

perceive that the calm vault around us is not an uninterrupted blue, but melts into a pale green as it nears the eastern horizon. Angus Sutherland leaves the artist to her work. He will not interrupt her by idle talk.

There is no idle talk going forward where the Laird is concerned. He has got hold of an attentive listener in the person of his hostess, who is deep in needle-work; and he is expounding to her more clearly than ever the merits of the great Semple case, pointing out more particularly how the charges in the major proposition are borne out by the extracts in the minor. Yes; and he has caught the critics, too, on the hip. What about the discovery of those clever gentlemen that Genesis x and 10 was incorrect? They thought they were exceedingly smart in proving that the founders of Babel were the descendants, not of Ham, but of Shem. But when the ruins of Babel were examined, what then?

"Why, it was distinctly shown that the founders were the descendants of Ham after all!" says Denny-mains, triumphantly. "What do ye think of that, Dr. Sutherland?"

Angus Sutherland starts from a reverie; he has not been listening.

"Of what?" he says. "The Semple case?"

"Ay."

"Oh, well," he says, rather carelessly, "all that wrangling is as good an occupation as any other—to keep people from thinking."

The Laird stares, as if he had not heard aright. Angus Sutherland is not aware of having said anything startling. He continues, quite innocently.

"Any occupation is valuable enough that diverts the mind—that is why hard work is conducive to complete mental health; it does not matter whether it is grouse-shooting, or command in an army, or wrangling about major or minor propositions. If a man were continually to be facing the awful mystery of existence—asking the record of the earth and the stars how he came to be here, and getting no answer at all—he must inevitably go mad. The brain could not stand it. If the human race had not lashed itself with wars and commerce, and so forth, it must centuries ago have committed suicide. That is the value of hard work—to keep people from thinking of the unknown around them; the more a man is occupied, the happier he is; it does not matter whether he occupies himself with School Boards, or salmon-fishing, or the prosecution of a heretic."

He did not remark the amazed look on the Laird's face, nor yet that Mary Avon had dropped her painting and was listening.

"The fact is," he said, with a smile, "if you are likely to fall to thinking about the real mysteries of existence anywhere, it is among solitudes like these, where you see what a trivial little accident human life is in the history of the earth. You can't think about such things in Regent street; the cigar shops, the cabs, the passing people, occupy you. But here you are brought back, as it were, to all sorts of first principles; and commonplace appears somehow in their original freshness. In Regent street you do not know that life is a strange thing, and that death is a strange thing, because you have been told so, and you believe it, and think no more about it. But here, with the seas and skies around you, and with the silence of the night making you think, you feel the strangeness of these things. Now just look over there: the blue sea, and the blue sky, and the hills, it is a curious thing to think that they will be shining there just as they are now, on just such another day as this, and you unable to see them or anything else—passed away like a ghost. And the *White Dove* will be sailing up here; and John will be keeping an eye on V-hinish Light-house; but your eyes won't be able to see anything."

"Well, Angus, I da declare," exclaims our sovereign mistress, "you have chosen a comfortable thing to talk about this morning! Are we to be always thinking about our coffin?"

"On the contrary," says the young doctor, "I was only insisting on the wholeness of people occupying themselves diligently with some distraction or other, however trivial. And how do you think the Semple case will end, sir?"

But our good friend of Denny-mains was far too deeply shocked and astounded to reply. The great Semple case a trivial thing—a distraction—an occupation to keep people from serious thinking! The public duties, too, of the Commissioner for the Burgh of Strathgovan; were these to be regarded as a mere plaything? The new steam fire-engine was only a toy, then? The proposed new park and the addition to the rates were to be regarded as a piece of amiable diversion?

The Laird knew that Angus Sutherland had not read the "Vestiges of Creation," and that was a hopeful sign. But, *Vestiges* or no *Vestiges*, what were the young men of the day coming to, if their daring speculation led them to regard the most serious and important concerns of life as a pastime! The Commissioners for the Burgh of Strathgovan were but a parcel of children, then, playing on the sea-shore, and unaware of the awful depths beyond!

"I am looking at these things only as a doctor," says Dr. Sutherland, lightly—seeing that the Laird is too dumfounded to answer his question, "and I sometimes think a doctor's history of civilization would be an odd thing, if only you could get at the physiological facts of the case. I should like to know, for example, what Napoleon had for supper on the night before Waterloo. Something indigestible, you may be sure; if his brain had been clear on the

18th, he would have smashed the Allies, and altered modern history. I should have greatly liked, too, to make the acquaintance of the man who first announced his belief that infants dying unbaptized were to suffer eternal torture. I think it must have been his liver. I should like to have examined him."

"I should like to have poisoned him," says Mary Avon, with a flash of anger in the soft eyes.

"No, no; the poor wretch was only the victim of some ailment," said our doctor, charitably. "There must have been something very much the matter with Calvin, too. I know I could have cured Schopenhauer of his pessimism if he had let me put him on a wholesome regimen."

The Laird probably did not know who Schopenhauer was; but the audacity of the new school was altogether too much for him.

"I—I suppose," he said, stammering in his amazement, "ye would have taken Joan of Arc and treated her as a lunatic?"

"Oh, no; not as a confirmed lunatic," he answered, quite simply. "But the diagnosis of that case is obvious; I think she could have been cured. All that Joanna Southcote wanted was a frank physician."

The Laird rose and went forward to where Mary Avon was standing at her easel. She instantly resumed her work, and pretended not to have been listening.

"Very good—very good," says he, as if his whole attention had been occupied by her sketching. "The reflections on the water are just fine. Ye must let me show all your sketches to Tom Galbraith before ye go back to the south."

"I hear you have been talking about the mysteries of existence," she says, with a smile.

"Oh, ay, it is very easy to talk," he says, sharply, and not willing to confess that he has been driven away from the field. "I am afraid there is an unsettling tendency among the young men of the present day—a want of respect for things that have been established by the common-sense of the world. Not that I am against all innovation. No, no. The world cannot stand still. I myself, now; do ye know that I was among the first in Glasgow to hold that it might be permissible to have an organ to lead the psalmody of a church?"

"Oh, indeed!" says she, with much respect.

"That is true. No, no; I am not one of the bigoted. Give me the Essentials, and I do not care if ye put a stone cross on the top of the church. I tell ye that honestly; I would not object even to a cross on the building if all was sound within."

"I am sure you are quite right, sir," says Mary Avon, gently.

"But no tampering with the Essentials. And as for the millinery, and incense, and crucifixes of the poor crathurs that have not the courage to go right over to Rome—who stop on this side, and play-act at being Romans—it is seeking it, perfectly seeking it. As for the Romans themselves, I do not condemn them. No, no. If they are in error, I doubt not they believe with a good conscience. And when I am in a foreign town, and one of their processions of priests and boys come by, I raise my hat. I do indeed."

"Oh, naturally," says Mary Avon.

"No, no," continues Denny-mains, warmly, "there is none of the bigot about me. There is a minister of the Episcopalian Church that I know, and there is no one more welcome in my house; I ask him to say grace just as I would a minister of my own Church."

"And which is that, sir?" she asked meekly.

The Laird stares at her. Is it possible that she has heard him so elaborately expound the Semple prosecution, and not be aware to what denomination he belongs?

"The Free—the Free Church, of course," he says, with some surprise. "Have ye not seen the Report of Proceedings in the Semple case?"

"No, I have not," she answers, timidly.

"Ye have been so kind in explaining it that—that a printed report was quite unnecessary."

"But I will get ye one—I will get ye one directly," says he. "I have several copies in my portmanteau. And ye will see my name in front as one of the elders who considered it fit and proper that a full report should be published, so as to warn the public against these insidious attacks against our faith. Don't interrupt your work, my lass. But I will get ye the pamphlet; and whenever you want to sit down for a time, ye will find it most interesting reading—most interesting."

And so the worthy Laird goes below to fetch that valued report. And scarcely has he disappeared than a sudden commotion rages over the deck. Behold! a breeze coming swiftly over the sea, ruffling the glassy deep as it approaches! Angus Sutherland jumps to the tiller. The head-sails fill, and the boat begins to move. The lee-sheets are hauled taut; and now the great mainsail is filled, too. There is a rippling and hissing of water, and a new stir of life and motion throughout the vessel from stem to stern.

It seems but the beginning of the day now, though it is near lunch-time. Mary Avon puts away her sketch of the dead calm, and sits down just under the lee of the boom, where the cool breeze is blowing along. The Laird, having brought up the pamphlet, is vigorously pacing the deck for his morning exercise; we have all awakened from these idle reveries about the mystery of life.

"Ha, ha," he says, coming aft, "this is fine, now. Why not give the men a glass of whisky all round for whistling up such a fine breeze? Do ye think they would object?"

"Better give them a couple of bottles of beer

for their dinner," suggests Queen T—, who is no lover of whisky.

But do you think the Laird is to be put off his story by any such suggestion? We can see by his face that he has another anecdote to fire off. Is it not apparent that the mention of whisky was made with a purpose?

"There was a real good one," says he—and the laughter is already twinkling in his eyes—"about the man that was apologizing before his family for having been drinking whisky with some friends. 'Ay,' says he, 'they just held me and forced it down my throat.' Then says his son—a little chap about ten—says he, 'I think I could ha' held ye mysel', feyther—ho! ho! ho! says he—'I think I could ha' held ye mysel', feyther;' and the Laird laughed, and laughed again, till the tears came into his eyes. We could see that he was still internally laughing at that good one when we went below for luncheon."

At luncheon, too, the Laird quite made up his feud with Angus Sutherland, for he had a great many other good ones to tell about whisky and whisky-drinking; and he liked a sympathetic audience. But this general merriment was suddenly dashed by an ominous suggestion coming from our young doctor. "Why," he asked, "should we go on fighting against these northerly winds? Why not turn and run before them?"

"Then you want to leave us, Angus," said his hostess, reproachfully.

"Oh no," he said, with some colour in his face. "I don't want to go, but I fear I must very soon now. However, I did not make that suggestion on my own account; if I were pressed for time, I could get somewhere where I could catch the *Clansman*."

Mary Avon looked down, saying nothing.

"You would not leave the ship like that?" says his hostess. "You would not run away, surely? Rather than that, we will turn at once. Where are we now?"

"If the breeze lasts, we will get over to Uist, to Loch-na-Maddy, this evening, but you must not think of altering your plans on my account. I made the suggestion because of what Captain John was saying."

"Very well," says our Admiral of the Fleet, taking no heed of properly constituted authority. "Suppose we set out on our return voyage to-morrow morning, going round the other side of Skye for a change. But you know, Angus, it is not fair of you to run away when you say yourself there is nothing particular calls you to London."

"Oh," says he, "I am not going to London just yet. I am going to Banff, to see my father. There is an uncle of mine, too, on a visit to the manse."

"Then you will be coming south again?"

"Yes."

"Then why not come another cruise with us on your way back?"

It was not like this hard-headed young doctor to appear so embarrassed.

"That is what I should like very much myself," he stammered, "if—it if it were not in the way of your other arrangements."

"We shall make no other arrangements," says the other, definitely. "Now that is a promise, mind. No drawing back. Mary will put it down in writing, and hold you to it."

Mary Avon had not looked up all this time.

"You should not press Dr. Sutherland too much," she says, shyly; "perhaps he has other friends he would like to see before leaving Scotland."

The hypocrite! Did she want to make Angus Sutherland burst a blood-vessel in protesting that of all the excursions he had made in his life this would be to him forever the most memorable; and that a repetition or extension of it was a delight in the future almost too great to think of? However, she seemed pleased that he spoke so warmly, and she did not attempt to contradict him. If he had really enjoyed all this rambling idleness, it would no doubt be better fit him for his work in the great capital.

We bent in to Loch-na-Maddy—that is, the Lake of the Dogs—in the quiet evening; and the rather commonplace low-lying hills, and the plain houses of the remote little village, looked beautiful enough under the glow of the western skies. And we went ashore, and walked inland for a space, through an intricate network of lagoons inbranching from the sea; and we saw the trout leaping and making circles on the gold-red pools, and watched the herons rising from their fishing and winging their slow flight across the silent lakes.

And it was a beautiful night, too, and we had a little singing on deck. Perhaps there was an under-current of regret in the knowledge that now—for this voyage at least—we had touched our farthest point. To-morrow we were to set out again for the south.

CHAPTER XIII.

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA.

The wind was laughing at Angus Sutherland. All the time we had been sailing north, it had blown from the north; now that we had turned our faces eastward, it wheeled round to the east, as it would imprison him forever in this floating home.

"You would fain get away"—this was the sound that one of us seemed to hear in those light airs of the morning that blew along the white canvas—"the world calls; ambition, fame, the eagerness of rivalry, the spell that science throws over her disciples—all these are powerful, and they draw you, and you would fain go

away. But the hand of the wind is uplifted against you; you may fret as you will, but you are not round Ru Hinish yet!"

And perhaps the imaginative small creature who heard these strange things in the light breeze against which we were fighting our way across the Minch may have been forming her own plans. Angus Sutherland, she used often to say, wanted humanizing. He was too proud and scornful in the pride of his knowledge; the gentle hand of a woman was needed to lead him into more tractable ways. And then this Mary Avon, with her dexterous, nimble woman's wit, and her indomitable courage, and her life and spirit and abounding cheerfulness; would she not be a splendid companion for him during his long and hard struggle? This born match-maker had long ago thrown away any notion about the Laird transferring our singing-bird to Denny-mains. She had almost forgotten about the project of bringing Howard Smith, the Laird's nephew, and half compelling him to marry Mary Avon; that was preposterous on the face of it. But she had grown accustomed, during those long days of tranquil idleness, to see our young doctor and Mary Avon together, cut off from all the distractions of the world, a new Paul and Virginia. Why—she may have asked herself—should not these two solitary waifs, thus thrown by chance together on the wide ocean of existence, why should they not cling to each other and strengthen each other in the coming days of trial and storm? The strange, pathetic, phantasmal force of life is brief; they cannot seize it, and hold it, and shape it to their own ends; they know not whence it comes or whither it goes; but while the brief, strange thing lasts, they can grasp each other's hand, and make sure—amid all the unknown things around them, the mountains, and the wide seas, and the stars—of some common, humble, sympathy. It is so natural to grasp the hand of another in the presence of something vast and unknown.

The rest of us, at all events, have no time for such vague dreams and reveries. There is no idleness on board the *White Dove* out here on the shining deep. Dr. Sutherland has rigged up for himself a sort of gymnasium by putting a rope across the shrouds to the peak halyards; and on this rather elastic cross-bar he is taking his morning exercise by going through a series of performances, no doubt picked up in Germany. Miss Avon is busy with a sketch of the long headland running out to Vaternish Point, though, indeed, this smooth Atlantic roll makes it difficult for her to keep her feet, and introduces a certain amount of hap-hazard into her handiwork. The Laird has brought on deck a formidable portfolio of papers, no doubt relating to the public affairs of Strathgovan, and has put on his gold spectacles, and has got his pencil in hand. Master Fred is re-arranging the cushions; the mistress of the yacht is looking after her flowers. And then his heard the voice of John of Skye—"Stand by, boys!" and "*Boat ship!*" and the helm goes down, and the jib and foresail flutter and tear at the blocks and sheets, and then the sails gently fill, and the *White Dove* is away on another tack.

"Well, I give in," says Mary Avon at last, as a heavier lurch than usual threatens to throw her and her easel together into the scuppers. "It is no use."

"I thought you never gave in, Mary," says our admiral, whose head has appeared again at the top of the companion-stairs.

"I wonder who could paint like this," says Mary Avon indignantly. And indeed she is trussed up like a fowl, with one arm round one of the gig davits.

"Turner was lashed to the mast of a vessel in order to see a storm," says Queen T—.

"But not to paint," retorts the other. "Besides, I am not Turner. Besides, I am tired."

By this time, of course, Angus Sutherland has come to her help, and removes her easel and what not for her, and fetches her a deck chair. "Would you like to play chess?" says he.

"Oh yes," she answers, dutifully, "if you think the men will stay on the board."

"Draughts will be safer," says he; and therewith he plunges below and fetches up the square board and the pieces.

And so, on this beautiful summer day, with the shining seas around them, and a cool breeze tempering the heat of the sun, Ferdinand and Miranda set to work. And it was a pretty sight to see them—her soft dark eyes so full of an anxious care to acquit herself well; his robust, hard, fresh-coloured face full of a sort of good-natured forbearance. But nevertheless it was a strange game. All Scotchmen are supposed to play draughts, and one brought up in a manse is almost of necessity a good player. But one astonished on-looker began to perceive that whereas Mary Avon played but indifferently, her opponent played with a blindness that was quite remarkable. She has a very pretty, small, white hand; was he looking at that, that he did not, on one occasion, see how he could have taken three pieces and crown his man at one fell sweep? And then is it considered incumbent on a draught-player to inform his opponent of what would be a better move on the part of the latter? However that may be, true it is that, by dint of much advice, opportune blindness, and atrocious bad play, the doctor managed to get the game ended in a draw.

"Dear me," says Mary Avon, "I never thought I should have had a chance. The Scotch are such good draught-players."

"But you play remarkably well," said he—and there was no blush of shame on his face.

Draughts and luncheon carry us on to the