dew. The men hung their heads and were mute.

All at once there came a breath of wind. At first it was as soft as an angel's whisper. Then it grew stronger and ruffled the sea. Every man lifted his eyes and looked at his mates. Each was struggling with a painful idea that perhaps he was the victim of a delusion of the sense. But the chill breath of the wind was indeed among them. "Isn't it beginning to puff up from the sou'-west?" asked one, in a hoarse whisper.

[Pg 455]

At that Davy Cain jumped to his feet. The idea of the supernatural had already gone from him, at least. "Now for the sheets, and to make sail," he cried.

As mate formerly, Davy constituted himself skipper now.

One after one the men got up and bustled about. Their limbs were wellnigh frozen stiff.

"Heave hearty, men; heave and away."

All was stir and animation in an instant. Pulling at the ropes, the men had begun to laugh—yes, with their husky, grating, tear-drowned voices even to laugh.

"Bear a hand, men. We're drifting fast into the down-stream to Contrary," cried Davy.

Then a gruesome sense of the ludicrous took hold of him. It was the swift reaction from solemn thoughts.

"Lay on, Quilleash, my man. Why, you're going about like a brewing-pan. What are your arms for, eh?"

The old fellow's eyes, that had been dim with tears a moment ago, glistened with grisly mischief.

"Who hasn't heard that a Manxman's arms are three legs?" he said, with a hungry smile.

How the men laughed! What humor there was now in the haggard old saw!

"Where are you for, Davy?" cried one.

"Scotland—Shetlands," answered Davy, indefinitely.

"Hooraa! Bold fellow. Ha, ha, ha, he."

"I've been there before to-day, Davy," said Quilleash; "they're all poor men there; but it's right kind they are. Aw, yes, it's safe and well we'll be when we're there. What's it sayin'?—'When one poor man helps another poor man, God laughs.'"

How they worked! In two minutes mainsail and mizzen were up, and they filled away and stood out. But they had drifted into the down-stream, though they knew it not as yet.

From the shores of death they had sailed somehow into the waters of life. Hope was theirs once more.

They began to talk of what had caused the wind. "It was the blessed St. Patrick," said Killip. St. Patrick was the patron saint of that sea, and Killip was a Catholic and more than half an Irishman.

[Pg 456]

"St. Patrick be—" cried Davy Cain, with a scornful laugh. They got to high words, and at length almost to blows.

Old Quilleash had been at the tiller. His grisly face had grown ghastly again. "Drop it, men," he cried, in a voice of fear. "Look yander! D'ye see what's coming?"

The men looked toward the west. The long, thin cloud which Danny knew as the cat's-tail was scudding fast in the line of their Starboard quarter.

"Make all snug," cried Davy.

A storm was coming. It was very near; in ten minutes it was upon them. It was a terrific tempest, and they knew now that they were in the down-stream.

The men stared once more into each others' faces. Their quips were gone; their hopeful spirits had broken down.

"God, it's running a ten knots' tide," shouted Quilleash.

"And we're driving before it—dead on for Peel," answered Davy, with an appalling look of fear toward the west, where the wind was seen to be churning the long waves into foam.

Danny saw it all, but there was no agony in his face and no cry of dread on his lips. "I think at whiles I'd like to die in a big sea like that." His despair was courage now.

CHAPTER XIX

[Pg 457]

THE WORLD'S WANT IS MEN

In the old house at Balladhoo, three hearts nearly made glad had still one painful passage to experience. It was dusk. By the fire stood Mylrea Balladhoo, with Mona Cregeen seated beside him. Christian had stepped to the door, and now returning to the room with the stranger previously seen in his company, he said, with averted face, "This is the man, father."

Balladhoo neither lifted his eyes to the new-comer nor shifted their gaze from the fire. His frame trembled perceptibly as he said, "I know your business, sir, and it shall have my attention." The stranger glanced from father to son. They stood apart, each unable to meet the other's face. Perhaps there is no more touching sight in nature, rightly regarded, than an old man, and to the pathos incident to age Balladhoo added the sorrow of a wretched and shattered hope.

"May I ask if this deed was drawn by your authority?" said the stranger. He stepped up to the old man, and put the document into his listless hand. Balladhoo glanced down at it, but his poor blurred eyes saw nothing.

"Yes," he answered, promptly enough, but in a husky voice. Christian's face quivered, and his head dropped on his breast. The stranger looked incredulous. "It is quite right if you say so," he answered, with a cold smile.

Balladhoo lifted his face. It was seamed with lines of pain, and told of a terrible struggle. "I *do* say so," he replied.

His fingers crumpled the deed as he spoke; but his head was erect, and truth seemed to sit on his lips. Christian sat down and buried his eyes in his hand.

The stranger smiled again the some cold smile. "The mortgagor wishes to withdraw the mortgage," he said.

"He may do so—in fifteen days," answered Balladhoo.

"That will suffice. It would be cruel to prolong a painful interview."

Then, with a glance toward Christian, as he sat convulsed with distress that he was unable to conceal, the stranger added, in a hard tone:

[Pg 458]

"Only, the mortgagor came to have reasons to think that perhaps the deed had been drawn without your knowledge."

Balladhoo handed back the document with a nerveless hand. He looked again through dim eyes at the stranger, and said quietly, but with an awful inward effort, "You have my answer—I knew of it."

The recording angel set down the words in the Book of Life to the old man's credit in heaven. They were not true.

The stranger bowed low and retired.

Christian leaped up and took his father by both hands, but his eyes were not raised to the troubled face.

"This is worse than all," he said, "but God knows everything. He will make me answer for it."

"What is the debt?" asked Balladhoo, with an effort to be calm.

"Money squandered in England."

The old man shook his head with an impatient gesture.

"I mean how much?"

"A thousand pounds." There was a pause.

"We can meet it," said Balladhoo; "and now, my son, cheer up; set your face the right way, and His servant shall not be ashamed."

Christian strode up and down the room. His agitation was greater than before. "I feel less than a man," he said. "Oh, but a hidden sin is a mean thing, father—a dwarfing, petrifying, corroding, unmanly thing. And to think that I could descend so low as to try to conceal it—a part of it—by consorting with a gang of lawless fellows—by a vulgar outrage that might have ended in death itself but that the hand of Heaven interposed!"

"You are not the first," answered Balladhoo, "who has descended from deceit to the margin of crime; but it isn't for me to judge you. Read your misfortunes, my lad, as Heaven writes them. Are they not warnings against the want of manliness? No, it's not for me to say it; but if there's one thing truer than another, it is that the world wants *men*. Clever fellows, good fellows, it has ever had in abundance, but in all ages the world's great want has been *men*."

Balladhoo glanced down at Mona. Throughout this interview she had sat with eyes bent on her lap. The old man touched the arm of his son and continued:

"As for the hand of Heaven, it has worked through the hand of this dear, brave girl. You owe her your life, Christian, and so do I." [Pg 459]

Then the young man, with eyes aflame, walked to Mona and lifted her into his arms. The girl looked very beautiful in her confusion, and while she sobbed on Christian's breast, and Balladhoo looked on with wondering eyes, Christian confessed everything; how, in effect, Mona had been his wife for six years past, and little Ruby was their child.

It was a staggering blow. But when the surprise of it was past, all was forgiven.

"You love my boy?" said Balladhoo, turning to Mona.

The girl could not answer in words. She threw her arms around the old man's neck, and he kissed her. Then through the tears that had gathered in his blurred old eyes there shot a merry gleam as he said above the girl's hidden face, "Oh, so I've got to be happy yet, I find."

There came the noise of people entering the house. In another moment Kerruish Kinvig had burst in with one of the Castle Rushen men behind him.

"Manxman-like, he's a dog after the fair, and away from Peel to-night," bawled Kinvig, indicating the subject of his inconsequent remarks by a contemptuous lurch of his hand over his shoulder.

"We stayed too long in hiding," said the man, with a glance of self-justification.

"Of course," shouted Kinvig, oblivious of the insinuation against his own leadership; "and who hasn't heard that the crab that lies always in its hole is never fat?"

"The fishing-boat is still at sea, sir. It's scarce likely that the men will come back to Peel," said the man, addressing Balladhoo.

"Who dreamed that they would?" cried Kinvig. "What black ever stamped on his own foot?"

"We're trusting you think we've done our best, sir," continued the man, ignoring the interruptions.

"Eaten bread is quick forgotten," shouted Kinvig. "What you've done you've done, and there's an end of it, and it's not much either; and if I were magistrate, I'd have the law on the lot of you for a pack of incompetent loblolly boys. Wouldn't you, Christian?"

"You have done your best," said Balladhoo, and the man left them. "As for you, Kerruish," he added, "if you'd had the ill-luck to succeed, think what a sad dog you must have been by this time; you would have had nothing to growl about."

Christian had walked to the window. "Hark," he said, turning to Mona, "the wind is rising. What of those poor fellows outside?" The melancholy sigh of the wind could be heard above the low moan of the distant sea. Mona thought of Danny, and the tears came again into her eyes. [Pg 460]

It was time for the girl to return home. Christian put on his hat to accompany her, and when they left the house together he laughed, dejected though he was, at the bewildered look on the face of Kerruish Kinvig as he glanced in stupid silence from Balladhoo to them, and from them back to Balladhoo.

CHAPTER XX

[Pg 461]

THE FAIRY THAT CAME FOR RUBY

The night was dark, and the wind was chill outside, but light and warmth were in two happy hearts. With arms entwined and clasped hands they walked down the familiar road, transfigured now into strange beauty at every step. When two souls first pour out their flood of love, whatever the present happiness, it is the unconscious sense of a glad future that thrills them. It was the half-conscious sense of a sad past shared together that touched these two to-night.

"I feel like another man," said Christian; "to have the weight of these six years of disguise lifted

away is a new birth." He seemed to breathe more freely.

"How glad I am it is gone, this haunting secret," said Mona, with a sigh of relief; but suddenly a fresh torment suggested itself. "What will people say?" she asked.

"Don't think of that. Let people say what they will. In these relations of life the world has always covered its nakedness in the musty rags of its old conventions, and dubbed its clothes morality. We'll not heed what people say, Mona."

"But the child?" said the girl, with some tremor of voice.

Christian answered the half-uttered question.

"Ruby is as much my daughter as Rachel was the daughter of Laban, and you are even now as much my wife as she was the wife of Jacob."

Mona glanced up into his face. "Can this be Christian?" she thought.

"Where one man sets himself apart for one woman," he continued, "there is true marriage, whether the mystic symbol of the Church be used or not. No; I've feared the world too long. I mean to face it now."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Christian," answered Mona. "But surely to defy the world is foolishness, and marriage is a holy thing."

He stopped, and, with a smile, kissed the girl tenderly. "Never fear, darling—*that* shall be made as the world wants it. I was thinking of the past, not the future. And if ours was a sin, it was one of passion only, and we whispered each other—did we not?—that He who gave the love would forgive its transgression." Then they walked on. In the distance the hill above glowed red through the darkness. Danny's Contrary fire, which had smoldered all day, showed brightly again. [Pg 462]

"Oh, how glad I am that all is over," repeated the girl, creeping closer beneath Christian's arm. "You said to-night to your father that a secret sin is a corroding thing. How truly I've felt it so when I've thought of my own poor father. You never knew him. He died before you came to us. He was a good, simple man, and loved us, though perhaps he left us poorer than we might have been, and more troubled than we were in the old days at Glen Rushen."

"No, I never knew him; but the thought of him has stung me to the quick when I've seen his daughter working for daily bread. It has been then that I've felt myself the meanest of men."

"Christian," continued Mona, regardless of the interruption, "have you ever thought that the dead are links that connect us with the living?"

"How?"

"Well, in this way. From our kin in heaven we can have no secrets; and when the living kin guess our hidden thought, our secret act, perhaps it has been our dead kin who have whispered of it."

"That is a strange fancy, Mona, an awful fancy. Few of us would dare to have secrets if we accepted it."

They were approaching the cottage, and could hear a merry child's voice singing. "Listen," said Mona, and they stopped. Then the girl's head dropped. Tears were again in her eyes.

"She's been sorrow as well as happiness to you, my brave Mona," said Christian. And he put her arms about his neck.

The girl lifted her face to his in the darkness. "That's true," she said. "Ah, how often in the early days did I gaze into the face of my fatherless little one, and feel a touch of awe in the presence of the mute soul that lay behind the speechless baby face, and wonder if some power above had told it something that its mother must needs hide from it, and if, when it spoke, it would reproach me with its own shame, or pity me for mine."

Christian smoothed her hand tenderly. "If the child suffered," he said, "before her race of life began, let it be mine henceforth to make it up to her with all that love can yet do." [Pg 463]

"And when I heard its cry," said Mona, "its strange, pitiful cry as it awoke from that mystery, a baby's troubled dream, and looked into its red startled eyes and into its little face, all liquid grief, and said, 'It's only a dream, darling,' the thought has sometimes stolen up to my heart that perhaps some evil spirit had whispered to it the story of its shame—for what else had it to cry about so bitterly?"

Christian kissed her again, a great gulp in his throat. "Yes," he said, "in the eyes of men we may have wronged the child, but in the eternal world, when these few painful years are as a span, she will be ours indeed, and God will not ask by right of what symbol we claim her."

They had walked to the gate.

"Wait!" said Mona, and ran toward the door.

Christian thought she had gone to prepare her mother, but returning in an instant, and on tip-toe, with the light of laughter struggling through her tears, she beckoned him to follow her, with stealthy tread. Creeping up to the window, she took his hand and whispered, "Look!"

They were standing in the darkness and cold, but the house within was bright this winter's night, with one little human flower in bloom. Ruby had dressed the kitchen in hibbin and hollen and had scattered wheaten flour over the red berries to resemble snow. She was standing near Mrs. Cregeen's knee, being undressed for bed. Her heart had leaped all day at the thought of a new hat, which she was to wear for the first time next morning. This treasure had been hung on a peg over the plates above the dresser, and at intervals more or less frequent Ruby twisted about and cocked her eye up at it. It took a world of stolen glances to grow familiar with the infinite splendor of its bow and feather. While the threads and the buttons were being undone Ruby sang and gossiped. A well-filled water-crock had been set on the table, and touching this, the little one said:

"Do the fairies bathe in winter?"

"So they're saying, my veen," answered Mrs. Cregeen.

"Can I see the fairies if I lie awake all night? I'm not a bit sleepy. Can I see them all in their little velvet jackets—can I?"

"No, no; little girls must go to bed."

There was a pretty pretense at disappointment in the downward curve of the lip. The world had no real sorrow for the owner of that marvelous hat. The next instant the child sang:

"I rede ye beware of the Carrasdoe men
As ye come up the wold;
I rede ye beware of the haunted glen—"

[Pg 464]

Ruby interrupted her song to wriggle out of Mrs. Cregeen's hands, pull off her stocking, and hang it on one of the knobs of the dresser. "I hope it will be the Phynnodderee that comes to-night," she said.

"Why that one?" said Mrs. Cregeen, smiling.

"Because Danny says that's the fairy that loves little Manx girls."

"Danny shouldn't tell you such foolish old stories."

"Are they stories?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

Another sly glance at the wonderful hat on the peg behind. That was a reality at all events.

"But I'm sure a good fairy will come for me to-night," insisted Ruby.

"Why are sure, Ruby veg?"

"Because—because I *am*."

Christian tightened his grasp of Mona's hand.

At that moment a gust of wind passed round the house. Mona remembered that to-night she was standing with Christian on the spot where last night she had parted with Danny.

"Listen," said Mrs. Cregeen to the child. "Pity the poor sailors at sea."

"Didn't Mona say Danny was at sea?"

"Yes, she was saying so."

Then the little one sang:

"In Jorby curragh they dwell alone
By dark peat bogs, where the willows moan,
Down in a gloomy and lonely glen—"

"Mammy, had Danny any father?"

"Everybody had a father, my veen."

"Had Ruby a father?"

"Hush, Ruby veg!"

Mona's hand unconsciously pressed the hand of Christian. "Oh," she muttered, and crept closer to his breast. Christian's bowels yearned for the child.

The silvery voice was singing again:

"Who has not heard of Adair, the youth?
Who does not know that his soul was truth?
Woe is me! how smoothly they speak,
And Adair was brave, and a man, but weak."

[Pg 465]

"I am quite sure a good fairy is coming," said Ruby, cocking her eye aslant at that peg on the dresser.

Christian could bear it no longer. He flung open the door, and snatched up the darling in his arms.

An hour later he and Mona came out again into the night, leaving the little one with laughing, wondering, wakeful eyes in bed, and Mrs. Cregeen sitting before the fire with something like happiness in her usually mournful face.

They took the road toward the town. They had no errand there, but the restless, tumultuous joy of this night would not leave them a moment's peace.

As they passed through the market-place they saw that the church windows were lit up. The bells were ringing. Numbers of young people were thronging in at the gates. But the parson was coming out of them. There was no pleasant expression on his face as he beheld the throngs that sought admission. It was Oiel Verree, the Eve of Mary. The bells were ringing for the only service in the year at which not the parson but the parishioners presided. It was an old Manx custom, that after prayers on Christmas-eve the church should be given up to the people for the singing of their native carols. Prayers were now over, and on his way through the market-place the parson encountered Tommy-Bill-beg among the others who were walking toward the church. He stopped the harbor-master, and said, "Mind you see that all is done in decency and order, and that you close your church before midnight."

"Aw, but the church is the people's, I'm thinkin'," said Tommy-Bill-beg, with a deprecating shake of his wise head.

"The people are as ignorant as goats," said the parson angrily.

"Aw, well, and you're the shepherd, so just make sheeps of them," answered Tommy, and passed on.

Laughing at the rejoinder, Christian and Mona went by the church, and, reaching the quay, they crossed the bridge at the top of the harbor. Then, hand in hand, they walked under the Horse Hill, and, without thinking what direction they took, they turned up the path that led toward the cottage in the old quarry.

Half the hillside seemed to be ablaze. Danny's fire over the Poolvash had spread north by many hundred yards. The wind was now blowing strongly from the sea, and fanned it into flame. The castle could be seen by its light from the black rocks fringed about with foam to the top of Fennella's Tower.

[Pg 466]

When they came abreast of the cottage they saw that a dim light burned in one window. They stepped up and looked into the house. On a bed, covered by a white sheet, lay all that remained of Kisseck. An old woman, set to watch the body, sat knitting beside it.

The deep roar of the sea was all that could be heard there above the moan of the wind.

CHAPTER XXI

[Pg 467]

OIEL VERREE

On this occasion, as on all similar occasions for the last thirty years, Tommy-Bill-beg, the harbor-master, and Jemmy Quark Balladhoo had been each to contribute toward the curious Manx ritual of carol or carval singing. Great had hitherto been the rivalry between these musical celebrities. But word had gone around the town that to-night their efforts were to be combined in a carol which they were to sing together. A young wag had effected this extraordinary combination by a plot which was expected to add largely to the amusement of the listeners.

Tommy-Bill-beg, as was well known, could not read a syllable, yet he would never sing his carol without having the printed copy of it in his hand. Such curious vanity had long been a cause of merriment, and now some capital was to be made out of it. Jemmy Quark Balladhoo, on the other hand, could read, but he resembled Tommy-Bill-beg in being almost stone-deaf. Each could hear himself sing, but neither could hear another.

And now for the plot. Young Mr. Wag had called on the harbor-master that morning at his ivy cottage, and, "Tommy," said he, "it's mortal strange the way a man of your common-sense can't see that you'd wallop that squeaking ould Jemmy Balladhoo in a jiffy if you'd only consent to sing a ballad along with him. Bless me, it's then they'd be seeing what a weak, ould, cracked pot of a voice is at him."

Tommy-Bill-beg's face began to wear a smile of benevolent condescension. Observing his advantage, the young rascal continued, "Do it at the Oiel Verree to-night, Tommy. He'll sing his treble, and you'll sing seconds to him."

It was an unlucky remark. The harbor-master frowned with the austerity of a Malvolio. "*Me* sing

seconds to the craythur? No; never!"

It was explained to Tommy-Bill-beg, with a world of abject apology, that there was a sense in which seconds meant firsts. The harbor-master was mollified, and at length consented to the proposal; but with one idea clearly impressed upon his mind, namely, that if he was to sing a carol with Jemmy Balladhoo, he must take good care to sing his loudest, in order to drown at once the voice of his rival, and the bare notion that it was *he* who was singing seconds to such a poor creature as that.

[Pg 468]

Then Mr. Wag walked up the hill to Balladhoo, and, "Jemmy," said he, "it's mortal strange the way a man of your common-sense can't see that you'd wallop that squeaking ould Tommy-Bill-beg in a jiffy if you'd only consent to sing a ballad along with him. Do it at the Oiel Verree to-night, Jemmy, and bless me! that's the time when they'll be seeing what a weak, ould, cracked pot of a voice is at the craythur."

The gardener of Balladhoo fell an easier prey to the plot than the harbor-master, and a carol was selected. It was to be the ancient carol on the bad women mentioned in the Bible as having (from Eve downward) brought evil on mankind. This was accounted an appropriate ditty for these notable illustrations of bachelordom.

Now, Tommy-Bill-beg always kept his carols where Danny saw them—pinned against the walls of his cottage. The "Bad Women" was the carol which was pinned above the mantelpiece. It resembled all the others in being worn, crumpled, and dirty; but Tommy knew it by its locality, and could distinguish every other by its position.

Young Mr. Wag had somehow got what he called a "skute" into this literary mystery; so, after arranging with Jemmy Quark, he watched Tommy-Bill-beg out of his house, crept into it unobserved took down the carol pinned above the mantelpiece, and fixed up another in place of it from a different part of the room. The substituted carol happened, oddly enough, to be a second copy of the Same carol on "Bad Women," with this radical difference: that the one taken down was the version of the carol in English, and the one put up was the version in Manx.

The bells began to ring, and Tommy-Bill-beg donned his best petticoat and monkey-jacket, put the carol in his pocket, and went off to church.

Prayers had been said that night to a thin congregation, but no sooner were they done, and the parson had prepared to leave, than great crowds of young men and maidens trooped down the aisles. The young women went up into the gallery, and from that elevation shot down at their bachelor friends large handfuls of peas; but to what ancient spirit of usage, beyond the ancient spirit of mischief, the strange practise was due must be left as a solemn problem to the learned and curious antiquaries.

[Pg 469]

Nearly everybody carried a candle, the candles of the young women being usually adorned with a red ribbon and rosette. The brilliance of illumination was such as the dusky old church enjoyed only once in a year.

When everything was understood to be ready, and the parish clerk had taken his station inside the communion-rail, the business of the Oiel Verree began. First one man got up and sang a carol in English; then another sang a Manx carol. The latter depicted the physical sufferings of Christ, and described, with an intensity of "naturalism" even yet unknown to modern literature, how the "skin was torn off his shoulder-blade." But the great event of the night was to be the carol sung by the sworn enemies, Tommy-Bill-beg and Jemmy Quark Balladhoo.

At last their time came. They rose from opposite sides of the church, eyed each other with severe looks, stepped out of their pews, and walked down the aisle to the door of the porch. Then they turned about in silence, and, standing side by side, faced the communion.

The whispering in the gallery and tittering in the body were audible to all except the persons who were the occasion of them.

"Hush, hush, ma veen, that's him, that's him." "Bless me, look at Tommy-Bill-beg and the petticoat, and the handkercher pinnin' round his throat!" "Aw, dear, it's what he's used of." "A reg'lar Punch-and-Judy." "Hush, man, let them make a start for all."

The carol they were about to sing contained some thirty verses. It was an ancient usage that after each verse the carol-singers should take a long stride together toward the communion. By the time the carol came to an end they must therefore be at the opposite end of the church. What this meant must also be left to the venerable doctors aforesaid.

There was now a sublime scorn printed on the features of Jemmy Quark. As for Tommy-Bill-beg, he looked at this last moment like a man who was rather sorry than otherwise for his rash adversary. "The rermantick they're looking," whispered one expectant maiden in the gallery to a giggling companion beside her.

Expectation was at its highest when Tommy-Bill-beg thrust his hand into the pocket of his monkey-jacket and brought out the printed copy of the carol. Tommy unfolded it, glanced at it with the air of a conductor taking a final look at his score, nodded his head at it as if in approval, and then, with a magnanimous gesture, held it between himself and Jemmy Quark. Jemmy in turn glanced at it, glanced again, glanced a third time at the paper, and then up into the face of Tommy-Bill-beg.

[Pg 470]

Anxiety was now on tiptoe. "Hush, d'ye hear, hush, or it's spoiling all you'll be, for sure."

At the moment when Jemmy Quark glanced into the face of Tommy-Bill-beg there was a smile on that benign countenance. Jemmy mistook that smile. He imagined he saw a trick. Jemmy could read, and he perceived that the carol which the harbor-master held out to him was not the carol he had been told to prepare for. They were, by arrangement, to have sung the English version of "Bad Women." This was the Manx version, and it was always sung to a different metre. Ha! Jemmy understood it all! This rascally Tommy-Bill-beg was trying to expose him. The monster wanted to show that he, Jemmy Quark Balladhoo, could only sing one carol, but Jemmy would be even with him. He *could* sing this Manx version, and he *would*. It was Jemmy's turn to smile.

"Aw, look at them—the pair of them—grinnin' together like the two ould gurgoils on the steeple."

At a motion of the harbor-master's hand, intended to beat the time, the singers began. Tommy-Bill-beg sang the carol agreed upon—the English version of "Bad Women." Jemmy Quark sang the carol of which they held the printed copy in their hands—the Manx version of "Bad Women." Neither heard the other. Each bawled at the utmost reach of his lung-power. To one tune Tommy-Bill-beg sang:

"Thus from the days of Adam
Her mischief you may trace,"

and to another tune Jemmy Quark sang:

"She ish va'n voir ain ooilley
Son v'ee da Adam ben,"

What laughter ensued! How the young women in the gallery lay back in their seats with shrieks of hysteria! How the young fellows in the body made the sacred edifice ring with guffaws! But the singers—Tommy especially—with eyes steadfastly fixed on the paper, heard nothing but each his own voice. Thus they sang on.

They had got through three verses, and made three strides toward the communion, when suddenly there was heard above the uproar a dismal and unearthly cry, and all at once the laughter and the shouting of the people ceased. Every face turned to the porch.

[Pg 471]

Bareheaded, dripping wet from his matted hair to his feet, a ghastly light in his sunken eyes, with wasted cheeks and panting breath, Danny Fayle stood there, one hand on the door-jamb, the other holding a coil of rope.

"The 'Ben-my-Chree' is on the rocks!" he cried, and was gone in an instant.

If a spectre had appeared the consternation had scarcely been greater. But the next moment, recovering from their surprise, the people on all sides leaped up and rushed out of the church. In two minutes not a soul was left except Tommy-Bill-beg and Jemmy Quark Balladhoo, who still sang lustily, oblivious of the fact that they had no audience.

CHAPTER XXII

[Pg 472]

ON THE MOAR REEF

This is what had happened.

When Christian and Mona turned away from the house in the quarry, with its dead man and solitary watcher, they thought they descried a sail far out in the black void beyond the line of wild sea that was lighted up by the burning gorse.

"Let's hope they're not in the down-stream, poor fellows, whoever they are," said Christian. "In a wind like this it would be certain to drive them dead on to the Moar Reef."

Then they continued their walk, and passed the open shaft in which Christian had spent his night of peril and agony. There was so much to say that neither spoke except at long intervals. There was so much else to feel that neither felt weary, nor remembered the many hours in which both had been strangers to sleep. They might have wandered on—two dark figures against the red glow of the great fire—until the steep declivities of the Poolvash had stopped them, but that the wind rose higher every moment, and threatened to sweep them from their feet.

"Listen how the sea thunders," said Christian; and just then a cloud of hissing spray came up to them, high as they were, from the boiling surge below.

They turned back, laughing as every gust tore them a little apart.

Before they passed the cottage on their return they were conscious of faint cries from beneath.

"Hark," said Mona, "surely they were voices from the sea."

There could be no doubt of it now. Several voices were calling in accents of fearful agony, and

above the rest was one wild thin shriek. It seemed to echo in the lowering dome of the empty sky—was such a cry of distress as might haunt one's dreams for years.

"It's from the boat we saw, and they're on the Moar Reef, too surely," said Christian. Then they hastened on.

When they reached the shore they found the sea running high. A long ground-swell was breaking in the narrow strait between the mainland and the Castle Isle. Flakes of sea-foam were flying around them. The waves were scooping up the shingle and flinging it through the air like sleet. [Pg 473]

The cries were louder here than above. By the light of Danny's fire it was but too easy to see from whence they came. Jammed between two huge protruding horns of rock a fishing-boat was laboring hard in the heavy sea, rearing with a creak on the great waves, and plunging down with a crash and groan on the sharp teeth of the shoal beneath her.

The men on deck could be seen hacking at the mast to lighten her, and cutting away the gunwale forward to ease her off the horns that held her like a vise. But every fresh wave behind drove her head deeper into the cleft. The men shouted in mingled rage and fear. They tried to leap on to the rocks, but the weight of seas breaking on them made this a perilous adventure, even if the pitching of the boat left it possible.

Christian took in the situation in an instant. Two or three small boats were lying high and dry on the shore. He ran to them, cut away their cables, tied them together in strong knots, slung one end round his waist and passed the other about an old spar that lay close by.

"They're too near for us to stand and see them die," he shouted excitedly above the tumult of the wind.

Mona clung to him for an instant. Then she loosed him with a fervent kiss.

In another moment he had plunged into the water.

The strait was very narrow—sixty feet at most from the shore to the rocks. Yet what a toilsome journey to the man who was wading off with the rope. The tide was flowing and near the top. It never rose higher than four or five feet in this channel. A man might cross it if the swell did not sweep him back.

Through the boiling surf, piercingly cold, Christian struggled bravely. He was young and strong. He reached the boat at last. It was prancing like an unbroken horse. But waiting for a receding wave, he rushed in, laid firm hold of the first man at hand, and carried him back to the shore. The man had lain in his arms a dead weight. Was he dead indeed?

Mona stooped and looked into his face. "It is Danny Fayle," she cried.

But Danny was not dead. He recovered consciousness, and staggered to his feet.

Loud and angry cries were now coming from the boat. Mingled with the curses of rage there came the words, "Why didn't you give us the rope?" [Pg 474]

Christian shouted that he was coming back with it. Then, watching again for an ebbing wave, he plunged off afresh. He reached the boat quicker this time. Being pulled aboard, he unlashd the rope and strapped it to the capstan. Then one of the men—it was old Quilleash—dropped over the side, and drew himself hand-over-hand through the water.

But the rope stretched and creaked with the rolling of the boat. The spar to which the end ashore was strapped budged not an inch. Mona saw the danger too late. Before she could ease the rope it snapped.

Now Christian added one more to the number of those on the boat!

Old Billy, safe on shore, sat down on the shingle and sobbed terror-stricken and helpless. Thank God, the poor despised Danny had his wits about him. He saw what had happened, and ran for another rope. Flying into the town, he shouted, "Help, help!" But all Peel seemed to be at the "carvals." He ran to the church. Screams of laughter and the tumult of noisy singing came out into the darkness. Scarce knowing what he did, he burst open the door, and cried, in a piercing voice, "The 'Ben-my-Chree' is on the rocks." Then, with the new rope in his hand, he fled away to the shore.

When Danny got back a great multitude was at his heels. Old Quilleash still sat wailing and helpless. Mona ran up and down the shore in an agony of suspense. The lad looked at neither. The hillside of fire behind them showed but too clearly what had occurred. Chilled to the bone by the raw winter wind, four of the men had dropped overboard. A fifth had leaped into the water, and after a fearful struggle for life had been lifted off his feet by the breakers and broken on the rocks.

He was seen no more. Only two remained on the deck, and one of the two was Christian. He could be seen clinging to the bowsprit, which was shipped. The dingy had been torn from the lugger, and thrown by the rising tide high and dry on the shingle. Danny pushed it to the water's edge, jumped in, strapped one end of the new rope about his body, threw the other to a group of men on the shore, and looked round for assistance. None stepped out. Many fell back. "It's no use throwing more lives away," muttered one. "They're past saving," said another. Women clung to their husbands, and would not let them stir. Other women, the wives of men who had been on the

boat, cried "Help." Little children, crouching together with fear and cold, wept piteously.

Danny pushed off his boat, but in an instant it was lifted on to the top of a snow-capped billow and pitched ashore. Danny himself was thrown out on the shingle. "No use, man," shouted many voices, and the lad was compelled to desist.

[Pg 475]

The wind clamored louder every minute. Timbers cut away from the fishing-boat were swept up with every wave. The surf around the rocks was like snow. The water was beaten into seething foam around the boat also; between the billows the long swell was red with the reflection of the fire, but the sea was black as ink beyond the line of the Castle Isle, save where, at the farthest line of wave and sky, a streak of ashen light shone in the darkness.

Danny had coiled the rope from end to end around his waist. Then he stood and waited. He knew that the tide must soon turn. He knew too that, having once begun to ebb, it would flow out at this point as fast as a horse might gallop. But low water never left those rocks dry between which the fishing-boat was jammed. The men aboard of her would still need succor. But help might then come to them from the castle side of the channel.

The crowd knew his purpose, and laughed at it. One grizzled old fisherman took Danny by the arm, and would have held him. But at the first glimpse of the reef that ran across the highest and narrowest point of the strait, the lad shook himself free, and bounded across to the Castle Isle.

"Brave Danny," said Mona, in a deep whisper.

"Brave? Is it brave? Aw, well, it's mad I'm calling it," said the old salt.

There is a steep pathway under the east wall of the castle. It runs up from the shore to a great height above the water. It is narrow enough to be called a ledge, and the rocks beneath it fall wellnigh precipitously. Danny ran along this path until he came to the square turret, whose truncated shaft stands on the southeast corner of the castle. While he was under the shelter of the walls the wind did not touch him, but when he reached the east angle a fierce gust from the west threatened to fling him over into the sea. He tried to round the corner and could not. The wind filled his jersey like a sail. He took the jersey off and threw it aside. Then, on hands and knees he crawled round inch by inch, clinging to the stones of the turret and the few tussacs of long grass that grew between them.

Every movement he made could be watched from the opposite side of the channel. The light of the gorse fired over the Poolvash fell full upon him, and lit up the entire castle and rocks and the shuddering boat beneath with an eery brilliance. The townspeople were congregated in thousands on the Horse Hill and the shore of the mainland. "Who's yonder madman?" cried one. "Danny Fayle," answered another. "No, not Danny, the gawk?" "Aw, yes, though, Danny, the gawk." Kerruish Kinvig was there, striding up and down, and shouting like thunder itself above the tumult of the wind, "Clear the road. Stand back, the ruck of you." There was nothing else that Kinvig could do. Mylrea Balladhoo had been sent for. He came and sat down on the spar to which Christian had strapped the rope. The broken piece still hung to it. Mona stood beside him, and spoke to him at intervals. He answered nothing, but stared vacantly before him.

[Pg 476]

The people held their breath as Danny rounded the turret, expecting every instant to see him lifted from the ledge and hurled into the surf beneath. When he had cleared the corner, and stood full in the wind on the south side of the castle, directly above the two protruding rocks that held the fishing-boat in their grip, the crowds rushed down the shore and along the top of the Contrary Head to keep him in view. What other mad act would the lad attempt?

"He'll go round to the west, and come back on the shingle."

"Not him, man; the shore there is in six feet of water."

Danny emerged presently. He was seen to tie one end of his rope through a hole in the old castle wall to a huge stone built into it. The other end was still about his waist. "He's going down the rocks to the boat." "Gerr out of that. He'd be cut in pieces." "Aw, dear, the poor boy's not mad enough for that, anyway."

But Danny was going down the rocks. Sharp as needles, with their thousand teeth turned upward, slippery and icy cold, Danny set his foot on them. He began his descent with his back to the sea. Clouds of spray rose from every third wave and hid him from the people. But he was seen to be going down foot after foot. What had seemed like madness before began to look like courage now that success appeared possible. It was neither—it was despair. "Aw, beautiful!" "Beautiful, extraordinary!" "It's the young Masther Christian he's going down for." "Well, well, the masther was kind to the boy astonishing." "Poor lad, *there's* a heart at him!"

Meanwhile Christian was clinging to the bowsprit. He was chilled near to losing his hold. He saw Danny with the rope, and wondered if he would ever reach them. His companion—some said it was the mate, Davy Cain—saw him also, and the poor fellow was so transported by the prospect of deliverance that he died on the instant, and was swept away. Only Christian now remained. Every moment the waves washed over him. He was numbed past feeling. His hands were swollen to twice their size. Wondering if when Danny reached him with the rope he would have strength enough to grip it, he lost consciousness.

[Pg 477]

When within a yard of the bow of the boat, Danny leaped and landed on the deck. The people had held their breath while he descended. Now a great cheer went up on the shore and on the cliff. It

rang out above the clamor of the wind and the hiss of the thrashing billows. But Danny heard it not. His thoughts were of Mona, and of how she was blessing him in her heart. As surely as if he heard it with his carnal ear, Danny knew that even at that moment Mona was praying that strength might be granted him, and that he might be blessed in the mercy of God forever.

He lifted Christian in his arms. The swollen hands had next to no hold now. Then the lad set his face afresh to the cruel, black, steep rocks. Once again a shower of spray hid him from the people. When the white cloud had fallen back he could be seen half-way up the rock, dragging Christian on one arm after him.

Could none help him? Yes; twenty hands set out at this moment, nine-tenths of the peril past. The tide had left a wide bank across the highest part of the strait, and the water was running out on both sides.

Danny was helped up, but he would not relinquish his burden. Walking feebly, he carried Christian, who was insensible, along the narrow path under the east wall back to the shore. The crowd divided for him. He saw Mona, where she stood with clasped hands beside Balladhoo. Making his way to her, he laid Christian at her feet.

* * * * *

Danny's life's work was done. He had given back to the woman who was all the world to him the man she loved.

Mona dropped to her knees beside Christian, and kissed him tenderly. Danny stood apart in silence, and amid all that throng saw Mona alone. Then he turned his head aside and looked away over the sea. Only Heaven knew what his thoughts were in that bitter hour—that blessed hour—that hour of sorrow and of glory. In this world his days were done. For Kisseck's death, what remained to him among men? Without Mona's love, what was left to him on earth?

Christian returned to consciousness. Mona rose up and took Danny's hand. She would have put her arms around his neck, but he drew away, and turned his eyes again toward the sea. The longing look came back, but no tear would start, for the gift of tears had gone forever.

[Pg 478]

The hum of human voices arose above them. "Poor lad, and his uncle dead too." "Kisseck?" "Aw, yes, Kisseck." "No." "Yes, though—and shot, they're saying'." "Never." "Who shot him?" "There's no one knowing that."

A loud, unearthly peal of laughter was heard above the noise of the people and the tumult of the storm. Every one turned to look for Danny. He had gone. The next moment he was seen at the water's edge pushing off the dingy of the lugger. He leaped into it and picked up an oar. But the ebbing tide needed no such help. It caught the boat and carried it away on a huge billow white with foam. In a minute it was riding far out into the dark void beyond.

Then Mona remembered Danny's strange words two days ago, "I think at whiles I'd like to die in a big sea like that."

Next day—Christmas Day—when the bleared sun was sinking over the western bar of the deep lone sea, and Danny's gorse fire on the cliff-head was smoldering out, a boat was washed ashore in the Poolvash—empty, capsized. It was the dingy of the "Ben-my-Chree."

CHAPTER XXIII

[Pg 479]

THREE YEARS AFTER

One scene more.

It was the morning of a summer's day. The sunshine danced bewitchingly over the sea, that lay drowsily under the wide vault of a blue sky. Lambent, languid, white, earth and air slept together.

A soothing and dreamy haze rested on the little town of Peel.

Brighter than the sunshine, fresher than the salt breath of the sea, a little girl of eight tripped over the paved and crabbed streets. In one hand she swung a straw-hat overflowing with flowers. By the other she held a fair-haired boy, who was just old enough to trot along at her side. The stout little man carried a mighty spade across one shoulder, and the hand that held the hand of his sister held also a bucket heavily laden with perhaps a teaspoonful of sand. At one moment the maiden, exercising the grave duties of a guardian, stopped, and volunteered to relieve the little chap of this burden; but, of course, he resented the humiliating tender with proper masculine dignity. Then they tripped on.

They were making for the market-place, and when they reached it they turned in at the church gates. Many a green grave lay there bathed in the sunbeams; and many a simple stone, moss-grown and discolored, looked brighter on this brilliant day. An old man sat on a tomb and leaned forward on a stick. He seemed to doze in the light and warmth; but as the little people passed

him, he fumbled at his hat and smiled through his toothless gums.

"At's Billy," said the little fellow, with an air of knowledge.

The children walked to the southwest angle of the church, and stopped before a white marble slab embedded in the wall. There was no grave beneath it. Tossed on the shimmering waters that stretched away miles on miles in front of it, or resting calmly in that ocean bed, was all that remained of him to whom this stone was raised.

The little maiden cast her flowers in front of it. The little boy, too, must needs cast his flowers also. Then he looked up with his great wondering eyes at the letters of the inscription. They ran: [Pg 480]

TO DEAR DANNY IN HEAVEN

The tide was just on the turn, and the murmur of the first receding waves began to break the silence.

"Listen," said the little woman, with lifted finger.

"I 'ikes the sea," said the boy.

The children turned to go. "Come, Danny," said she.

"Ees, Ruby," he lisped.

When they reached the gate the little feet tripped faster over the stones, and a silvery voice sang:

"Sweet violets, and primroses the sweetest."

END OF "SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO ME"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO ME ***

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