

Barr Amelia E.

An Orkney Maid



Amelia Barr

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Barr A.

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	15
CHAPTER III	21
CHAPTER IV	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

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MOTTO

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

INTRODUCTION

Yesterday morning this thing happened to me: I was reading the *New York Times* and my eyes suddenly fell upon one word, and that word rang a little bell in my memory, “Kirkwall!” The next moment I had closed my eyes in order to see backward more clearly, and slowly, but surely, the old, old town—standing boldly upon the very beach of the stormy North Sea—became clear in my mental vision. There was a whole fleet of fishing boats, and a few smart smuggling craft rocking gently in its wonderful harbour—a harbour so deep and safe, and so capacious that it appeared capable of sheltering the navies of the world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

with horses, cattle and sheep. In A. D. 1830, the Norwegian system of weights was changed to the standard weights and measures, and money, instead of barter, began to be used generally.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF RAGNOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

No one could deny her beauty, though it was of the Highland Scotch type, and therefore a great contrast to the Orcadean blonde. She was slender and dark, with plentiful, glossy, black hair, and soft

brown eyes. Her face was oval and richly coloured. Her temperament was frank and domestic; yet she had a romantic side, and a full appreciation of what she called “a proper man.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I thought thou wert looking for Boris home tonight.”

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

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

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

“Thou should think of thyself.”

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

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

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

Apparently she owed little to her dress, and yet it would have been difficult to choose anything more befitting her, for though it was only of wine-coloured cashmere, it was made with a plain picturesqueness that rendered it most effective. The short sleeves then worn gave to her white arms the dark background that made them a fascination; the high waist, cut open in front to a point, was

filled in with white satin, over which it was laced together with a thin silk cord of the same colour as the dress. A small lace collar completed the toilet, and for the occasion, it was perfect; anything added to it would have made it imperfect.

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

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

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

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

"Why not make it twelve?"

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

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

"Art thou thinking of Sunna Vedder, Mother?"

"Yes, I am thinking of Sunna Vedder."

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

"Why?"

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

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

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

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

"And the Dominie?"

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

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

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

"That may not be easy to manage."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Dress! What is wrong with my dress?”

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

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

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

“Well, then, just for thee—I will wash and put on fresh linen.”

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

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

“And thou wilt wet it, to make it curl?”

“That I will do also—to please thee.”

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

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

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

“Did he do that thing?”

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

“Thou did right. Thy Aunt Barbara—”

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

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

“Father!”

“Well, then, what call for ‘Father’ now?”

“I want thee to wear thy kirk suit.”

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

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

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

“Thy Bishop also wears black broadcloth.”

“That will be because of his piety and humility. I am not as pious and humble as I might be. No, indeed! Not in everything can I humour thee, and trouble myself; but this thing is what I will do—I have a new suit of fine blue flannel; last night I brought it home. At McVittie’s it was made, and well it fits me. For thy sake I will wear it. This is the end of our talk. No more will I do.”

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

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

“Dear Father, thy will is my will. What is thy wish?”

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

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

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

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

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

“But thou must wash—”

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

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

“Whatever is the matter with thy father, Thora?”

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

“Will he change his suit?”

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

“What made him do such a childish thing?”

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

“I will go to him.”

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

“Am I right? From top to toe?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Thou hast made thyself so handsome—just to please me!”

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

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

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

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

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

“It is the very truth, dear one!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II

ADAM VEDDER'S TROUBLE

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

– *Swift*

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

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

Rahal Ragnor had never kept it. It had been only a remnant of popery to her. Long before the Free Kirk had been born, she and all her family had been Dissenters of some kind or other. And yet her life and her home were affected by this Episcopal "In Memoriam" in a great number of small, dominating ways, so that in the course of years she had learned to respect a ceremonial that she did not endorse. For she knew that no one kept Lent with a truer heart than Conall Ragnor, and that the Lenten services in the cathedral interfered with his business to an extent nothing purely temporal would have been permitted to do.

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

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

"It is Lent," answered Rahal.

"And after Lent comes Easter, dear Mother."

"That is the truth."

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

speak of it—the old prohibition of unkind speech, and the theological quarrel was yet so new and raw that to touch it was to provoke controversy, instead of conversation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Perhaps."

"Yes; for I would not have let a woman so fair and good as thou art go out of my family. We should have been man and wife. That would certainly have happened."

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

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

“To what port has thy son Boris sailed?”

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

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

“If that be so, speak thy mind to me.”

“I want a few words of advice about a woman.”

“Is that woman thy granddaughter, Sunna?”

“A right guess thou hast made.”

“Then I would rather not speak of her.”

“Thy reason? What is it?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Rahal Ragnor could speak safely to me.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Thy words are sufficient. Listen, then! There is a family, in the newest and best part of the town, called McLeod. They are yet strange here. They are Highland Scotch. Many say they are Roman Catholics. They sing Jacobite songs, and they go not to any church. They have opened a great trading route; and they have brought many new customs and new ideas with them. A certain class of our people make much of them; others are barely civil to them; the best of our citizens do not notice them at all. But they have plenty of money, and live extravagantly, and the garrison’s officers are constantly seen there. Do you know them?”

“I have heard of them.”

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

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

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

“And thou? What dost thou think?”

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

“I have heard that he wears the Highland dress.”

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

“You ought to know.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

as the hour was struck for the dance. Boris permitted them to go, laughing and boastful; an hour afterwards he followed.”

“With whom did he go?”

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

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

“Think no worse than needs be.”

“What did Boris do—or say?”

“He walked rapidly to Sunna, and he said, ‘Miss Vedder, thou art wanted at thy home—at once thou art wanted. Get thy cloak, and I will walk with thee.’”

“Then?”

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

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

“Well, then, Adam, a young man wishes to make sure of himself. Boris is much from home—”

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

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

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

“Oh! You mean it is Lent, Adam?”

“Yes! It is Lent!”

“I was never taught to regard it.”

“Yet none keep Lent more strictly than Conall Ragnor.”

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

“I do.”

“Let us cease this talk. It will come to nothing.”

“Then good-bye.”

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

“As kindly as may be, I will do right.”

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

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

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

CHAPTER III

ARIES THE RAM

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

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

It was Saturday morning and the next day was Easter Sunday. The little town of Kirkwall was in a state of happy, busy excitement, for though the particular house cleaning of the great occasion was finished, every housewife was full laden with the heavy responsibility of feeding the guests sure to arrive for the Easter service. Even Rahal Ragnor had both hands full. She was expecting her sister-in-law, Madame Barbara Brodie by that day's boat, and nobody ever knew how many guests Aunt Barbara would bring with her. Then if her own home was not fully prepared to afford them every comfort, she would be sure to leave them at the Ragnor house until all was in order. Certainly she had said in her last letter that she was not "going to be imposed upon, by anyone this spring"—and Thora reminded her mother of this fact.

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

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

"Are there many flowers this year?"

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

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

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

"It now belongs to the altar. I gave it freely last Easter. I promised then that it should never hold flowers again for any meaner festival. Take whatever thou wants for thy purpose, and delay me no

longer. I have this day to put two days' work into one day." Then she lifted her eyes from the pastry she was making and looking at Thora, asked: "Art thou not too lightly clothed?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's right, laddie! Folks seldom see any good thing in their employer; and it is quite fair for them to be just as blind to any bad thing in him—but I'll tell you frankly that your employer has not a first rate reputation here."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Began in A. D., 1138. Is that old?”

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

“*Presence*. What do you mean?”

“Souls.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Are you a Roman Catholic?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thora?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, no, better go down to the beach and watch the puffins flying over the sea, and the terns fishing about the low lying land. Or you might get a sight of an Arctic skua going north, or a black

guillemot with a fish in its mouth flying fast to feed its young. The seaside is the place, laddie! There is something going on there constantly.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is Bishop Hedley!” said Rahal.

“Then I am going,” said Aunt Barbara.

“No, no, Aunt!” cried Thora, and the next moment she was at her aunt’s side coaxing her to resume her chair. Then the Bishop and Ragnor entered the room, and the moment the Bishop’s face shone upon them, all talk about leaving the room ceased. For Bishop Hedley carried his Great Commission in his face and his life was a living sermon. His soul loved all mankind; and he had with

it an heroic mind and a strong-sinewed body, which refused to recognise the fact that it died daily. For the Bishop's business was with the souls of men, and he lived and moved and did his daily work in a spiritual and eternal element.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The month of March, sir.”

“Why?”

“I do not know. Tell me, sir.”

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

“But why under that sign, sir?”

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

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

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

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

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

Then he took from his pocket a little book and said, “Listen to the end of this service, ‘And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities

of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away, by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV

SUNNA AND HER GRANDFATHER

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

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

– *Carl Spencer.*

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

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

“Well then, Vera, what is thy wish?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And which way runs the guessing?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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