ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE EAGLE CLIFF

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Содержание

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Chapter One
Begins the Tale—Naturally

From the earliest records of history we learn that man has ever been envious of the birds, and of all other winged creatures. He has longed and striven to fly. He has also signally failed to do so.

We say "failed" advisedly, because his various attempts in that direction have usually resulted in disappointment and broken bones. As to balloons, we do not admit that they fly any more than do ships; balloons merely float and glide, when not otherwise engaged in tumbling, collapsing, and bursting.

This being so, we draw attention to the fact that the nearest approach we have yet made to the sensation of flying is that achieved by rushing down a long, smooth, steep hill-road on a well-oiled and perfect ball-bearings bicycle! Skating cannot compare with this, for that requires exertion; bicycling down hill requires none. Hunting cannot, no matter how splendid the mount, for that implies a certain element of bumping, which, however pleasant in itself, is not suggestive of the smooth swift act of flying.

We introduce this subject merely because thoughts somewhat similar to those which we have so inadequately expressed were burning in the brain of a handsome and joyful young man one summer morning not long ago, as, with legs over the handles, he flashed—if he did not actually fly—down one of our Middlesex hills on his way to London.

Urgent haste was in every look and motion of that young man's fine eyes and lithe body. He would have bought wings at any price had that been possible; but, none being yet in the market, he made the most of his wheel—a fifty-eight inch one, by the way, for the young man's legs were long, as well as strong.

Arrived at the bottom of the hill the hilarious youth put his feet to the treadles, and drove the machine vigorously up the opposite slope. It was steep, but he was powerful. He breathed hard, no doubt, but he never flagged until he gained the next summit. A shout burst from his lips as he rolled along the level top, for there, about ten miles off, lay the great city, glittering in the sunshine, and with only an amber-tinted canopy of its usual smoke above it.

Among the tall elms and in the flowering hedgerows between which he swept, innumerable birds warbled or twittered their astonishment that he could fly with such heedless rapidity through that beautiful country, and make for the dismal town in such magnificent weather. One aspiring lark overhead seemed to repeat, with persistent intensity, its trill of self gratulation that it had not been born a man. Even the cattle appeared to regard the youth as a sort of ornithological curiosity, for the sentiment,

"Well, you are a goose!" was clearly written on their mild faces as he flew past them.

Over the hill-top he went—twelve miles an hour at the least—until he reached the slope on the other side; then down he rushed again, driving at the first part of the descent like an insane steam-engine, till the pace must have increased to twenty miles, at which point, the whirl of the wheel becoming too rapid, he was obliged once more to rest his legs on the handles, and take to repose, contemplation, and wiping his heated brow—equivalent this, we might say, to the floating descent of the sea-mew. Of course the period of rest was of brief duration, for, although the hill was a long slope, with many a glimpse of loveliness between the trees, the time occupied in its flight was short, and, at the bottom a rustic bridge, with an old inn and a thatched hamlet, with an awkwardly sharp turn in the road beyond it, called for wary and intelligent guidance of this lightning express.

Swiftly but safely to the foot of the hill went John Barret (that was the youth's name), at ever-increasing speed, and without check; for no one seemed to be moving about in the quiet hamlet, and the old English inn had apparently fallen asleep.

A delicious undulating swoop at the bottom indicates the crossing of the bridge. A flash, and the inn is in rear. The hamlet displays no sign of life, nevertheless Barret is cautious. He lays a finger on the brake and touches the bell. He is half-way through the hamlet and all goes well; still no sign of life except—yes, this so-called proof of every rule is always forthcoming, except

that there is the sudden appearance of one stately cock. This is followed immediately by its sudden and unstately disappearance. A kitten also emerges from somewhere, glares, arches, fuffs, becomes indescribable, and—is not! Two or three children turn up and gape, but do not recover in time to insult, or to increase the dangers of the awkward turn in the road which is now at hand.

Barret looks thoughtful. Must the pace be checked here? The road is open and visible. It is bordered by grass banks and ditches on either side. He rushes close to the left bank and, careering gracefully to the right like an Algerine felucca in a white squall, dares the laws of gravitation and centrifugal force to the utmost limitation, and describes a magnificent segment of a great circle. Almost before you can wink he is straight again, and pegging along with irresistible pertinacity.

Just beyond the hamlet a suburban lady is encountered, with clasped hands and beseeching eyes, for a loose hairy bundle, animated by the spirit of a dog, stands in the middle of the road, bidding defiance to the entire universe! The hairy bundle loses its head all at once, likewise its heart: it has not spirit left even to get out of the way. A momentary lean of the bicycle first to the left and then to the right describes what artists call "the line of beauty," in a bight of which the bundle remains behind, crushed in spirit, but unhurt in body.

At the bottom of the next hill a small roadside inn greets our cyclist. That which cocks, kittens, dangers, and dogs could not effect, the inn accomplishes. He "slows." In front of the door he

describes an airy circlet, dismounting while yet in motion, leans the lightning express against the wall, and enters. What! does that vigorous, handsome, powerful fellow, in the flush of early manhood, drink? Ay, truly he does.

"Glass of bitter, sir?" asks the exuberant landlord.

"Ginger," says the young man, pointing significantly to a bit of blue ribbon in his button-hole.

"Come far to-day, sir?" asks the host, as he pours out the liquid.

"Fifty miles—rather more," says Barret, setting down the glass.

"Fine weather, sir, for bicycling," says the landlord, sweeping in the coppers.

"Very; good-day."

Before that cheery "Good-day" had ceased to affect the publican's brain Barret was again spinning along the road to London.

It was the road on which the mail coaches of former days used to whirl, to the merry music of bugle, wheel, and whip, along which so many men and women had plodded in days gone by, in search of fame and fortune and happiness: some, to find these in a greater or less degree, with much of the tinsel rubbed off, others, to find none of them, but instead thereof, wreck and ruin in the mighty human whirlpool; and not a few to discover the fact that happiness does not depend either on fortune or fame, but on spiritual harmony with God in Jesus Christ.

Pedestrians there still were on that road, bound for the same goal, and, doubtless, with similar aims; but mail and other coaches had been driven from the scene.

Barret had the broad road pretty much to himself.

Quickly he ran into the suburban districts, and here his urgent haste had to be restrained a little.

"What if I am too late!" he thought, and almost involuntarily put on a spurt.

Soon he entered the crowded thoroughfares, and was compelled to curb both steed and spirit. Passing through one of the less-frequented streets in the neighbourhood of Finchley Road, he ventured to give the rein to his willing charger.

But here Fortune ceased to smile—and Fortune was to be commended for her severity.

Barret, although kind, courteous, manly, sensitive, and reasonably careful, was not just what he ought to have been. Although a hero, he was not perfect. He committed the unpardonable sin of turning a street corner sharply! A thin little old lady crossed the road at the same identical moment, slowly. They met! Who can describe that meeting? Not the writer, for he did not see it; more's the pity! Very few people saw it, for it was a quiet corner. The parties concerned cannot be said to have seen, though they felt it. Both went down. It was awful, really, to see a feeble old lady struggling with an athlete and a bicycle!

Two little street boys, and a ragged girl appeared as if by magic. They always do!

"Oh! I say! Ain't he bin and squashed 'er?"

Such was the remark of one of the boys.

"Pancakes is plump to 'er," was the observation of the other.

The ragged girl said nothing, but looked unspeakable things.

Burning with shame, trembling with anxiety, covered with dust and considerably bruised, Barret sprang up, left his fallen steed, and, raising the little old lady with great tenderness in his arms, sat her on the pavement with her back against the railings, while he poured out abject apologies and earnest inquiries.

Strange to say the old lady was not hurt in the least—only a good deal shaken and very indignant.

Stranger still, a policeman suddenly appeared in the distance. At the same time a sweep, a postman, and a servant girl joined the group.

Young Barret, as we have said, was sensitive. To become the object and centre of a crowd in such circumstances was overwhelming. A climax was put to his confusion, when one of the street arabs, observing the policeman, suddenly exclaimed:—

"Oh! I say, 'ere's a bobby! What a lark. Won't you be 'ad up before the beaks? It'll be a case o' murder."

"No, it won't," retorted the other boy; "it'll be a case o' manslaughter an' attempted suicide jined."

Barret started up, allowing the servant maid to take his place, and saw the approaching constable. Visions of detention, publicity, trial, conviction, condemnation, swam before him.

"A reg'lar Krismas panty-mime for nuffin'!" remarked the

ragged girl, breaking silence for the first time.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Barret leaped towards his bicycle, set it up, vaulted into the saddle, as he well knew how, and was safely out of sight in a few seconds.

Yet not altogether safe. A guilty conscience pursued, overtook, and sat upon him. Shame and confusion overwhelmed him. Up to that date he had been honourable, upright, straightforward; as far as the world's estimation went, irreproachable. Now, in his own estimation, he was mean, false, underhand, sneaking!

But he did not give way to despair. He was a true hero, else we would not have had anything to write about him. Suddenly he slowed, frowned, compressed his lips, described a complete circle—in spite of a furniture van that came in his way—and deliberately went back to the spot where the accident had occurred; but there was no little lady to be seen. She had been conveyed away, the policeman was gone, the little boys were gone, the ragged girl, sweep, postman, and servant maid—all were gone, "like the baseless fabric of a vision," leaving only new faces and strangers behind to wonder what accident and thin old lady the excited youth was asking about—so evanescent are the incidents that occur; and so busily pre-occupied are the human torrents that rush in the streets of London!

The youth turned sadly from the spot and continued his journey at a slower pace. As he went along, the thought that the old lady might have received internal injuries, and would die,

pressed heavily upon him: Thus, he might actually be a murderer, at the best a man-slaughterer, without knowing it, and would carry in his bosom a dreadful secret, and a terrible uncertainty, to the end of his life!

Of course he could go to that great focus of police energy —Scotland Yard—and give himself up; but on second thoughts he did not quite see his way to that. However, he would watch the daily papers closely. That evening, in a frame of mind very different from the mental condition in which he had set out on his sixty miles' ride in the afternoon John Barret presented himself to his friend and old schoolfellow, Bob Mabberly.

"You're a good fellow, Barret; I knew you would come; but you look warm. Have you been running?" asked Mabberly, opening the door of his lodging to his friend. "Come in: I have news for you. Giles Jackman has agreed to go. Isn't that a comfort? for, besides his rare and valuable sporting qualities, he is more than half a doctor, which will be important, you know, if any of us should get ill or come to grief. Sit down and we'll talk it over."

Now, it was a telegram from Bob Mabberly which led John Barret to suddenly undertake a sixty miles' ride that day, and which was thus the indirect cause of the little old lady being run down. The telegram ran as follows:—

"Come instanter. As you are. Clothes unimportant. Yacht engaged. Crew also. Sail, without fail, Thursday. Plenty more to say when we meet."

"Now, you see, Bob, with your usual want of precision, or care, or some such quality—"

"Stop, Barret. Do be more precise in the use of language. How can the want of a thing be a *quality*?"

"You are right, Bob. Let me say, then, that with your usual unprecision and carelessness you sent me a telegram, which could not reach me till late on Wednesday night, after all trains were gone, telling me that you sail, without fail, on Thursday, but leaving me to guess whether you meant Thursday morning or evening."

"How stupid! My dear fellow, I forgot that!"

"Just so. Well to make sure of losing no time, instead of coming here by trains, which, as you know, are very awkward and slow in our neighbourhood, besides necessitating long waits and several changes, I just packed my portmanteau, gun, rods, etcetera, and gave directions to have them forwarded here by the first morning train, then took a few winks of sleep, and at the first glimmer of daylight mounted my wheel and set off across country as straight as country roads would permit of—and—here I am."

"True, Barret, and in good time for tea too. We don't sail till morning, for the tide does not serve till six o'clock, so that will give us plenty of time to put the finishing touches to our plans, allow your things to arrive, and permit of our making—or, rather, renewing—our acquaintance with Giles Jackman. You remember him, don't you?"

"Yes, faintly. He was a broad, sturdy, good-humoured, reckless, little boy when I last saw him at old Blatherby's school."

"Just so. Your portrait is correct. I saw him last month, after a good many years' interval, and he is exactly what he was, but considerably exaggerated at every point. He is not, indeed, a little, but a middle sized man now; as good-humoured as ever; much more reckless; sturdier and broader a great deal, with an amount of hair about his lip, chin, and head generally that would suffice to fit out three or four average men. He has been in India—in the Woods and Forests Department, or something of that sort—and has killed tigers, elephants, and such-like by the hundred, they say; but I've met him only once or twice, and he don't speak much about his own doings. He is home on sick-leave just now."

"Sick-leave! Will he be fit to go with us?" asked Barret, doubtfully.

"Fit!" cried Mabberly. "Ay, much more fit than you are, strong and vigorous though you be, for the voyage home has not only cured him; it has added superabundant health. Voyages always do to sick Anglo-Indians, don't you know? However ill a man may be in India, all he has to do is to obtain leave of absence and get on board of a ship homeward bound, and straightway health, rushing in upon him like a river, sends him home more than cured. So now our party is made up, yacht victualled, anchor tripped; and—'all's well that ends well.'"

"But all is not ended, Bob. Things have only begun, and, as

regards myself, they have begun disastrously," said Barret, who thereupon related the incident of the little old lady being run down.

"My dear fellow," cried Mabberly, laughing, "excuse me, don't imagine me indifferent to the sufferings of the poor old thing; but do you really suppose that one who was tough enough, after such a collision, to sit up at all, with or without the support of the railings, and give way to indignant abuse—"

"Not abuse, Bob, indignant looks and sentiments; she was too thorough a lady to think of abuse—"

"Well, well; call it what you please; but you may depend upon it that she is not much hurt, and you will hear nothing more about the matter."

"That's it! That's the very thing that I dread," returned Barret, anxiously. "To go through life with the possibility that I may be an uncondemned and unhung murderer is terrible to think of. Then I can't get over the meanness of my running away so suddenly. If any one had said I was capable of such conduct I should have laughed at him. Yet have I lived to do it—contemptibly—in cold blood."

"Contemptibly it may have been, but not in cold blood, for did you not say you were roused to a state of frenzied alarm at the sight of the bobby? and assuredly, although unhung as yet, you are not uncondemned, if self-condemnation counts for anything. Come, don't take such a desponding view of the matter. We shall see the whole affair in the morning papers before sailing, with a

report of the old lady's name and condition—I mean condition of health—as well as your unmanly flight, without leaving your card; so you'll be able to start with an easy— Ha! a cab! yes, it's Jackman. I know his manservant," said Mabberly, as he looked out at the window.

Another moment and a broad-chested man, of about five-and-twenty, with a bronzed face—as far as hair left it visible—a pair of merry blue eyes, and a hearty manner, was grasping his old schoolfellows by the hand, and endeavouring to trace the likeness in John Barret to the quiet little boy whom he used to help with his tasks many years before.

"Man, who would have thought you could have grown into such a great long-legged fellow?" he said stepping back to take a more perfect look at his friend, who returned the compliment by asking who could have imagined that he would have turned into a Zambezian gorilla.

"Where'll I put it, sor?" demanded a voice of metallic bassness in the doorway.

"Down there—anywhere, Quin," said Jackman turning quickly; "and be off as fast as you can to see after that rifle and cartridges."

"Yes, sor," returned the owner of the bass voice, putting down a small portmanteau, straightening himself, touching his forehead with a military salute, and stalking away solemnly.

"I say, Giles, it's not often one comes across a zoological specimen like that. Where did you pick him up?" asked

Mabberly.

"In the woods and forests of course," said Jackman, "where I have picked up everything of late—from salary to jungle fevers. He's an old soldier—also on sick-leave, though he does not look like it. He came originally from the west of Ireland, I believe; but there's little of the Irishman left, save the brogue and the honesty. He's a first-rate servant, if you know how to humour him, and, being a splendid cook, we shall find him useful."

"I hope so," said Mabberly, with a dubious look.

"Why, Bob, do you suppose I would have offered him as cook and steward if I had not felt sure of him?"

"Of course not; and I would not have accepted him if I had not felt sure of you, Giles, my boy; so come along and let's have something to eat."

"But you have not yet told me, Bob," said Jackman, while the three friends were discussing their meal, "what part of the world you intend to visit. Does your father give you leave to go wherever you please, and stay as long as you choose?"

"No; he limits me to the Western Isles."

"That's an indefinite limitation. D'you mean the isles of the Western Pacific?"

"No; only those of the west of Scotland. And, to tell you the truth, I have no settled or definite plan. Having got leave to use the yacht all the summer on condition that I don't leave our own shores, I have resolved to begin by running at once to the wildest and farthest away part of the kingdom, leaving circumstances to

settle the rest."

"A circumstantial account of the matter, no doubt, yet rather vague. Have you a good crew?"

"Yes; two men and a boy, one of the men being skipper, and the nearest approach to a human machine you ever saw. He is a Highlander, a thorough seaman, hard as mahogany and about as dark, stiff as a poker, self-contained, silent, except when spoken to, and absolutely obedient."

"And we set sail to-morrow, early?" asked Barret.

"Yes; after seeing the morning papers," said Mabberly with a laugh.

This, of course, turned the conversation on the accident, much to the distress of Barret, who feared that the jovial, off-hand reckless man from the "woods and forests" would laugh at and quiz him more severely than his friend Bob. To his surprise and great satisfaction, however, he found that his fears were groundless, for Jackman listened to the account of the incident quite gravely, betrayed not the slightest tendency to laugh, or even smile; asked a good many questions in an interested tone, spoke encouragingly as to the probable result, and altogether showed himself to be a man of strong sympathy as well as high spirits.

Next morning found our three adventurers dropping down the Thames with the first of the ebb tide, and a slight breeze from the south-west; Mabberly and Jackman in the very small cabin looking after stores, guns, rods, etcetera; Barret anxiously scanning the columns of a newspaper; Quin and the skipper

making each other's acquaintance with much of the suspicion observable in two bull-dogs who meet accidentally; the boy in the fore part of the vessel coiling ropes; and the remainder of the crew at the helm.

"Port! port! stiddy," growled the skipper.

"Port it is; steady," replied the steersman in a sing-song professional tone, as a huge steamer from the antipodes went slowly past, like a mighty leviathan of the deep.

"Is it to the north, south, east, or west we're bound for, captain?" asked Quin, with a voice like that of a conciliatory bassoon.

"I don't know where we're bound for," growled the skipper slowly. "Starboard a bit; stiddy!"

"Steady!" sang out the man at the tiller.

A few hours carried them into the German Ocean. Here Quin thought he would try again for a little information.

"Sure it's nor'-east we're steerin', captain," he remarked in a casual way.

"No, it's not," growled the skipper, very much through his nose; "she's headin' west."

"It's to *somewhere* that coorse will take us in the ind, no doubt, if we carry on?" suggested Quin, interrogatively.

"Ay; oot to sea," replied the skipper.

Quin was obliged to give it up for the time being.

For some time they were nearly becalmed; then, as the land dropped astern and the shades of night deepened, the wind

fell altogether, and, when the stars came out, a profound calm prevailed over the gently undulating sea. The exuberant spirits of our three friends were subdued by the sweet influences around, and, as the hour for rest drew near, the conversation, which at first became fitful, dropped at last to silence.

This was broken at length by Jackman saying, to the surprise of his companions, "What d'you say to reading a chapter before turning in? I'm fond of striking what's called a key-note. If we begin this pleasure-trip with an acknowledgment of our dependence on God, we shall probably have a really pleasant time of it. What say you?"

Both Mabberly and Barret gladly agreed to their friend's proposal—for both had been trained in God-fearing families—though neither would have had the courage to make the proposal himself. The crew were invited to join, and thus family worship was established on board the *Fairy* from the first day.

Only one point is worthy of note in connection with this—although no one noted it particularly at the time, namely, that the portion of Scripture undesignedly selected contained that oft-quoted verse, "Ye know not what a day may bring forth."

The truth of this was very soon thrust home upon them by stern experience.

Chapter Two
The Voyage Auspiciously Begun and Promptly Ended

A voyage up the east coast of Great Britain and through the Pentland Firth does not usually take a long time. When the vessel is a swift little schooner-yacht, and the breeze is stiff as well as fair, the voyage is naturally a brief one.

Everything favoured the little *Fairy*. Sun, moon, and stars cheered her, and winds were propitious, so that our voyagers soon found themselves skimming over the billows of the western sea.

It was one part of Mabberly's plan that he and his friends should do duty as part of the crew. He was himself accustomed to the handling of yachts, and Barret he knew had been familiar with the management of boats from childhood.

"You can steer, of course?" he had asked Giles Jackman almost as soon as they were fairly at sea.

"Well, ye–es, oh yes. No doubt I could steer if I were to try."

"Have you never tried?" asked his friend in surprise.

"Oh yes, I have tried—once. It was on an occasion when a number of us had gone on a picnic. We had to proceed part of the way to our destination by river in a small boat, which was managed by a regular old sea-dog—I forget his name, for we generally hailed him by the title of Old Salt. Some of the

impatient members of the party suggested a little preliminary lunch. There are always people ready to back up impatient suggestions! It was agreed to, and Old Salt was ordered to open the provision basket, which had been stowed away in the bows of the boat. 'Would you steer, sir?' said Old Salt to me, as he rose to go forward. 'Certainly, with pleasure,' said I, for, as you know, it's an old weakness of mine to be obliging! Well, in a few minutes they were all eating away as if they'd had no breakfast, while we went merrily down the river, with the current and a light breeze in our favour.

"Suddenly Old Salt shouted something that was smothered in its passage through a bite of sandwich. I looked up, and saw a native canoe coming straight towards us. 'Port!' roared Old Salt, in an explosion that cleared away half the sandwich. 'No, thankee; I prefer sherry,' said I. But I stopped there, for I saw intuitively from the yell with which he interrupted me that something was wrong. '*Hard* a-port!' he cried, jumping up and scattering his rations. I shoved the tiller hard to the side that suggested itself, and hoped for the best. The worst followed, for we struck the native canoe amidships, as it was steering wildly out of our way, and capsized it! There were only two men in it, and they could swim like ducks; but the river was full of alligators, and two sharp-set ones were on the scent instantly. It is my opinion that those two natives would, then and there, have been devoured, if we had not run in between and made such a splashing and hullaballoo with boat-hook, oars, and voices, that

the monsters were scared away. I have never steered since that day."

"I don't wonder; and, with my consent, you shall not steer now," said Mabberly, laughing. "Why, Giles, I was under the impression that you understood everything, and could do almost anything!"

"Quite a mistake, Bob, founded in error or superstition. You have confused the will with the deed. I am indeed willing to try anything, but my capacity for action is limited, like my knowledge. In regard to the higher mathematics, for instance, I know nothing. Copper-mining I do not understand. I may say the same with reference to Tartar mythology, and as regards the management of infants under two years I am densely ignorant."

"But do you really know nothing at all about boats and ships, Giles?" asked Barret, who, being a good listener, did not always shine as a speaker.

"How can you ask such a question? Of course I know a great deal about them. They float, they sail and row, they steer—"

"Rather badly sometimes, according to your own showing!" remarked Barret.

Having cleared the Pentland Firth, Mabberly consulted the skipper one morning as to the prospects of the weather. "Going to fall calm, I fear," he said, as McPherson came aft with his hands in his pilot-coat pockets.

"Ay, sir, that iss true, what-ë-ver."

To pronounce the last word correctly, the central "ë" must be

run into a long-drawn, not an interjectional, sound.

"More-ö-ver," continued the skipper, in his drawling nasal tone, "it's goin' to be thick."

Being a weather-wise man, the skipper proved to be right. It did come thick; then it cleared, and, as we have said, things became favourable until they got further out to sea. Then a fancy took possession of Mabberly—namely, to have a "spin out into the Atlantic and see how it looked!" It mattered not to Jackman or Barret what they did or where they went; the first being exuberantly joyous, the other quietly happy. So they had their run out to sea; but twenty-four hours of it sufficed—it became monotonous.

"I think we'd better go back now," suggested Mabberly.

"Agreed," said his companions.

"Iss it goin' back you'll be?" asked the skipper.

"Yes. Don't you think we may as well turn now?" said Mabberly, who made it a point always, if possible, to carry the approbation of the skipper with him.

"I think it wass petter if we had niver come oot."

"Why so, Captain?"

"Because it's comin' on to plow. Putt her roond, Shames."

James McGregor, to whom the order was given, and who was the *other* man of the crew, obeyed. The yacht, which had latterly been beating against a headwind, now ran gaily before it towards the Scottish coast, but when night closed in no outlying islands were visible.

"We wull hev to keep a sharp look-oot, Shames," remarked the skipper, as he stopped in his monotonous perambulation of the deck to glance at the compass.

"Oo, ay," responded McGregor, with the air of a man who knew that as well as his superior.

"What do you fear?" asked Mabberly, coming on deck at the moment to take a look at the night before turning in.

"I fear naething, sir," replied McPherson, gravely.

"I mean, what danger threatens us?"

"None that I ken o'; but we're makin' the land, an' it behooves us to ca' canny."

It may be well to remark here that the skipper, having voyaged much on all parts of the Scottish coast, had adopted and mixed up with his own peculiar English several phrases and words in use among the lowland Scots.

Next morning, when Mabberly again visited the deck, he found the skipper standing on the same spot where he had left him, apparently in the same attitude, and with the same grave, sleepless expression on his cast-iron features. The boy, Robin Tips, was at the helm, looking very sleepy. He was an English boy, smart, active, and wide-awake—in the slang sense—in which sense also we may add that he was "cheeky."

But neither the skipper nor Tips was very visible at the distance of three yards, owing to a dense fog which prevailed. It was one of those white, luminous, dry fogs which are not at all depressing to the spirits, though obstructive to the eyes, and

which are generally, if not always, accompanied by profound calm.

"Has it been like this long?" asked Mabberly, after the first salutations.

"Ay, sir, a coot while."

"And have we made no progress during the night?"

"Oo, ay, a coot bit. We should nae be far off some o' the islands noo, but it's hard to say, wi' naither sun, moon, nor stars veesible to let us fin' oot where we are."

Jackman and Barret came on deck at the moment, closely followed by Quin, who, quietly ignoring the owner of the yacht, went up to his master and said—

"Tay's riddy, sor."

"Breakfast, you mean," said Mabberly, with a smile.

"Sure I wouldn't conterdick—ye, sor, av ye was to call it supper—but it was tay that I put in the pot."

At breakfast the conversation somehow turned upon boats—ship's boats—and their construction.

"It is quite disgraceful," said Jackman, "the way in which Government neglects that matter of boats. Some things, we know, will never be generally adopted unless men are compelled to adopt them. Another biscuit, Barret."

"Instance something, Giles," said Mabberly, "and pass the butter. I hate to hear sweeping assertions of an indefinite nature, which no one can either corroborate or confute."

"Well, there is the matter of lowering boats into the water from

a ship's davits. Now, I'll be bound that the apparatus for lowering your little punt astern is the ordinary couple of blocks—one at the stem, the other at the stern?"

"Of course it is. What then?"

"Why, then, don't you know what would happen if you were lowering that boat full of people in a rough sea, and the man at the bow failed to unhook his block at the exact same moment as the man at the stern?"

"Yes, I know too well, Giles, for I have seen it happen. The boat, on the occasion I refer to, was hung up by one of the blocks, all the people were dropped into the water, and several of the women and children drowned. But how is Government to remedy that?"

"Thus, Bob, thus. There is a splendid apparatus invented by somebody which holds fast the two blocks. By means of an iron lever worked by *one* man, the rod is disengaged from both blocks at the same instant. You cannot work it wrong if you tried to do so. Now, the Government has only to compel the adoption of that apparatus in the Royal and Merchant Navies, and the thing is done."

"Then, again," continued Jackman, devouring food more ravenously in proportion as he warmed with his subject, "look at the matter of rafts. How constantly it happens that boats get swamped and lost while being launched in cases of shipwreck at sea, and there is nothing left for the crews and passengers, after the few remaining boats are filled, save loose spars or a hastily

and ill-made raft; for of course things cannot be well planned and constructed in the midst of panic and sudden emergency. Now, it has been suggested, if not actually carried out, that mattresses should be made of cork, with bands and straps to facilitate buckling them together, and that a ship's chairs, tables, camp-stools, etcetera, should be so constructed as to be convertible into rafts, which might be the means of saving hundreds of lives that would, under present arrangements, inevitably be lost. Why, I ask, does not Government see to this? have a special committee appointed to investigate, find out the best plan, and compel its adoption? Men will never do this. They are too obstinate. What's wanted is that our ladies should take it up, and howl with indignation till it is done."

"My dear Giles, ladies never howl," said Barret, quietly tapping the end of an egg; "they smile, and gently insinuate—that is always sufficient, because irresistible!"

"Well, being a bachelor I cannot say much on that point," returned Jackman. "But I was not aware that *you* were married?"

"Neither am I; but I have a mother and sisters, aunts and cousins, and I know their ways."

"If such are their ways, I must get you to introduce me to them," said the woods-and-forester. "Come on deck, now, and I will give you a practical illustration of what might be done."

Jackman, being an enthusiast, always went at things, "with a will."

"Bring me a hen-coop, Quin," he said to the steward, who,

having so far completed his morning work, and consumed his morning meal, was smoking his pipe, seated on the rail beside Tips. Tips was an admirer of the Irishman, and, in consequence, an imitator as far as he dared and was permitted.

"Lend a hand, ye spalpeen," said Quin, going forward, and quickly returning with the coop, from which a cackling of strong remonstrance issued.

"Will ye have the other wan too, sor?"

"Yes, and the main-hatch besides, and a lot of spun-yarn. Of course that's not strong enough for real service, but it will do for illustration."

In a few minutes the two hen-coops were placed face to face and lashed firmly together, despite the remonstrative poultry. Then the main-hatch was laid upon the top, and fixed there by means of the iron rings at its four corners.

"Now, Quin, fetch four of the cabin chairs," said the operator, "and observe, gentlemen, how much more easily and quickly this would have been accomplished if the coops, and hatch, and chairs had been made to fit into each other, with a view to this very purpose, with strong straps and buckles in handy positions. Now, then, for the chairs."

At each corner of this extemporised raft Jackman fastened one of the cabin chairs, pointing out, as he did so, that there was no limit to the extension of the raft.

"You see," he continued, "all you would have to do, if the ship were properly fitted out, would be to add chair to chair, bench

to bench, cork mattress to mattress, until your raft was as big as you wanted; or you could make two or three rafts, if preferable."

"But sure, sor, it would be an unstiddy machine intirely, an' given to wobblin'," said Quin, who was one of those privileged men who not only work for their wages, but generously throw their opinions into the bargain.

"It would not be more unsteady than the waves, Quin; and as to wobbling, that would be an advantage, for a rigid raft in a rough sea would be more liable to be damaged than one that was pliable."

The discussion about rafts and ship's boats which thus began was continued with much interest till lunchtime, for it chanced that John Barret was one of those men whose tendency of heart and mind is to turn everything to its best uses, and generally to strive after the highest point of perfection in everything, with a view to the advancement of human felicity. This tendency called into exercise his inventive faculties, inducing him to search after improvements of all descriptions. Thus it was natural that he and Jackman should enter into a keen controversy as to what was the best method of constructing the raft in detail; and that, when the faithful Quin announced lunch as being, "riddy, sor," the life-saving machine was left in an incomplete state on the deck.

The interest attaching to this discussion had helped the three comrades and crew alike to tide over what might otherwise have proved a tedious forenoon, for during the whole of that day the dense fog and profound calm continued.

On returning to the deck the discussion was continued for a time, but gradually the interest flagged, then other subjects engaged attention, and the raft was finally allowed to lie undisturbed and forgotten.

"I don't know how it is," said Bob Mabberly; "but somehow I always feel a depression of spirits in a fog at sea."

"Explanation simple enough," returned Jackman; "are we not constantly reading in the papers of ships being run down in fogs? Where there is risk there is always in some minds anxiety—in your case you call it depression of spirits."

"Your explanation, Giles, uncomplimentary to me though it be, might have some force if we were just now in the Channel, where being run down in fog is an event of frequent occurrence; but here, in a comparatively unfrequented sea, it would be strange indeed were I to be influenced by such possibilities. What say you, Captain?"

McPherson, who had sauntered towards the group, gazed in the direction where the horizon would have been visible had the fog been absent, and said:—

"Hm!—weel—" and then stopped, as if for the purpose of mature consideration. The audience waited for the announcement of the oracle's opinion.

"Oo ay—weel, ye see, many persons are strangely influenced by possibeelities, what-ë-ver. There is a maiden aunt o' my own —she wass niver marrit, an' she wass niver likely to be, for besides bein' poor an' plain, an' mittle-aged, which are not in

my opeenion objectionable, she had an uncommon bad temper. Yet she wass all her life influenced by the notion that half the young men o' the place wass wantin' to marry her! though the possibeelities in her case wass fery small."

"I should like to 'ave know'd that old gurl!" whispered Tips to Quin.

"Howld your tongue, ye spalpeen!" whispered his friend in reply.

"Have you any idea, Captain, where we are now?" asked Jackman.

"Oo ay, we're somewhere's wast'ard o' the Lewis. But whether wast, nor'-wast, or sooth-wast, I could not say preceesely. The nicht, ye see, wass uncommon dark, an' when the fog came doon i' the mornin', I could na' feel sure we had keep it the richt coorse, for the currents hereaboots are strang. But we'll see whan it comes clear."

"Do you believe in presentiments, Giles?" asked Barret, in an unusually grave tone.

"Of course I do," answered Jackman. "I have a presentiment just now that you are going to talk nonsense."

Barret was not, however, to be silenced by his friend's jest.

"Listen," he said, earnestly, as he rose and stood in an attitude of intense attention. "It may be imagination playing with the subjects of our recent conversation, but I cannot help thinking that I hear the beating of paddles."

"Keep a sherp look-oot, Shames," cried the skipper, suddenly,

as he went forward with unwonted alacrity.

A few minutes more and the sound which had at first been distinguished only by Barret's sharp ear, became audible to all—the soft regular patting of a paddle-wheel steamer in the distance, yet clearly coming towards them. Presently a shrill sound, very faint but prolonged, was heard, showing that she was blowing her steam-whistle as a precaution.

"Strange, is it not, that the very thing we have been talking about should happen?" said Mabberly.

"Nay," returned Jackman, lightly, "we were talking about being run down, and we have not yet come to that."

"The strangest thing of all to me," said Barret, "is that, with a wide ocean all round, vessels should ever run into each other at all, at least on the open sea, for there is only one line, a few feet wide, in favour of such an accident, whereas there are thousands of miles against it."

Jackman, who was a great theorist, here propounded a reason for this.

"If vessels would only hold straight on their courses, you see," he said, "the accident of collision would be exceedingly rare, for, although thousands of ships might pass near to each other, not one in ten thousand would meet; but when vessels come pretty near, their commanders sometimes become anxious, take fancies into their heads, as to each having forgotten the 'rules of the road,' and each attempting to correct the other—as we do sometimes in the streets—they bring about the very disaster they are trying

to avoid."

"Had we not better ring the bell, Captain?" cried Mabberly, in rising excitement.

"Oo ay, if you think so, sir. Ring, poy!"

The boy, who was getting alarmed, seized the tongue of the ship's bell, and rang with all his might. Whether this had the effect to which Jackman had referred, we cannot tell, but next moment what appeared to be a mountain loomed out of the mist. The steam-whistle had been silent for some time, but as soon as the bell was heard it burst forth with increased fury. From the instant her form was dimly seen the fate of the yacht was sealed. There was a wild shouting on board the steamer, but there was no time for action.

"Starboard hard!" was the cry.

"Starboard it is!" was the immediate answer. But before the helm could act, the great rushing mass struck the *Fairy* amidships, and literally cut her in two!

The awful suddenness of a catastrophe, which those on board had just been arguing was all but impossible, seemed to have paralysed every one, for no one made the slightest effort to escape. Perhaps the appearance of the wall-like bow of the steamer, without rope or projection of any kind to lay hold of, or jump at, might have conveyed the swift perception that their case was hopeless. At all events, they all went under with the doomed yacht, and nothing was left in the wake of the leviathan but a track of foam on the mist-encumbered sea.

But they were not lost! One after another the wrecked party rose struggling to the surface, and all of them could swim except the boy.

Giles Jackman was the first who rose. Treading water and brushing the hair out of his eyes, he gazed wildly about. Barret came up close beside him, almost a moment later. He had barely taken breath, when the others rose at various distances. A cry not far from him caused him to turn. It was poor Robin Tips, struggling for life. A few powerful strokes carried Barret alongside. He got behind the boy, caught him under the armpits, and thus held him, at arm's length, until he could quiet him.

"There is a spar, thank God! Make for it, Barret, while I see to Quin," shouted Jackman.

As he spoke, they could hear the whistle of the steamer rushing away from them.

Barret, forcing himself breast-high out of the water, glanced quickly round and caught sight of the floating spar to which his companion had referred. Although only a few yards off, the fog rendered it almost invisible.

"Are you quiet now?" demanded Barret, in a stern voice, for the terrified boy still showed something like a hysterical determination to turn violently round, and grasp his rescuer in what would probably have turned out to be the grip of death.

"Yes, sir, oh! yes. But d–don't let me go! M–mind, I can't swim!"

"You are perfectly safe if you simply do nothing but what I

tell you," returned Barret, in a quiet, ordinary tone of voice, that reassured the poor lad more than the words.

By way of reply he suddenly became motionless, and as limp as a dead eel.

Getting gradually on his back, and drawing Tips slowly on to his chest, so that he rested with his mouth upwards, and his head entirely out of the water, Barret struck out for the spar, swimming thus on his back.

On reaching it, he found to his surprise that it was the experimental raft, and that the captain, Mabberly, and McGregor were already clinging to it.

"Won't bear us all, I fear," said Mabberly; "but thank God that we have it. Put the boy on."

In order to do this, Barret had to get upon the raft, and he found that it bore him easily as well as the boy.

"Have you seen Jackman?" asked Mabberly.

"Yes," replied Barret, rising and looking round.

"Here he comes, towing Quin, I think, who seems to be stunned. Hallo! This way—hi! Giles!"

But Giles suddenly ceased to swim, turned over on his back, and lay as if dead.

"Rescue, Bob, rescue!" shouted Barret, plunging into the water. Mabberly followed, and soon had hold of Giles and his man by the hair.

"All right!" said Jackman, turning round; "I was only taking a rest. No one lost, I hope?"

"No; all safe, so far."

"You can tow him in now. I'm almost used up," said Jackman, making for the raft. "He's only stunned, I think."

It was found that the Irishman had in truth been only stunned when they lifted him on to the raft, for he soon began to show signs of returning life, and a large bump on his head sufficiently explained the nature of his injury.

But when the whole party had cautiously clambered up on the raft it sank so deep that they scarcely dared to move. To make matters worse, they clearly distinguished the steamer's whistle going farther and farther away, as if she were searching for them in a wrong direction. This was indeed the case, and although they all shouted singly and together, the whistle grew fainter by degrees, and finally died away.

With feelings approaching to despair, the crew of the frail raft began to talk of the prospect before them, when they were silenced by a slight movement in the mist. The white curtain was lifted for a few yards, and revealed to their almost incredulous eyes a rocky shore, backed by a range of precipitous cliffs, with a wild mountainous region beyond.

As the sea was still perfectly calm, there was no surf. Our castaways, therefore, with the exception of Quin and the boy, quietly slipped into the water, and, with thankful hearts, propelled the raft vigorously towards the shore.

Chapter Three
The Wreck is Followed by Repose, Refreshment, Surprise, and Disaster

The distance from land was not more than a few hundred yards; nevertheless, it occupied a considerable time to pass over that space, the raft being ill-adapted for quick progression through the water.

Close to the shore there was a flat rock, to which, as they approached it, their attention was drawn by the appearance of what seemed to be living creatures of some sort. Quin and Robin Tips, sitting on the raft, naturally saw them first.

"I do belave it's men, for they're liftin' their hids an' lookin' at us. Av it was the South Says, now, I'd say they was saviges peepin' at us over the rocks."

"P'raps they're boys a-bathin'," suggested Tips.

"Are they white?" asked Captain McPherson, who, being chin-deep in the water and behind the raft, could not see the rock referred to.

"No; sure they seem to be grey, or blue."

"Oo, they'll be seals," returned the skipper, nasally—a tone which is eminently well adapted for sarcastic remark without the necessity of elaborate language.

"In coorse they is," said Tips; "don't you see they're a-heavin'

up their tails as well as their 'eads?"

On advancing a few yards farther, all doubt upon the question was put at rest. The animals, of which about a dozen were enjoying themselves on the rock, raised themselves high on their flippers and gazed, with enormous eyes, at the strange-looking monster that was coming in from the sea! Thus they remained, apparently paralysed with astonishment, until the raft was within pistol-shot, and then, unable to endure the suspense longer, they all slipped off into the sea.

A few minutes later and the raft struck on the shore. And well was it for the party that the weather chanced to be so fine, for if there had been anything like a breeze, their frail contrivance would inevitably have been dashed to pieces. Even a slight swell from the westward would have raised such a surf on that rugged shore that it would have been impossible for the best of swimmers to have landed without broken limbs, if not loss of life. As it was, they got ashore not only without difficulty, but even succeeded in hauling the raft up on the beach without much damage to its parts—though, of course, the unfortunate fowls in the hen-coops had all perished!

While Mabberly and the others were engaged in securing the raft, Barret was sent off along shore with directions to ascertain whether there was any habitation near. To his right the high cliffs came down so close to the sea that it seemed very improbable that any cottage or hamlet could be found in that direction. He therefore turned towards the left, where the cliffs receded some

distance from the shore, leaving a narrow strip of meadow land.

Hurrying forward about a quarter of a mile, he stopped and looked about him. The sun was still high in the heavens—for the days are long and nights brief in that region during summer—and its rays had so far scattered the mists that all the low-lying land was clear, though the mountain-range inland was only visible a short distance above its base. The effect of this was to enhance the weird grandeur of the view, for when the eye had traced the steep glens, overhanging cliffs, rugged water-courses, and sombre corries upward to the point where all was lost in cloud, the imagination was set free to continue the scenery to illimitable heights.

The youth was still gazing upward, with solemnised feelings, when there was presented to him one of those curious aspects of nature which are sometimes, though rarely, witnessed in mountainous regions. Suddenly an opening occurred in the clouds—or mist—which shrouded the mountain-tops, and the summit of a stupendous cliff bathed in rich sunshine, was seen as if floating in the air. Although obviously part of the mountain near the base of which he stood, this cliff—completely isolated as it was—seemed a magical effect, and destitute of any real connection with earth.

While he was looking in wonder and admiration at the sight, he observed a bird hovering about motionless in the blue vault high above the cliffs. Although inexperienced in such scenery and sights, Barret knew well enough that nothing but an eagle—and

that of the largest size—could be visible at all at such a distance. Suddenly the bird sailed downwards with a grand circular sweep, and was lost among the shadows of the perpendicular rocks. A few minutes more and the mists drifted over the opening, causing the vision to disappear.

This was Barret's first view of the Eagle Cliff, which was destined to exercise a powerful and lasting influence upon his fortunes!

A few yards beyond this the explorer came upon a sheep track, and a little farther on he found one of those primitive roads which are formed in wild out-of-the-way places by the passage of light country carts, with the aid of a few rounded stones where holes required to be filled up, or soft places strengthened. Following it a short distance to a spot where it ran between a precipice and the shore, he came suddenly in sight of a wilderness of fallen rocks, which were varied in size from mere pebbles to masses the size of an omnibus. These had all fallen from a steep spur of the mountains which projected towards the sea of that place. The whole of the level land at the base of the spur was strewn with them; some being old, moss-covered and weather-worn, others fresh and sharp in outline, as if they had fallen only the previous winter, as probably they had, for the places from which they had been dislodged could be seen still fresh and light-coloured, nearly a thousand feet up on the riven cliffs. It was a species of desolation that powerfully recalled some scenes in Dante's "Inferno," and had a depressing effect on the youth's spirits, for

nothing seemed more unlikely than the existence of a human habitation in such a place.

A new view of the matter broke upon him, however, when he suddenly became aware that a spot in the confused scene which he had taken to be a clump of withered bracken was in reality a red cow! Looking a little more narrowly at objects he soon perceived a hut among the rocks. It was so small and rude and rugged as almost to escape detection. A furious barking soon told that he had been seen, and two collie dogs rushed towards him with demonstrations that threatened him with immolation on the spot. The uproar put life into a few more clumps of red bracken, and produced a lively display of sheep and cattle throughout the region.

Barret walked straight up to the door of the hut, and the collies withdrew from the attack—as most noisy demonstrators do when treated with silent indifference.

"Is there any one inside?" he asked of a bare-legged, shaggy-headed boy, who came out and gazed at him, apparently with his mouth as well as his eyes.

"Na," answered the boy.

"Any other cottages or houses near this?"

"Ay; yonder."

The boy pointed in the direction of the sea, where, in a stony nook between two jutting masses of rock, nestled about a dozen huts built of boulder stones gathered from the sea-shore. So small were these huts, and so stupendous the rocks around them,

that they might easily have been overlooked by a careless eye. So might the half-dozen fishing-boats that lay in the little cove beside them.

A stream or rivulet—better known in Scotland as a burn—ran past the hamlet, formed a pool just below it, and dropped into the cove close to the place where the boats lay.

Rejoiced to find even the poorest kind of shelter in such a place, Barret hastened down to the cove, and, tapping at the door of the largest of the cottages, was bidden "come in" by a soft voice.

Entering, he was surprised to find a neatly, though plainly, furnished room, which was evidently the kitchen of the house—indeed, the sole room, with the exception of an off-shoot closet. The large open fireplace contained a peat fire on the hearth, over which hung a bubbling pot. There were two box-beds opposite the fire, and in the wall which faced the door there was a very small window, containing four panes of glass, each of which had a knot in the middle of it. One of them also presented the phenomenon of a flattened nose, for the boy with the ragged head had rushed down and stationed himself there to observe the result of the unexpected and singular visit.

Beside the window, in a homely arm-chair, sat an invalid girl with pale thin cheeks, bright blue eyes, and long flaxen hair. If not pretty, she was, at all events, extremely interesting, and possessed the great charm of a winning smile.

Apologising for causing her alarm by his damp, dishevelled,

and sudden appearance, Barret asked if there were any men about the place.

No, there were none there at the moment; most of them being out after the sheep and cattle, and some gathering peat, or away in the boats.

"But surely they have not left you all by yourself?" said Barret, struck not only by the appearance of the girl, but by the comparative refinement of her language.

"Oh no!" she replied, with a slight smile; "they look well after me. Mrs Anderson has only gone to fetch some peats. But where have you come from, sir? Your clothes are all wet!"

"You are right. I have just been saved from drowning, through God's mercy, along with my companions."

Here Barret gave her a brief outline of the recent disaster, and then asked if Mrs Anderson was her mother.

"No; she is my aunt, but she is very good to me; takes as much care of me as if I was her own daughter. I don't belong to this place. They have sent me here for my health."

At this point they were interrupted by Mrs Anderson herself, who entered with a load of peat, which she flung down, shook her fist at the nose-flattener outside, and turned in astonishment to her visitor.

Of course our shipwrecked friend had to retail his story to the woman, and then learned from her that the island was a very large one, with a name unpronounceable by English lips, that it was very thinly inhabited, that it consisted almost entirely of pasture

land, and that "the laird" owned a large portion of it, including the little fishing village of "Cove."

While the woman was speaking an elderly man entered, whom she introduced as her husband Ian. To him Barret had to re-repeat his story, and then asked if he and his friends could obtain shelter in the village for the night.

"Iss it shelter ye'll be wantin'? Ye'll hev that an' welcome, though it will be of the poorest. But in the mornin' ye'll gang up to the hoose, for the laird wud be ill-pleased if we keepit ye here."

"Pray, who is this laird?" asked Barret; "your wife has already mentioned him."

"Maister Gordon is his name. He lives near the heed o' Loch Lossie. It iss over eight mile from here," said Ian; "an' a coot shentleman he iss, too. Fery fond o' company, though it iss not much company that comes this way, for the steam-poats don't veesit the loch reg'lar or often. He'll be fery glad to see you, sir, an' to help ye to git home. But we'd petter be goin' to tell your freen's that we can putt them up for the nicht. I'll go pack with ye, an we'll take the poy to help an' carry up their things."

"You forget that we have been wrecked," returned Barret with a laugh, "and have no 'things' to carry, except our own damp carcases."

"That's true, sir, but we'll be none the worse o' the poy, what-ë-ver. Come away, Tonal'," said Ian, as they started back along the shore. "It iss under the Eagle Cliff where ye came to laund, I make no doot?"

"Well, I suppose it was; at least, there is a range of cliffs close to the place where our raft struck."

"Oo ay—but it iss not the wee precipices, it iss the big hull behind them that we ca' the Eagle Cliff."

"Oh, indeed! I saw that cliff in a peculiar manner as I came along," said Barret giving a description of the scene.

"Ay; it iss sometimes seen like that," said Ian; "an' we often see the eagle, but it's no' possible to git a shot at that crater. The laird is real keen to bring it doon, for it plays the mischief among the lambs, an' him an' his freen's hes aften tried, but they hev not manicht it yet."

Thus chatting they soon reached the raft, and found the disconsolate party waiting impatiently for them.

"Shall we leave it where it lies, or drag it further up on the beach?" asked Mabberly, referring to the raft.

"Ye petter haul it a wee higher up," said Ian, examining the machine with much interest; "for when it comes on to plow there's a heavy sea here. Weel, weel, but it iss a strange contrivance!"

"Ay; an' also a useful one," said the skipper, drily—at least as duly as was possible in the circumstance.

"Noo, shentlemen, I think we had petter be goin'."

It was indeed time, for although the weather was warm and fine, the sun had set, and their damp garments began to feel uncomfortable.

At the Cove the whole party was accommodated in a single-

roomed hut, which chanced to be empty at the time. Here the hospitable fishermen spread nets for bedding, and with plaids made up for the lack of blankets. They also kindled a large peat fire, and put on a pot of potatoes, and some splendid sea-trout, while Mrs Anderson prepared oat-cakes at her own fire, and sent them in as required.

"Noo, shentlemen, ye'll tak a tram?" said Ian, producing a black bottle.

Immeasurable was the astonishment of the Highlander when the gentlemen refused a dram.

"But—but, ye'll catch yer death o' cauld, if ye don't!" he said, remonstratively, as he stood bottle and glass in hand.

"Thanks, friend," replied Jackman, "but we have taken in so much salt water during our swim to land that we are not sure whether the whisky would agree with it."

"Hoots! havers!" exclaimed Ian, pouring out some of the liquid; "ye're jokin'."

"In truth we are not, then," said Mabberly; "for we are all total abstainers."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Ian, who could not understand the principles or feelings of men who, after a long exhausting swim in their clothes, were capable of refusing whisky! For it is to be remembered that, although the time we write of is comparatively recent, that remote island had not been visited by any apostle of temperance or total abstinence in regard to alcohol. Of course Ian had heard something of such principles, but he did not

believe in them, and certainly did not practise them. "Hooiver, shentlemen," he added, "if ye wunna tak it—here's wushin' your fery coot health!"

Raising the glass, he drained it without winking, as if the contents had been water, smacked his lips and put the bottle away.

It must not be supposed that all the crew of the late unfortunate *Fairy* witnessed this proceeding unmoved, for, although they had all been engaged on the understanding that no strong drink was to be allowed or consumed while the voyage lasted, not one of them was a pledged abstainer, and now that the voyage was ended it did seem as if the laws of the voyage should no longer be binding. Still there remained a feeling that, as long as they continued a united party, the spirit of the agreement should not be broken; therefore the skipper and "Shames" let the bottle pass with a sigh, and Quin followed suit with an undertoned remark to Tips that, "he wouldn't have belaved tim'tation to be so strong av he hadn't wrastled wid it!"

By that time most of the men of the hamlet had returned, and a rig out of fisher clothes was lent to each of the unfortunates, so that they were enabled to pass the night in comfort while their own garments were in front of a good fire.

"Is that sick girl your daughter, Ian?" asked Giles Jackman that night, as he walked on the shore with his host before retiring to rest.

"No, sir; she's a niece—the daughter of a brother o' mine who

hes feathered his nest petter than me. He's a well-to-do grocer in Oban, an' hes geen his bairn a pretty good edication; but it's my opeenion they hev all but killed her wi' their edication, for the doctor has telt them to stop it altogither, an' send her here for a change o' air."

"Indeed! An interesting child, and so well-mannered, too," remarked Jackman.

"Humph! Nae doot she is. They do say that it's because my brither has gotten an English wife. But for my pairt, oor weemen seem to me to be as weel mainered as the weemen sooth o' the Tweed."

"Quite as well, I doubt not; though I have not seen much of your countrywomen, Ian. Besides, good manners are to be judged by varying standards. What is good in the opinion of the Eskimo may be thought very bad by the Hindoo, and *vice versa*. It is very much a matter of taste. The manners of your niece, at all events, are admirable. Now it is time to turn in. Good-night, Ian."

The sun was high next morning when the wrecked men awoke, and began to feel the outcries of nature with reference to breakfast. Long before that time the men of Cove had gone off to the hills, the peat-hags, or the sea, according to their respective callings. But Mrs Anderson had a sumptuous breakfast of oatmeal porridge and fresh milk ready for the strangers.

"Musha! but it'll make me mouth wather all the afthernoon thinkin' of it," said Quin, on finishing his second plateful.

"It's prime wittles," remarked Tips, as he helped himself to more.

"Now, Barret, have you finished?" asked Mabberly.

"No; why?"

"Because, in the first place, you are evidently eating too much for your health, and, in the second place, I want you to go up to what Ian calls the Hoose, as a deputation to the laird. You see, although we are forced, as it were, to throw ourselves on his hospitality, I don't quite like to descend on him all at once with the whole strength of our party. It will be better for one of us to break the ice, and as you are the best-looking and most hypocritically urbane, when you choose, I think we could not do better than devolve the duty upon you."

"Right, Bob, as usual; but don't you think," said Barret, helping himself to another ladleful of the porridge, "that my going may cut in two directions? Doubtless the laird would be agreeably surprised to meet with me; but then that will raise his expectations so high, that he will be woefully disappointed on meeting with *you*!"

"Come, friends," cried Jackman, "it is dangerous to play with edged tools immediately after a meal. My medical knowledge assures me of that. I quite approve of Barret forming the deputation, and the sooner he starts off the better. The rest of us will assist Ian to fish in his absence."

Thus authorised and admonished, Barret finished breakfast, put on his own garments—which, like those of his companions,

were semi-nautical—and sallied forth for an eight miles' walk over the mountains to the mansion of the laird, which lay on the other side of the Eagle's Cliff ridge, on the shores of Loch Lossie.

He was guided the first part of the journey by Tonal' with the ragged head, who, with an activity that seemed inexhaustible, led him up into wild and rugged places such as he had never before dreamed of—rocky fastnesses which, looked at from below, seemed inaccessible, even to goats, but which, on being attempted, proved to be by no means beyond the powers of a steady head and strong limbs.

Reaching the summit of a heather-clad knoll that projected from a precipitous part of the mountain-side, Barret paused to recover breath and look back at the calm sea. It lay stretched out far below him, looking, with its numerous islets in bird's-eye view, somewhat like a map. The mists had completely cleared away, and the sun was glittering on the white expanse like a line of light from the shore to the horizon. Never before had our Englishman felt so like a bird, both as to the point of vision from which he surveyed the glorious scene, and the internal sensation of joy which induced him not only to wish that he could fly, but to think that a very little more of such exultation of spirit would enable him to do so!

"Is that the Cove down there?" he asked of the ragged companion who stood beside him.

"Ay, that's the Cove!"

"Why, Donald, it looks like a mere speck in the scene from

here, and the men look no bigger than crows."

As this observation called for no answer none was given, and Donald seemed to regard his companion as one who was rather weak-minded.

"Have we come half-way yet, Donald?"

"No—no' near."

"Is it difficult to find the rest of the way from this point?"

"No; but it wad be diffeecult to miss it."

"Well, Donald, my boy, I have a strong desire to be alone—that is, to try if I cannot go the rest of the way without guidance; so, if you will just give me a little direction, I'll let you go home, and many thanks for coming thus far. Now, point out the landmarks."

He turned, as he spoke, towards the grand mountain that still towered behind him.

"There's naethin' t' pint oot," returned the boy; "ye've only t' haud on by this sheep track till ee come close under the cliff yonder."

"The Eagle Cliff?"

"Ay. It'll bring ee to a cairt road, an' ye've only to follow that through the pass, an' haud on till ee come to the hoose. Ye can see the hoose frae the other side o' the pass."

"And what is the 'hoose' called?" asked Barret.

"Kinlossie."

"Thank you. Good-bye, my boy."

A few coppers sent the youth of the ragged head away in high

spirits. The young man watched him till he was concealed by a clump of small birch trees that hung like a fringe on the top of a neighbouring precipice. Barret had just turned to continue the ascent to the Eagle Cliff, whose frowning battlements still rose high above him, when a wild shout from the boy made him turn and look anxiously back. The place which he had reached was strewn with great masses of rock that had fallen from the cliffs. He was about to clamber on to one of these, in order to obtain a better view, when the cause of the shout became obvious. A splendid stag, frightened from its lair by the boy, burst from the birchwood, and, with antlers laid well back, bounded up the slope towards him. It was closely followed by two does.

Barret crouched at once behind the mass of rock. The deer, thinking, doubtless, only of the danger behind, had failed to observe him.

"Oh for Giles, with his rifle!" thought the youth, as the agile creatures passed within less than a hundred yards of him, and headed straight for the pass of the Eagle Cliff.

Scarcely had the thought occurred, when a flapping noise behind caused him to turn quickly. It was the eagle himself, sailing majestically and slowly overhead, as though he knew full well that an Englishman without a gun was a harmless creature!

Considerably excited by these unexpected and, to him, stirring sights, Barret pushed steadily upward, and soon reached a part of the pass whence he could see the valley beyond, with a house in the far distance—which, of course, must be Kinlossie—standing

in a clump of wood on the margin of an inlet of the sea, known by the name of Loch Lossie.

But a far more astonishing sight than anything he had beheld that morning was yet in store for Barret. On turning round a projecting rock at the foot of the Eagle Cliff, he suddenly came upon a young girl, lying on the road as if dead!

Springing towards her, he knelt and raised her head. There was no blood upon the face, which was deadly pale, and no apparent injury. She did not seem to breathe, but on feeling her pulse he fancied that he felt a flutter there. A feeling of desperate regret passed through him as he thought of his utter destitution alike of medical or surgical knowledge. But Barret was not by any means a helpless man. Running to one of the many streams of water which trickled from the cliff, he filled the top of his wideawake therewith, and, returning, laved the girl's face, and poured a little into her mouth.

His efforts were successful. She recovered consciousness, opened her eyes, and asked, with a confused look, what was the matter.

"You must have had a fall, dear child; but you'll be better presently. Let me raise you."

The girl tried to rise, but, with a sharp cry of pain, fell back again unconscious.

Barret soon ascertained that one of the poor girl's arms was severely bruised, perhaps broken. He knew not what to do, but he knew that the greatest present evil was delay. He therefore

wrapped her in the shepherd's plaid which she wore, and raised her as gently as possible in his arms—making use of the plaid as a sort of sling, with part of it round his own neck. Then, thanking God for the strong limbs and muscles with which he had been endowed, he set off with vigorous tread for Kinlossie House.

Chapter Four
The Family at Kinlossie

Serenity was the prevailing feature in the character of old Allan Gordon, the laird of Kinlossie; but when that amiable, portly, grand, silver-headed old gentleman suddenly met an unknown young man of fine proportions carrying his favourite niece, wrapped up as a bundle in his arms, all his serenity disappeared, and he stared, glared, almost gasped, with mingled astonishment and consternation.

A very brief explanation, however, quickly sufficed to charge his susceptible spirit to overflowing with a compound of grave anxiety and heartfelt gratitude.

"Come in, my dear sir, come in; luckily our doctor is spending the day with me. But for you, my poor dear Milly might have been— This way, to her own room. Are you sure the arm is broken?"

"I fear so," replied Barret, entering the mansion; but before he could proceed farther his words were drowned in a shriek of surprise from four little Gordons, aged from sixteen to four, who yelled rather than demanded to know what ailed their cousin— ranging from Archie's, "What's wrong with Cousin Milly," to Flora's, "Wass wong wid Cuzn Miwy?"

By that time Mrs Gordon, a pleasant-voiced lady, with

benignity in her, looks, appeared on the scene, followed quickly by a man and several maid servants, all of whom added to the confusion, in the midst of which Cousin Milly was conveyed to her room and deposited on her bed. The family doctor, a rotund little man of fifty-five, was speedily in attendance.

"So fortunate that the doctor happens to be here," said the laird, as he led Barret to the library and offered him a glass of wine. "No! you don't drink? Well, well, as you please. Here, Duncan, fetch milk, lemonade, coffee, hot, at once. You must be tired after carrying her so far, even though she *is* a light weight. But, forgive me; in my anxiety about my poor niece I have quite forgotten to ask either your name or how you came here, for no steamer has been to the island for a week past. Pray be seated, and, wherever you may be bound for ultimately, make up your mind that my house is to be your home for a week at least. We suffer no visitor ever to leave us under that period."

"You are very kind," returned the young man, smiling, "and I accept your proffered hospitality most gladly. My name is John Barret. I came to the other side of the island in a yacht, and swam on shore in my clothes with six companions, spent the night at Cove, and have walked over here to make known these facts to you."

"You speak in riddles, my young friend," returned the laird, with an amused look.

"Yet I speak the truth," returned Barret, who thereupon gave a circumstantial account of the disaster that had befallen himself

and his friends.

"Excuse me," said Mr Gordon, rising; throwing up the window he shouted to a man who was passing at the moment, "Roderick, get the big waggonette ready to go to Cove, and bring it round here as fast as you can. You see," he added to Barret, "the road is considerably longer than the short cut by which you came, and we must have them all over here without delay. Don't distress yourself about room. We have plenty of accommodation. But come, I'll take you to your own room, and when you have made yourself comfortable, we will talk over your future plans. Just let me say, however, to prevent your mind running away on wrong ideas, that in the circumstances we won't allow you to leave us for two months. The post goes out to-morrow, so you can write to your father and tell him so."

Thus running on in a rich hearty voice, the hospitable Allan Gordon conducted Barret to a room in the southern wing of the rambling old edifice, and left him there to meditate on his good fortune, and enjoy the magnificent prospect of the island-studded firth or fiord from which the mansion derived its name.

While the waggonette was away for the rest of the wrecked party, the laird, finding that Milly's arm was not actually broken, though severely bruised, sat down to lunch with restored equanimity, and afterwards drove Barret in his dog-cart to various parts of his estate.

"Your friends cannot arrive for several hours, you see," he said on starting, "and we don't dine till seven; so you could not be

better engaged than in making acquaintance with the localities of our beautiful island. It may seem a little wild to you in its scenery, but there are thousands of picturesque points, and what painters call 'bits' about it, as my sweet little Milly Moss will tell you when she recovers; for she is an enthusiastic painter, and has made innumerable drawings, both in water-colour and oils, since she came to stay here. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you, Mr Barret, for rescuing the poor girl from her perilous position."

"I count myself fortunate indeed in having been led to the spot so opportunely," said Barret; "and I sincerely hope that no evil effects may result from her injuries. May I ask if she resides permanently with you at Kinlossie?"

"I wish she did," said the laird, fervently; "for she is like a sunbeam in the house. No, we have only got the loan of her, on very strict conditions too, from her mother, who is a somewhat timid lady of an anxious temperament. I've done my best to fulfil the conditions, but they are not easy."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Well, you see, my sister is firmly convinced that there is deadly danger in wet feet, and one of her conditions is that Milly is not to be allowed to wet her feet. Now you know it is not easy for a Londoner to understand the difficulty of keeping one's feet dry while skipping over the mountains and peat-hags of the Western Isles."

"From which I conclude that Mrs Moss is a Londoner," returned Barret, with a laugh.

"She is. Although a Gordon, and born in the Argyll Highlands, she was sent to school in London, where she was married at the age of seventeen, and has lived there ever since. Her husband is dead, and nothing that I have been able to say has yet tempted her to pay me a visit. She regards my home here as a wild, uninhabitable region, though she has never seen it, and besides, is getting too old and feeble to venture, as she says, on a long voyage. Certes, she is not yet feeble in mind, whatever she may be in body; but she's a good, amiable, affectionate woman, and I have no fault to find with her, except in regard to her severe conditions about Milly, and her anxiety to get her home again. After all, it is not to be wondered at, for Milly is her only child; and I am quite sure if I had not gone to London, and made all sorts of promises to be extremely careful of Milly and personally take her home again, she never would have let her come at all. See, there is one of Milly's favourite views," said the laird, pulling up, and pointing with his whip to the scene in front, where a range of purple hills formed a fine background to the loch, with its foreground of tangle-covered stones; "she revels in depicting that sort of thing."

Barret, after expressing his thorough approval of the young girl's taste in the matter of scenery, asked if Milly's delicate health was the cause of her mother's anxiety.

"Delicate health!" exclaimed the laird. "Why, man, sylph-like though she appears, she has got the health of an Amazon. No, no, there's nothing wrong with my niece, save in the imagination of

my sister. We will stop at this cottage for a few minutes. I want to see one of my men, who is not very well."

He pulled up at the door of a little stone hut by the roadside, which possessed only one small window and one chimney, the top of which consisted of an old cask, with the two ends knocked out. A bare-legged boy ran out of the hut to hold the horse.

"Is your brother better to-day?" asked the laird.

"No, sir; he's jist the same."

"Mind your head," said the laird, as he stooped to pass the low doorway, and led his friend into the hut.

The interior consisted of one extremely dirty room, in which the confined air was further vitiated by tobacco smoke and the fumes of whisky. One entire side of it was occupied by two box-beds, in one of which lay a brawny, broad-shouldered man, with fiery red hair and scarcely less fiery red eyes, which seemed to glare out of the dark den in which he lay.

"Well, Ivor, are ye not better to-day, man?"

There was a sternness in Mr Gordon's query, which not only surprised but grieved his young companion; and the surprise was increased when the sick man replied in a surly tone—

"Na, laird, I'm not better; an' what's more, I'll not be better till my heed's under the sod."

"I'm afraid you are right, Ivor," returned the laird, in a somewhat softer tone; "for when a man won't help himself, no one else can help him."

"Help myself!" exclaimed the man, starting up on one elbow,

and gazing fiercely from under his shaggy brows. “Help myself!” he repeated. And then, as if resolving suddenly to say no more, he sank down and laid his head on the pillow, with a short groan.

“Here, Ivor, is a bottle o’ physic that my wife sends to ye,” said Mr Gordon, pulling a pint bottle from his pocket, and handing it to the man, who clutched it eagerly, and was raising it to his mouth when his visitor arrested his hand.

“Hoot, man,” he said, with a short laugh, “it’s not whisky! She bid me say ye were to take only half a glass at a time, every two hours.”

“Poor’t oot, then, laird—poor’t oot,” said the man, impatiently. “Ye’ll fin’ a glass i’ the wundy.”

Fetching a wine-glass from the window Mr Gordon half filled it with a liquid of a dark brown colour, which the sick man quaffed with almost fierce satisfaction, and then lay down with a sigh.

“It seems to have done ye good already, man,” said the laird, putting the bottle and glass on that convenient shelf—the window-sill. “I’ve no idea what the physic is, but my good wife seems to know, and that’s enough for me; and for you, too, I think.”

“Ay, she’s a good wumin. Thank her for me,” responded Ivor.

Remounting the dog-cart the old gentleman explained, as they drove along, that Ivor Donaldson’s illness was the result of intemperance.

“He is my gamekeeper,” said the laird; “and there is not a

better or more trustworthy man in the island, when he is sober; but when he takes one of his drinking fits, he seems to lose all control over himself, and goes from bad to worse, till a fit of *delirium tremens* almost kills him. He usually goes for a good while after that without touching a drop, and at such times he is a most respectful, painstaking man, willing to take any amount of trouble to serve one, but when he breaks down he is as bad as ever—nay, even worse. My wife and I have done what we could for him, and have tried to get him to take the temperance pledge, but hitherto without avail. My wife has even gone the length of becoming a total abstainer, in order to have more influence over him; but I don't quite see my way to do that myself."

"Then *you* have not yet done all that you could for the man, though your wife has," thought Barret; but he did not venture to say so.

At this point in the conversation they reached a place where the road left the shores of the loch and ascended into the hills. Being rather steep at its lower end, they alighted and walked; the laird pointing out, as they ascended, features in the landscape which he thought would interest his young guest.

"Yonder," he said, pointing to a wood on the opposite side of the valley, "yonder is a good piece of cover for deer. The last time we had a drive there we got three, one o' them a stag with very fine antlers. It was there that a young friend of mine, who was not much accustomed to sporting, shot a red cow in mistake for a deer! The same friend knocked over five or six of my tame

ducks, under the impression that they were wild ones, because he found them among the heather! Are you fond of sport?"

"Not particularly," answered Barret; "that is, I am not personally much of a sportsman, though I have great enjoyment in going out with my sporting friends and watching their proceedings. My own tastes are rather scientific. I am a student of natural history—a botanist and geologist—though I lay no claim to extensive knowledge of science."

"Ah! my young friend, then you will find a powerful sympathiser in my niece Milly—that is, when the poor child gets well—for she is half mad on botany. Although only two weeks have passed since she came to us, she has almost filled her room with specimens of what she calls rare plants. I sometimes tease her by saying it is fortunate that bracken does not come under that head, else she'd pull it all up and leave no cover for the poor rabbits. She has also half-filled several huge books with gummed-in specimens innumerable, though I can't see that she does more than write their names below them."

"And that is no small advance in the science, let me tell you," returned Barret, who was stirred up to defend his co-scientist. "No one can succeed in anything who does not take the first steps, and undergo the drudgery manfully."

"Womanfully, in this case, my friend; but do not imagine that I underrate my little niece. My remark was to the effect that I do not see that she *does* more, though I have no manner of doubt that her pretty little head *thinks* a great deal more. Now we will get

up here, as the road is more level for a bit. D'you see the group of alders down in the hollow yonder, where the little stream that runs through the valley takes a sudden bend? There's a deep pool there, where a good many sea-trout congregate. You shall try it soon—that is, if you care for fishing."

"Oh, yes, I like fishing," said Barret. "It is a quiet, contemplative kind of sport."

"Contemplative!" exclaimed the old gentleman with a laugh; "well, yes, it is, a little. Sometimes you get down into the bed of the stream with considerable difficulty, and you have to contemplate the banks a long time, occasionally, before deciding as to which precipice is least likely to give you a broken neck. Yes, it is a contemplative sport. As to quiet, that depends very much on what your idea of quietude may be. Our burn descends for two or three miles in succession of leaps and bounds. If the roaring of cataracts is quieting to you, there is no end of it down there. See, the pool that I speak of is partly visible now, with the waterfall above it. You see it?"

"Yes, I see it."

"We call it Mac's pool," continued the laird, driving on, "because it is a favourite pool of an old school companion of mine, named MacRummle, who is staying with us just now. He tumbles into it about once a week."

"Is that considered a necessary part of the process of fishing?" asked Barret.

"No, it may rather be regarded as an eccentric addition

peculiar to MacRummle. The fact is, that my good friend is rather too old to fish now; but his spirit is still so juvenile, and his sporting instincts are so keen, that he is continually running into dangerous positions and getting into scrapes. Fortunately he is very punctual in returning to meals; so if he fails to appear at the right time, I send off one of my men to look for him. I have offered him a boy as an attendant, but he prefers to be alone."

"There seems to be some one down at the pool now," remarked Barret, looking back.

"No doubt it is MacRummle himself," said the laird, pulling up. "Ay, and he seems to be making signals to us."

"Shall I run down and see what he wants?" asked Barret.

"Do; you are active, and your legs are strong. It will do you good to scramble a little."

Leaping the ditch that skirted the road, the youth soon crossed the belt of furze and heather that lay between him and the river, about which he and his host had been conversing. Being unaccustomed to the nature of the Western Isles, he was a little surprised to find the country he had to cross extremely rugged and broken, and it taxed all the activity for which the laird had given him credit, as well as his strength of limb, to leap some of the peat-hags and water-courses that came in his way. He was too proud of his youthful vigour to pick his steps round them! Only once did he make a slip in his kangaroo-like bounds, but that slip landed him knee-deep in a bog of brown mud, out of which he dragged his legs with difficulty.

Gaining the bank of the river at last, he soon came up to the fisher, who was of sturdy build, though somewhat frail from age, and dressed in brown tweed garments, with a dirty white wideawake, the crown of which was richly decorated with casting-lines and hooks, ranging from small brown hackle to salmon-fly. But the striking thing about him was that his whole person was soaking wet. Water dripped from the pockets of his shooting coat, dribbled from the battered brim of his wideawake, and, flowing from his straightened locks, trickled off the end of his Roman nose.

"You have been in the water, I fear," said Barret, in a tone of pity.

"And you have been in the mud, young man," said the fisher, in a tone of good-humoured sarcasm.

The youth burst into a laugh at this, and the old fisherman's mouth expanded into a broad grin, which betrayed the fact that age had failed to damage his teeth, though it had played some havoc with his legs.

"These are what I style Highland boots," said the old man, pointing to the muddy legs.

"Indeed!" returned Barret. "Well, you see I have put them on at once, for I have only arrived a few hours since. My name is Barret. I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Mr MacRummle?"

"You have that pleasure, Mr Barret; and now, if you will do me the kindness to carry my rod and basket, I will lead you back

to the dog-cart by a path which will not necessitate an additional pair of native boots! I would not have hailed you, but having tumbled into the river, as you see, I thought it would be more prudent to get driven home as quickly as possible."

"You have a good basket of fish, I see, or rather, feel," remarked Barret, as he followed the old man, who walked rather slowly, for his physical strength was not equal to his spirits.

"Ay, it is not so bad; but I lost the best one. Fishers always do, you know! He was a grilse, a six-pounder at the least, if he was an ounce, for I had him within an inch of my gaff when I overbalanced myself, and shot into the stream head foremost with such force, that I verily believe I drove him to the very bottom of the pool. Strange to say the rod was not broken; but when I scrambled ashore, I found that the grilse was gone!"

"How unfortunate! You were not hurt, I hope?"

"Not in the least. There was plenty of depth for a dive; besides, I'm used to it."

It became quite evident to John Barret that his new friend was "used to" a good many more things besides tumbling into the river, for as they went slowly along the winding footpath that led them through the peat-hags, MacRummle tripped over a variety of stumps, roots, and other excrescences which presented themselves in the track, and which on several occasions brought him to the ground. The old gentleman, however, had a fine facility in falling. Being slow in all his movements, he usually subsided rather than fell; a result, perhaps, of laziness

as well as of unwillingness to struggle against fate. His frequent staggerings, also, on the verge of dark peat holes, caused his companion many a shock of alarm and many a start forward to prevent a catastrophe, before they gained the high road. They reached it at last, however, rather breathless, but safe.

MacRummle's speech, like his movements, was slow. His personal courage, considering the dangers he constantly and voluntarily encountered, was great.

"You've been in again, Mac, I see," exclaimed the laird heartily, extending his hand to his old friend with the view of hauling him up on the seat beside him. "Mind the step. Now then!"

"Yes, I've been in, but the weather is warm! Stop, stop! Don't pull quite so hard, Allan; mind my rheumatic shoulder. Give a shove behind, Mr Barret—gently—there. Thankee."

The old man sat down with something of a crash beside his friend. Barret handed him his rod, put the basket under his feet, and sprang up on the seat behind.

Returning at a swift pace by the road they had come, they soon reached Kinlossie, where the laird drove into the back yard, so as to deliver the still dripping MacRummle at the back door, and thus prevent his leaving a moist track from the front hall to his bedroom. Having got rid of him, and given the dog-cart in charge to the groom, Mr Gordon led his young friend round to the front of the house.

"I see your friends have already arrived," said the laird,

pointing to the waggonette which stood in the yard. "No doubt we shall find them about somewhere."

They turned the corner of the mansion as he spoke, and certainly did come on Barret's friends, in circumstances, however, which seemed quite unaccountable at first sight, for there, in front of the open door, were not only Bob Mabberly, Giles Jackman, Skipper McPherson, James McGregor, Pat Quin, and Robin Tips, but also Mrs Gordon, the two boy Gordons —named respectively, Eddie and Junkie—Duncan, the butler, and little Flora, with a black wooden doll in her arms, all standing in more or less awkward attitudes, motionless and staring straight before them as if petrified with surprise or some kindred feeling.

Barret looked at his host with a slight elevation of his eyebrows.

"Hush!" said the laird, softly, holding up a finger of caution. "My boy Archie is behind that laurel bush. He's photographing them!"

"That'll do," in a loud voice from Archie, disenchanted the party; and while the operator rushed off to his "dark closet," the laird hurried forward to be introduced to the new arrivals, and give them hospitable greeting.

That evening the host and his wife entertained their guests to a genuine Highland feast in the trophied hall, and at a somewhat later hour Duncan, the butler, and Elsie, the cook, assisted by Roderick, the groom, and Mary, the housemaid, held their share of high revelry in the kitchen, with Quin, Tips, and "Shames"

McGregor.

"You have come to the right place for sport, gentlemen," said the laird, as he carved with vigour at a splendid haunch of venison. "In their seasons we have deer and grouse on the hills; rabbits, hares, partridges, and pheasants on the low grounds. What'll you have, Mr Mabberly? My dear, what have you got there?"

"Pigeon pie," answered Mrs Gordon.

"Mac, that will suit your taste, I know," cried the host with a laugh.

"Yes, it will," slowly returned MacRummle, whose ruddy face and smooth bald head seemed to glow with satisfaction now that he had got into dry garments. "Yes, I'm almost as fond of pie as my old friend Robinson used to be. He was so fond of it that, strange though it may seem to you, gentlemen, he had a curious predilection for pie-bald horses."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.