

green of the water—this reflected, deep, almost opaque green is not unlike the colour of Niagara below the Falls—there are smooth circular lines here and there, and now and again the bows of the *White Dove* slowly swerve away from her course as if in obedience to some unseen and mysterious pressure. There is not a breath of wind, and it needs all the pulling of the two men out there in the dingy and all the watchful steering of Captain John to keep her head straight. Then a light breeze comes along the great gully; the red-capped men are summoned on board, the dingy is left astern; the danger of being caught in an eddy and swirled ashore is over and gone.

Suddenly the yacht stops as if it had run against a wall. Then, just as she recovers, there is an extraordinary hissing and roaring in the dead silence around us, and close by the yacht we find a great circle of boiling and foaming water, forced up from below and overlapping itself in ever-increasing folds. And then, on the perfectly glassy sea, another and another of those boiling and hissing circles appear, until there is a low rumbling in the summer air like the breaking of distant waves. And the yacht—the wind having again died down—is curiously impelled one way and another, inasmuch that John of Skye quickly orders the men out in the dingy again, and again the long cable is tugging at her bows.

"It seems to me," says Dr. Sutherland to our skipper, "that we are in the middle of about a thousand whirlpools."

"Oh, it is ferry quite this morning," says Captain John, with a shrewd smile. "It is not often so quiet as this. Ay, it is sometimes ferry bad here—quite so bad as Corrievreckan, and when the flood-tide is running, it will be running like a race-horse."

However, by dint of much hard pulling and judicious steering we manage to keep the *White Dove* pretty well in mid-current; and only once—and that but for a second or two—get caught in one of those eddies circling in to the shore. We pass the white ferry-house; a slight breeze carries us by the green shores and woods of Glenelg; we open out the wider sea between Isle Ornsay and Loch Houra; and then a silver tinkle tells us breakfast is ready.

That long, beautiful, calm summer day; Ferdinand and Miranda playing draughts on deck—he having rigged up an umbrella to shelter her from the hot sun; the Laird busy with papers referring to the Strathgovan Public Park; the hostess of these people overhauling the stores and meditating on something recondite for dinner. At last the Doctor fairly burst out laughing.

"Well," said he, "I have been in many a yacht; but never yet in one where everybody on board was anxiously waiting for the glass to fall."

His hostess laughed too.

"When you come south again," she said, "we may be able to give you a touch of something different. I think that, even with all your love of gales, a few days of the equinoctials would quite satisfy you."

"The equinoctials!" he said, with a surprised look.

"Yes," said she, boldly. "Why not have a good holiday while you are about it? And a yachting trip is nothing without a fight with the equinoctials. Oh, you have no idea how splendidly the *White Dove* behaves!"

"I should like to try her," he said, with a quick delight; but directly afterwards he ruefully shook his head. "No, no," said he, "such a tremendous spell of idleness is not for me. I have not earned the right to it yet. Twenty years hence I may be able to have three months' continued yachting in the West Highlands."

"If I were you," retorted this small person, with a practical air, "I would take it when I could get it. What do you know about twenty years hence?—you may be physician to the Emperor of China. And you have worked very hard, and you ought to take as long a holiday as you can get."

"I am sure," says Mary Avon very timidly, "that is very wise advice."

"In the meantime," says he, "I am not physician to the Emperor of China, but to the passengers and crew of the *White Dove*. The passengers don't do me the honour of consulting me; but I am going to prescribe for the crew on my own responsibility. All I want is, that I shall have the assistance of Miss Avon in making them take the dose."

Miss Avon looked up inquiringly with those soft black eyes of hers.

"Nobody has any control over them but herself—they are like refractory children. Now," said he, rather more seriously, "this night-and-day work is telling on the men. Another week of it and you would see *Insomnia* written in large letters on their eyes. I want you, Miss Avon, to get Captain John and the men to have a complete night's rest to-night—a sound night's sleep from the time we finish dinner till day-break. We will take charge of the yacht."

Miss Avon promptly rose to her feet.

"John!" she called.

The big, brown-bearded skipper from Skye came aft—quickly putting his pipe in his waistcoat pocket the while.

"John," she said, "I want you to do me a favour now. You and the men have not been having enough sleep lately. You must all go below to-night as soon as we come up from dinner; and you must have a good sleep till day-break. The gentlemen will take charge of the yacht."

It was in vain that John of Skye protested he was not tired. It was in vain he assured her that, if a good breeze sprang up, he might get right back to Castle Osprey by the next morning.

"Why, you know very well," she said, "this calm weather means to last forever."

"Oh, no! I don't think that, mem," said John of Skye, smiling.

"At all events we shall be sailing all night; and that is what I want you to do, as a favour to me."

Indeed, our skipper found it was of no use to refuse. The young lady was peremptory. And so, having settled the matter, she sat down to her draught-board again.

But it was the Laird who was playing with now. And this was a remarkable circumstance about the game: when Angus Sutherland played with Denny-mains, the latter was hopelessly and invariably beaten, and when Denny-mains in his turn played with Mary Avon, he was relentlessly and triumphantly the victor; but when Angus Sutherland played with Miss Avon, she generally managed to secure two out of three games. It was a puzzling triangular duel: the chief feature of it was the splendid joy of the Laird when he had conquered the English young lady. He rubbed his hands, he chuckled, he laughed—just as if he had been repeating one of his own "good ones."

However, at luncheon the Laird was much more serious, for he was showing us how remiss the Government was in not taking up the great solan question. He had a newspaper cutting which gave in figures—in rows of figures—the probable number of millions of herrings destroyed every year by the solan geese. The injury done to the herring-fisheries of this country, he proved to us, was enormous. If a solan is known to eat on an average fifty herrings a day, just think of the millions on millions of fish that must go to feed those nests on the Bass Rock! The Laird waxed quite eloquent about it. The human race were dearer to him far than any gannet or family of gannets.

"What I wonder at is this," said our young Doctor, with a curious grim smile, that we had learned to know, coming over his face, "that the solan, with that extraordinary supply of phosphorus to the brain, should have gone on remaining only a bird, and a very ordinary bird, too. Its brain-power should have been developed; it should be able to speak by this time. In fact, there ought to be solan school-boards and parochial boards on the Bass Rock; and commissioners appointed to inquire whether the building of nests might not be conducted on more scientific principles. When I was a boy—I am sorry to say—I used often to catch a solan by floating out a piece of wood with a dead herring on it; a wise bird, with its brain full of phosphorus, ought to have known that it would break its head when it swooped down on a piece of wood."

The Laird sat in dignified silence. There was something occult and uncanny about many of the young man's sayings—they savoured too much of the dangerous and unsettling tendencies of these modern days. Besides, he did not see what good could come of likening a lot of solan-geese to the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan. His remarks on the herring-fisheries had been practical and intelligible; they had given no occasion for jibes.

We were suddenly startled by the rattling out of the anchor-chain. What could it mean?—were we caught in an eddy? There was a scurrying on deck, only to find, having drifted so far south with the tide, and the tide beginning to turn, John of Skye proposed to secure what advantage he had gained by coming to anchor. There was a sort of shamed laughter over this business. Was the noble *White Dove* only a river barge, then, that she was thus dependent on the tide for her progress? But it was no use either to laugh or to grumble; two of us proposed to row the Laird away to certain distant islands that lie off the shore north of the mouth of Loch Houra; and for amusement's sake we took some towels with us.

Look now how this long and shapely gig cuts the blue water. The Laird is very dignified in the stern, with the tiller-ropes in his hand; he keeps a straight countenance—though he is mostly looking over the side. And, indeed, this is a perfect wonder-hall over which we are making our way—the water so clear that we notice the fish darting here and there among the great brown blades of the tangle and the long green sea-grass. Then there are stretches of yellow sand, with shells and starfish shining far below. The sun burns on our hands; there is a dead stillness of heat; the measured splash of the oars startles the sea-birds in there among the rocks.

Send the birlan on careering.

Cheerily and all together.

Ho, ro, clansmen!

A long, strong pull together.

Ho, ro, clansmen!

Look out for the shallows, most dignified of coxswains; what if we were to imbed her bows in the silver sand!

Another cheer! Our isle appears—

Our birlan bears her on the faster!

Ho, ro, clansmen!

A long, strong pull together.

Ho, ro, clansmen!

"Hold hard!" calls Denny-mains, and behold! we are in among a network of channels and small islands lying out here in the calm sea; and the birds are wildly calling and screaming and swooping about our heads, indignant at the approach of strangers. What is our first duty, then, in coming to those un-

known islands and straits?—why, surely, to name them in the interests of civilization. And we do so accordingly. Here—let it be forever known—is John Smith Bay. There, Thorley's Food for Cattle Island. Beyond that, on the south, Brown and Polson's Straits. It is quite true that these islands and bays may have been previously visited; but it was no doubt a long time ago; and the people did not stop to bestow names. The latitude and longitude may be dealt with afterwards; meanwhile the discoverers unanimously resolve that the most beautiful of all the islands shall hereafter, through all time, be known as the Island of Mary Avon.

It was on this island that the Laird achieved his memorable capture of a young sea-bird—a huge creature of unknown species that fluttered and scrambled over bush and over scur, while Denny-mains, quite forgetting his dignity and the heat of the sun, clambered after it over the rocks. And when he had got it in his hands, it lay as one dead. He was sorry. He regarded the newly-fledged thing with compassion; and laid it tenderly down on the grass; and came away down again to the shore. But he had scarcely turned his back when the demon bird got on its legs, and—with a succession of shrill and sarcastic "yawns"—was off and away over the higher ledges. No fasting girl had ever shammed so completely as this scarcely-fledged bird.

We bathed in Brown and Polson's Straits, to the great distress of certain sea-pyots that kept screaming over our heads, resenting the intrusion of the discoverers. But in the midst of it, we were suddenly called to observe a strange darkness on the sea, far away in the north, between Glenelg and Skye. Behold! the long-looked-for wind—a hurricane swooping down from the northern hills! Our toilet on the hot rocks was of brief duration; we jumped into the gig; away we went through the glassy water! It was a race between us and the northerly breeze which should reach the yacht first; and we could see that John of Skye had remarked the coming wind, for the men were hoisting the fore-staysail. The dark blue on the water spreads; the reflection of the hills and the clouds gradually disappear; as we clamber on board the first puff of the breeze are touching the great sails. The anchor has just been got up; the gig is hoisted on the davits; slack out the main sheet, you shifty Hector, and let the great boom go out! Nor is it any mere squall that has come down from the hills; but a fine, steady, northerly breeze; and away we go with the white foam in our wake. Far-well to the great mountains over the gloomy Loch Houra, and to the light-house over there at Isle Ornsay; and to the giant shoulders of Ardnagh-Glisnich. Are not these the dark green woods of Armadale that we see in the west? And southward and still southward we go with the running seas and the fresh brisk breeze from the north; who knows where we may not be to-night before Angus Sutherland's watch begins?

There is but one thoughtful face on board. It is that of Mary Avon. For the moment, at least, she seems scarcely to rejoice that we have at last got this grateful wind to bear us away to the South and to Castle Osprey.

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH THE DARK.

Ahead she goes! the land she knows!

What though we see a sudden squall come tearing over from the shores of Skye, whitening the waves as it approaches us? The *White Dove* is not afraid of any squall. And there are the green woods of Armadale, dusky under the western glow; and here the sombre heights of Dun Bane; and soon we will open out the great gap of Loch Nevis. We are running with the running waves; a general excitement prevails; even the Laird has dismissed for the moment certain dark suspicions about Frederick Smethurst that have for the last day or two been haunting his mind.

And here is a fine sight!—the great steamer coming down from the north—and the sunset is burning on her red funnels—and behold! she has a line of flags from her stem to her topmasts and down to her stern again. Who is on board!—some great laird, or some gay wedding-party!

"Now is your chance, Angus," said Queen T—, almost maliciously, as the steamer slowly gains on us. "If you want to go on at once, I know the captain would stop for a minute and pick you up."

He looked at her for a second in a quick, hurt way; then he saw that she was only laughing at him.

"Oh, no, thank you," he said, blushing like a school-boy; "unless you want to get rid of me. I have been looking forward to sailing the yacht to-night."

"And—and you said," remarked Miss Avon, rather timidly, "that we would challenge them again after dinner this evening."

This was a pretty combination: "we" referred to Angus Sutherland and herself. Her elders were disrespectfully described as "them." So the younger people had not forgotten how they were beaten by "them" on the previous evening.

Is there a sound of pipes amid the throbbing of the paddles? What a crowd of people swarm to the side of the great vessel! And there is the captain on the paddle-box—out all handkerchiefs to return the innumerable salutations—and good-bye, you brave *Glenelg*!—you have no need to rob us of any one of our passengers

Where does the breeze come from on this still evening?—there is not a cloud in the sky, and there is a drowsy haze of heat all along the land. But nevertheless it continues; and, as the gallant *White Dove* cleaves her way through the tumbling sea, we gradually draw on to the Point of Sleat, and open out the great plain of the Atlantic, now a golden green, where the tops of the waves catch the light of the sunset skies. And there, too, are our old friends Haleval and Hnskeval; but they are so far away, and set amid such a bewildering light, that the whole island seems to be of a pale transparent rose-purple. And a still stranger thing now attracts the eyes of all on board. The setting sun, as it nears the horizon-line of the sea, appears to be assuming a distinctly oblong shape. It is slowly sinking into a purple haze, and becomes more and more oblong as it nears the sea. There is a call for all the glasses hung up in the companion-way; and now what is it that we find out there by the aid of the various binoculars? Why, apparently, a wall of purple; and there is an oblong hole in it, with a fire of gold light far away on the other side. This apparent golden tunnel through the haze grows redder and more red; it becomes more and more elongated; then it turns a deeper crimson until it is almost a line. The next moment there is a sort of shock to the eyes; for there is a sudden darkness all along the horizon-line: the purple-black Atlantic is barred against that lurid haze low down in the west.

It was a merry enough dinner-party: perhaps it was the consciousness that the *White Dove* was still bowling along that brightened up our spirits, and made the Laird of Denny-mains more particularly loquacious. The number of good ones he told us was quite remarkable—until his laughter might have been heard throughout the whole ship. And to whom now did he devote the narration of those merry anecdotes—to whom but Miss Mary Avon, who was his ready chorus on all occasions, and who entered with a greater zest than any one into the humours of them. Had she been studying the Lowland dialect, then, that she understood and laughed so lightly and joyously at stories about a thousand years of age?

"Oh, ay," the Laird was saying patronizingly to her, "I see ye can enter into the peculiar humour of our Scotch stories; it is not every English person that can do that. And ye understand the language fine. . . . Well," he added, with an air of modest apology, "perhaps I do not give the pronunciation as broad as I might. I have got out of the way of talking the provincial Scotch since I was a boy—indeed, ah'm, generally taken for an Englishman myself—but I do my best to give ye the speerit of it."

"Oh, I am sure your imitation of the provincial Scotch is most excellent—most excellent—and it adds so much to the humour of the stories," says this disgraceful young hypocrite.

"Oh, ay, oh, ay," says the Laird, greatly delighted. "I will admit that some of the stories would not have much humour but for the language. But when ye have both! Did ye ever hear of the ladie who was called to his porridge by his mother?"

We perceived by the twinkle in the Laird's eyes that a real good one was coming. He looked round to see that we were listening, but it was Mary Avon whom he addressed.

"A grumbling bir laddie—a philosopher, too," said he. "His mother thought he would come in the quicker if he knew there was a fly in the milk. 'Johnny,' she cried out, 'Johnny, come into your parritch; there's a fly in the milk.' 'It'll no doon,' says he. 'What?' she says, 'grumbling again! Do ye think there's no enough milk?' Plenty for the parritch," says he—*kee! kee! kee!*—harp, eh, wasn't he!—'Plenty for the parritch,' says he—*ha! ha! ha!*—*ho! ho! ho!*—and the Laird slapped his thigh, and chuckled to himself. "Oh, ay, Miss Mary," he added, approvingly, "I see you are beginning to understand the Scotch humour fine."

And if our good friend the Laird had been but twenty years younger—with his battery of irresistible jokes, and his great and obvious affection for this stray guest of ours, to say nothing of his dignity and importance as a Commissioner of Strathgovan! What chance would a poor Scotch student have had, with his test-tubes and his scientific magazines, his restless, audacious speculation and eager ambitions! On the one side, wealth, ease, a pleasant face-tiousness, and a comfortable acceptance of the obvious facts of the universe—including water-rates and steam fire-engines; on the other, poverty, unrest, the physical struggle for existence, the mental struggle with the mysteries of life; who could doubt what the choice would be? However, there was no thought of this rivalry now. The Laird had abdicated in favour of his nephew, Howard, about whom he had been speaking a good deal to Mary Avon of late. And Angus—though he was always very kind and timidly attentive to Miss Avon—seemed nevertheless at times almost a little afraid of her; or perhaps it was only a vein of shyness that cropped up from time to time through his hard mental characteristics. In any case, he was at this moment neither the shy lover nor the eager student; he was full of the prospect of having sole command of the ship during a long night on the Atlantic, and he hurried us up on deck after dinner without a word about that return-battle at *beizque*.

The night had come on apace, though there was still a ruddy mist about the northern skies, behind the dusky purple of the Coolin hills. The stars were out overhead; the air around us