

THE SCHOOLMISTRESS

There was a grand clacking going on down by the row of cottages that lay near by the schoolhouse; an excited group of women had gathered together by the pailings that shut in the bits of garden in front of them. Some who preferred the shelter of their own doorway would put in a word now and then at the top of their voices with good effect. The stern sex was represented by old Jimmy, the lame carpenter, who, perched on the lowest step of the stile, smiled occasionally to himself between whiffs of his beloved pipe.

"I tell ye a' I'll no pit oop wi' it my mair," Mary McDonald's a guid enno; lassie, but she's owre young to be a schoolmistress, an' I'll just tell Mr. McPherson so, ay, an' a' the board, too, wi' me an' tongue."

Mrs. Reid stopped for breath, and while she knitted away with fierce energy, her eyes dared any one to disagree with her.

"There's ma Jeannie noo," she went on. "It's naething but the dancing noo a' the day—this step and that step. No, but that I'm no' fond of a tura mair—when I was a lassie," she corrected hastily, heedful of a grin on old Jimmy's face. "Where's the buik-larin' ta' come in wi' a' that playin' and jumpin' about?"

"That's just what I'm sayin'," put in another woman. "My twa laddies, that wasna owre fond o' their buiks (an' monny's the skelpin' they got frae me for being late at the schule), they just rin a' the way noo, to be in for the fun—the dancin' and singin' and jumpin' about. It's no' richt and proper. Wha's that ye're sayin', Jimmy?" as a sound proceeded from the stile.

"O nae muckle, Maggie. I was just wonderin' if ye missed gien y'r laddies their skelpin' every morn'."

"Toots, mon, just mind y'r ain beensin'," she cried, with a toss of her head.

At that moment a voice from a neighboring doorway loudly called their attention. The blacksmith's wife was pointing indignantly towards the school playground.

"There's the bairns at play noo," she shouted, "an' it's wantin' half an hour yet to the time."

"Och, och, did ye iver see the like?" "It's just a sinfu' waste o' time!" etc., etc., was heard on all sides amidst much head-shaking, and deep displeasure was felt for Miss McDonald's want of dignity, when they perceived the merry schoolmistress running about with the children for all the world like one of them. Her foot as fleet as any, her red hair shining in the sun, she laughed and romped and ran about and seemed, wherever she went, the centre of all the life and fun.

What could a silly girl like that know of book learning, of grammar and history, geography and sums? The mothers trembled for their offspring, and thought of the last school dame, of maturer years, whose rather sour-lined face and high forehead had certainly looked the part more, but who had, if they had only known it, about a third of the brains of the red-haired, rosy-cheeked Mary McDonald.

"I doubt the bairns will get little learnin' from yon lassie," said a woman presently who had not yet spoken. "Jessie was tellin' me a fine story of her goin' on in the schule. It was at the Bible class the other day. Mary was axing questions o' the littler bairns an' she cam' to wee Willie, Mrs. Ferguson's bairn, ye ken, 'Willie,' says Mary, 'who was Adam?'"

"Please, mam, the first wife," says Willie.

Old Jimmy in the background grinned widely.

"And what d'ye think the schulemistress says ta' that?" continued the narrator, pausing impressively. "Well, she just laughed and laughed, an' a' the scholars laughed too, till the tears ran down, and wee Willie began to greet. Then Mary called him tulla her. 'Willie,' says she, 'sin' Adam's the first wife, t'was he, then, that tuk the apple, tak' this yen for a remembrance o' him.'"

The old joinder roared with laughter, but the women were greatly shocked, and the general feeling was that this was the last straw. Was the Scripture to be made a joke of? Such levity was incompatible with book learning, and they must get rid of this Mary McDonald.

Mary sat in her cozy little parlor in deep thought. The frelight flickered about the room and picked out the gold in her red head as she leaned on her hand. Presently she took up the poker and gave the coals an angry jab. "The old idiots!" she said aloud, and with contempt in her voice. She let the poker fall with a clatter, and clapping her hands round her knees rocked herself to and fro, frowning at the flame she had started.

"It's Mary McDonald does this, and Mary McDonald doesn't do that, till I'm fair sick o' them all, and just weary for a sight of mother and little Jess. I think I'll just take myself off."

A pause—while the flames leaped up merrily, the room brightened, and Mary's frowns began to melt away.

"Well, well, I'm that fond o' the bairns," she began again, "and I'll just not give in to their doddering mothers," she finished in quite a loud and hearty voice. By this time the frown had gone entirely, and Mary still gazing into the fire, began to smile. A minute or two after that she was dancing round the room, clapping her hands, and altogether like the "daft lassie" the old folks sometimes called her.

A few days after this the gossips of the "town" were discussing with much gusto a choice little bit of news.

It seemed that Mary McDonald had thrown up her place in a huff, and was leaving the school on Saturday, and on Monday following a new teacher was coming. No one could exactly say where this information had come from, and there were some who maintained that Mary was but going for a holiday, and had asked a friend to take her place. But Mrs. Reid would have none of that.

"I tell ye," she said in triumph to her cronies, Mrs. Ferguson. "I tell ye then lass nae staideliv, she was owre young and flichty for such a posession."

"Indeed, Mrs. Reid," replied the other, "ye speak the truth. I was sayin' it myself to Jeannie the morn'." Mary McDonald, I said, 'is a lass t'at'll come to nae gude, she's that flichty,' was the wurd I used."

"A teacher," continued Mrs. Reid, scornfully, "for just two months, then off she's awa' in a meenute, as laushty as ye please."

"Eh! but ye're a gran' judge o'

character, Mrs. Reid," said a voice behind her, and she turned hastily. Old Jimmy had come up while they were talking, and met her suspicious glance with a flattering smile of innocent admiration. She looked uneasily away.

"Puir bit lass!" sighed old Jimmy to himself.

On Saturday Mary certainly did go—and with her box, too—and as certainly another arrived on Monday morning. And here she was installed. Oh, what a contrast to Mary!

Her gray hair—an ugly iron gray—was drawn back from a lined forehead and partly hidden under a black woollen cap. A pair of blue spectacles gave a severe aspect to such of her features as one could see; for she wore eternally a woollen comforter wound round her neck, and often pulled over her mouth and chin. Miss Forsyth suffered from asthma, and her hoarse voice testified to the weak throat she complained of. But she was an excellent teacher, and if the lads and lassies missed Mary's fun and laughter they certainly got on well at their books. Miss Forsyth was strict, but though she laughed seldom, all had seen her eyes twinkling behind the blue spectacles. The women folk were satisfied and in spite of the teacher being aloof in her manner and always refusing to take a cup of tea with them in their own houses, they looked upon her as a superior person, and were proud of what they deemed her town manners. Only old Jimmy raised a dissentient voice.

"It's the sonsy reid-haired lass I likit," he would say. "She was the grand creetur, wi' her jowl always ready. Ye'll never git the like o' her again." And he shook his head with mournful defiance at the "daft wives" as he styled them.

"Ye're a' for a bonny face, Jimmy," one of them retorted. "We ken that fine. Miss Forsyth nae doubt is no' sae bonny, but she's a gey worthy person, an' she gets the bairns on fine, though she's had them but a week. Jessie kens a' the po'try in her buik an' speaks it in gran' style, an' there's Mrs. Ferguson's laddies that were sae backward, they are well up into the second standard the noo."

"I'm no' sayin'," said Mrs. Reid, "that the bairns exactly lost wi' Mary; but she was clean daft on 'relaxation,' as she caed it. 'Let the bairns play,' said she to me, 'an' they'll learn a' the better for it.'"

"Yon's true enno," said Jimmy. "It's Mary was the wise-like lassie." "Hoots, mon! The bairns hae plenty o' time and tae spare for play at their own homes. Schule's no' a place for sae goin's on."

"There's no sae muckle time for playin'," answered obstinate Jimmy, "when the puir wee bodies hae tae tramp tae the general merchant, and tae fetch the milk and bread as soon as iver schule's oot."

"Och, indeed! Wha wud be fetchin' the things if the bairns didna'?" This was going off the line or argument Jamie felt, but knew 'twas no use saying so.

"Dinna fash yersel', wumman," he said in a soothing tone, listening patiently afterwards to the flood he had brought down on himself.

But for all that Mary McDonald came back to the schoolhouse again and stayed there, and this was the way of it.

Not long afterwards the school was "out" one sunshiny mid-day towards the end of winter. It had been a frosty night, but the sun had since taken the edge off the keenness of the air, and as the children played, the sunlight dazzled their bright eyes and glittered on their bare heads, and the frost touched up their cheeks to a rosy hue. Those shaded eyes of the school teacher twinkled again as she leaned her knitting in her hands against the doorway of the schoolhouse, and followed all their movements.

The old joinder, as usual, was not far off; he leaned against a post in the railing, pipe in mouth, smiling benevolently on the bairns, and not forgetting every now and then to throw a caustic word or two to some of the women folk, who had been tempted from their houses by the cheery sunlight.

"Miss Forsyth is luikin' gey dour the day," observed Jimmy. (He could not see her eyes from that distance off.) "No, that she's iver that blithesome, puit body, and it's no' to be wondered at considerin' a' the knowledge and learnin' the puit schule has tae tak' about wi' her."

"And what does the wumman mean?" he went on presently, "by coverin' up the maist o' her head wi' yon rowsty woollen thing? She maun be a gey fearsome countenance tae judge by the care she taks tae hide it."

"Shame on ye, mon," said Mrs. Reid, indignantly. "The puit wumman has a bad throat; it's that delicate she canna expose it tae the cauld air."

"Weel, weel, maybe we'll hae a better luik at her when the summer comes," replied Jimmy, with resignation.

"Hoots, laddie, tak' care o' yersel'!" ye'll break yer heid," lifting up a small lad who had tumbled down.

"Whist noo, whist!" But the laddie was bawling vociferously, and only stopped when the teacher bore him into the house in her arms, from which he presently emerged with a smiling face and suspiciously distended cheeks.

"There's y'r dour wumman for ye, Jimmy," jeered Mrs. Reid. "I'm thinkin' she's tae gude to shae bairns they'll be owre fond o' her soon."

"Nae fear," said Jimmy, with a chuckle. "No' the laddies onyway."

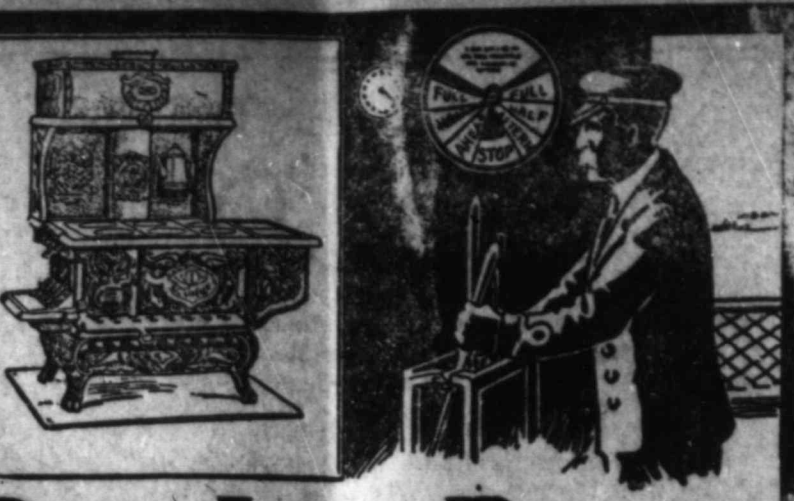
"James Grant, ye're a bigger fule than I—mercy me, whatever's happenin'?" Where are a' the bairns o' tae? Eh, what a fearful noise! Mon, mon!" she cried, seizing the joinder's arm, "there's some one killin' a beastie."

While they were talking a rough-looking man had come out of the wood above them whistling and shouting for a dog that refused to obey and slunk away as his master got nearer him. The man had caught him at last in the field, and with a face red with fury, seemed to be thrashing the life out of the poor creature with a heavy knobbed stick. Its piteous cries filled the air.

"Och, the brute, the brute!" cried the women, while the children, huddled against the railing, gazed with frightened eyes at the horrid scene. Then something happened.

Some one flew through their midst, pushing them aside as she ran—some one who cleared the low railing in one hand, and in almost another was on the ground.

The wretched, had torn the stick from his astonished grasp, had bent him reeling backward with a violent push, and was kneeling over the poor wounded dog.



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AN ATLANTIC EPISODE

It was the first ocean voyage of mother and daughter, and Miss Waldron, aged twenty-five, found it no whit harder to restrain her excitement than Mrs. Waldron, seventeen years her senior. This trip to Europe had been the dream of both their lives, and the expenses thereof had been saved by many sacrifices. Indeed, they had not dared to let their dream come true too soon, but for a friend with influence in high places, who assured the Waldrons that Matilda would, without doubt, secure a speedy promotion from grammar school to high school teacher, if, in addition to certain special courses which she had been taking during the past few years, she would spend her summer vacation in studios visits to European educational centres.

As Matilda would not go without her mother, Papa Waldron had magnanimously offered to close the little house in the Highlands and board in town with Aunt Maria during the ten weeks' absence of his wife and daughter. So, with his urgency, and all scruples dispelled by the prospect of speedily bettered fortunes, mother and daughter fared forth like two children on a holiday. As a family, the Waldrons were singularly unworried, with kindly hearts to every creature, and unexpected or any measure save that with which they would mete.

The intending travellers had talked their trip over many times, and prepared themselves for the pleasant things which might happen. They had resolved to be so "natural" that the most penetrating would not suspect how awfully new and strange were the broad ocean and the luxuries of a first-class passage. But after papa had left them with a bottle of champagne discreetly covered with fresh fruit in the bottom of a basket, as a preservative against seasickness, and they had sent back to him a letter from Minot's Light, they soon began to realize that their actual or possible experiences were of no moment to the gay and stylish family groups and parties of friends who crowded the decks of the Columbia.

Two slight, simply dressed and timid women whose straightened circumstances and unfamiliarity with the ways of the world "stood out all over them," as a rich and slangy girl who vouchsafed them a passing glance, noted it, were more than likely to be left severely to themselves; though Matilda would resign with difficulty some dreams too young for her years, of pleasant friendships made on shipboard, and a more interesting log-book for her father than the record of mere rounds of meals and deck promenades, the occasional sighting of a steamer, and the entertainment for the Sailors' Orphans' Home, on the second last evening out.

They were lingering in delight of a glorious sunset after most of their fellow-passengers had gone down to dinner, when Matilda noticed an elderly and infirm-looking man sitting

"The schulemistress!" cried Jimmy in hoarse amazement.

"The schulemistress!" echoed the women folk, open mouthed. As for the bairns, for once in their little lives they remained dumb, watching with fascinated eyes the finish of the scene. Miss Forsyth gathered the poor dog in her arms and staggered toward them with it, leaving its master standing where she had pushed him in stupefied astonishment. Arrived at the fence, she lifted the dog carefully over and prepared to follow—through the rails this time. Alas! there was a bit of barbed wire twisted along the top one. Her cap caught; she tore herself away, then, at a shriek from the children, turned to see a woollen cap and an iron grey wig dangling gracefully in the breeze. A shining twist of red hair fell flop on her shoulder, then streamed down her back. For a second she stood stock still; then, with a sudden movement, she tore off the blue spectacles, snatched the comforter from her neck, walked up to the pump and pouring some water on her handkerchief, passed it over her face. The lines disappeared as if by magic. There, before the amazed eyes of every one, was the smooth face, the red hair, the blue eyes of—Mary McDonald.

Then Mary laughed. At that the bairns rushed round her shrieking and laughing, too. Then the women folk began to laugh, others ran up and joined in also, but old Jimmy's roar was heard above them all.

Mary is the schoolmistress still and is beloved by all the bairns. Next to her in their affection is a yellow dog that lives with her, and bears the odd name—imposed by the children—of Miss Forsyth.—Vera Stewart in St. Andrew's Cross.

quite alone, a few yards away from them, and gazing absently out to sea. She attracted her mother's attention. "Poor old gentleman! He seems to be of as little account as ourselves among all these rich people," she said softly, "and he certainly does not look fit to travel alone."

The mother echoed her daughter's compassionate sigh. "But he might resent our sympathy," she said, with characteristic diffidence. So, for delicacy, they went by on the other side.

But the following morning, as they were taking a turn on deck before breakfast, they saw him again, in the same place, and in the same dejected attitude. They lingered this time with sympathetic eyes on the old man, who seemed oblivious to all about him.

"You speak to him, Matilda," urged Mrs. Waldron.

"Oh, mother, you know best what to say."

"There, like a good girl! Young people can do anything." And thus adjured, Matilda crossed the deck.

"Good morning, sir," she said, gently. "If you are alone, as we are, perhaps we might all go down to breakfast together."

He turned quickly. Were there tears in his dim and deep-sunken eyes?

"I will be had company, I am rather hard of hearing," he answered, "and none too well; but—if I don't bore you—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the young woman cheerfully. "We also are strangers in this crowd, and we'll be delighted to have you with us." Then, "let me present my mother, Mrs. Waldron."

His bow was perfect in its old-fashioned courtesy. "Mr. Maloney" he responded to the unspoken question. In the saloon, the head waiter assigned these three obscure people who wished henceforth to sit together, to the end of a far table; and between her kindly attentions to the lonely old invalid, and the satisfaction of her own appetite, Miss Waldron enjoyed the distant glimpses of the costly floral offerings of the friends who had sent them off.

On the seven succeeding days, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to the entertainment of their infirm fellow-traveller, giving him her strong young arm as he slowly paced the deck with her, reading, sometimes to him and her mother from some amusing book, and again, diverting his mind with stories of her Hebrew and Italian schoolchildren, now in the most interesting phase of their making into Americans. Sometimes, too, because he was so sympathetic, she would talk to him of the purpose of her trip, and her hope soon to make life easier for her father.

He told the Waldrons he would leave them at Queenstown. No one would meet him there. He meant to take his relatives by surprise, he added. A sad surprise, thought the kindly woman, to those who had known him in happy days.

They were on deck at 6 o'clock to bid him farewell and enjoy their first sight of the beautiful Irish shores. His eyes were misty as he pressed the hands of mother and daughter at parting.

"You'll never lack the friend in need, my child," he said to Matilda; and she reverently bent her graceful head at his fervent "God bless you!"

When the tug was beyond their farewell signals, she reached for the card he had slipped into her mother's hands.

"Mr. Michael Maloney," she read, adding: "Just a poor old Irishman going home to die."

"I guessed that from the first," rejoined the mother, "but he must have been a long time in America; for he has no accent, and seems familiar with every part of the country. His time is short, I fear; but you can have the satisfaction of knowing that you brightened a lonely week for him."

In the subsequent excitement of travel and study, the conscientious effort to make every moment and every penny yield their utmost to the ambitious young lady teacher, the sad old returning exile was forgotten.

September saw the travellers at home again, with note-books and memories crammed and strength renewed. But alas! clouds are wont to follow fast on life's gleams of sunshine, and they found the husband and father seriously ill, of a disease which for many months demanded unremitting care and expensive medical treatment. The promise of the influential friend failed them, and the coveted promotion went to a young lady who boasted among her intimates that she had no need to work for her living; her school meant just pocket money. Oh, for the ease with which good fortune is bettered!

Often during the hard and anxious winter following, Matilda and her

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