

Choice Literature.

HEATHER BELLES.

A MODERN HIGHLAND STORY.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

By this time the ladies had arrived, and the conversation was cut short. In a few minutes all were busy among the viands, and enjoying a hearty luncheon. Seldom if ever had they found the proverb more true to experience than "Hunger makes a good sauce." When the repast was over, the ladies began a fire of questions, for there were so many things they wished to know, and on the way it had been next to impossible to keep up anything like a lengthy conversation. Mr. Wyatt and Roderick were those to whom, because of their superior education and culture, the appeal was chiefly directed.

"What wonderful sunshine we have here?" began Miss Wyatt; "I have not seen anything like it elsewhere."

"Perhaps not, my dear," said her uncle. "You remember Byron's words,

"Not as in northern climes obscurely bright,
But one unclouded blaze of living light."

You must keep in mind, Miss, that you are not on the shores even of your favourite Devon, but of fair Liguria."

"Oh, that's one of the things I so much wanted to know. Why is this coast called Liguria? What is the origin of the name?"

"I really do not know," replied Mr. Wyatt. "Perhaps Mr. McKay can tell us. I believe it's an old classical name. What say you, Mr. Roderick?"

"Well," said the student, "I believe the Ligurians were a Celtic race who came from Asia Minor, and peopled this coast. For many a day they were independent, but at last came under the Roman yoke. The district called Liguria at one time embraced all the country between the Rhone and the Arno. Of the word itself there are half a dozen derivations given. I shall mention only two of the most probable. Some say it came from the name of an ancient mythical hero called Ligure; while others derive it from the Latin verb *Ligurio*, I lick, because the whole coast was lapped by the waves of the Mediterranean. I think the latter view is more likely to be correct."

"I should be inclined to favour the other explanation," said the young lady in a belligerent tone. "It's so nice to have these places connected in imagination with old mythical stories; and the second view is so wretchedly prosaic."

"If that is your bent," responded the student with a smile, "you may have it gratified to the full. Would it satisfy you to have the Riviera linked with the fortunes of our first mother Eve?"

"With Eve!" cried Miss Wyatt in amazement. "You don't mean to say there is any such story?"

"Of course there is," answered McKay; "I am surprised you have not heard it before now. The legend goes that when Eve was leaving Paradise, she picked up a lemon and carried it off with her, declaring that she would plant the seeds on the spot of the earth she could find most like to the beautiful Eden behind her. She wandered and wandered and wandered, until she came to the Riviera, and in its fertile soil she deposited the seeds as in point of loveliness the nearest approach to the primeval Paradise."

"There now, Charlotte," said Mr. Wyatt, "you surely do not want any more ancient myth than that; and it's as worthy of belief as a hundred more of a later date."

"I'm quite satisfied," said the young lady; "and as to faith in the story, that's a matter on which I claim the right of private judgment."

"Well, then," broke in Miss Nesta, "if that's settled, I have a question to ask. Pray, why did the people long ago build their towns far up on inaccessible heights like this Gorbio?"

"That I will answer myself," said the banker, "because I do not wish Mr. McKay to have the monopoly and credit of all the instruction going. It was for fear of their enemies. You find the same thing in Palestine, and it's often alluded to in Scripture. This coast was, in the ninth and tenth centuries, liable to frequent and furious incursions of the Saracens; and the natives, fearing to dwell in the low valleys, perched their villages on these lofty heights so as to be as far as possible beyond the reach of their foes. For the same reason they built strong walls around their towns, like those we noticed down there at Gorbio, and planted castles in the heart of them. As to the Saracens, you remember Ste. Agnese, which we saw in the distance as we came up to-day. I think there is one in our company who will not forget it in a hurry. Well, that place is said to have been captured and held for a time by Haroun, a Saracen chief, who built its now ruined castle."

"Thank you, uncle, that explains it all," said Nesta, "though it must have cost the poor people fearful labour, and seems to do so still. Think of those poor women—of whom we saw so many to-day—toiling up and down those frightful paths, with enormous bundles of sticks or fodder on their heads. I'm sure I can't tell how they stand it."

"The women on the Riviera are used to hard labour," replied her uncle; "I have seen two of them in San Remo carrying a great iron garden seat between them on their heads, without touching it with their hands, while a young man, chatting gaily and puffing a cigar, walked by their side."

"What a shame!" cried the elder Miss Wyatt. "I'm sure it's enough to make one go in for women's rights in their very wildest form."

"Well, the fair sex here," said Mr. Wyatt with a smile, which evidently meant that there was something coming—"the fair sex here must certainly be meeker and more patient than many we have heard of elsewhere. I have read or seen somewhere an epitaph on one who would, I am persuaded, have resented such treatment."

"Come now, uncle," said Miss Nesta, "that's one of your fearful bits about the women, I'm sure. I saw it com-

ing; I know you of old. But you'd better out with it now; it will at least tickle the young gentlemen if it's one of the usual kind."

"Oh, it's very simple and very innocent," said her uncle, laughing. "Here it is:

"Here lies, thank God, a woman who
Quarrelled and stormed her whole life through.
Tread lightly o'er her smouldering form,
Or else you'll rouse another storm."

"What a jewel of a wife that woman would have made!" said the Lieutenant reflectively; and then added mournfully, "I wish I had been born a little sooner, just to have had the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"Oh, don't grieve over that, my dear sir," said Mr. Wyatt soothingly, patting the young officer on the shoulder, "there are plenty of her sisters still above ground."

By this time the afternoon sun was fast declining, and they began their descent from old Gorbio. Skirting the slope of a long mountain-side, they came down on the picturesque old town of Roccafranca. Passing by its venerable castle, and through its narrow and tortuous streets, they descended by a steep path to the main highway between Monaco and Mentone, and reached their respective homes at a late hour.

Three or four days after this excursion, Roderick McKay and Archibald Graham received quite a bundle of letters by one post. The most important by far, if not the most tender or lively, was one from Mr. Craig to the student. As there were contained in that letter many particulars which have a close and especial bearing on our narrative, we transcribe it here in full:

"ALTBREAC HOUSE, GLENARTAN,
ROSS-SHIRE, June 17, 1887.

"MY DEAR MCKAY,—I have just received your most welcome letter. Its contents gave me much gratification. I shall say more when we meet."

"I should like this letter to be read by Mr. Graham as well as by yourself. I think I shall be able to show reason, satisfactory to both of you, why you should turn your steps homeward as soon as possible. I must condense as much as I possibly can."

"On your suggestion, I paid a visit to old Meg on the hillside. I could make nothing of her; threats and coaxings and bribes were all equally useless. She would enter into no conversation at all about Mr. Graham, and foiled me in trying to discover whether or no he had visited her on the night of the arrest. She confessed, however, that one of the smuggling party, a stranger to the glen, had come wounded to her cottage in the early morning. She had seen in his possession, as she dressed his sore, a silver-mounted pistol, with which she solemnly assured me the exciseman had been shot; and shot by the very man, and no other, in whose pocket she had detected it shining. She also promised me (though how the old creature knew, I cannot tell) that I should receive, though not from her, full confirmation of all she had said within a very few days."

"Would you believe it? Her words came literally true. The very next day I got a letter from Dr. Anderson, saying that his patient Ross was now out of danger, and that I was free to visit and examine him, provided that I did not stay too long, or in any way press him too hard. I went at once to see the exciseman, and was glad to find him wonderfully recovered. Of his story all I need record is this, that his assailant was certainly not Archibald Graham, whom he would have known even in the darkness, but a stranger, a tall, powerful man, with a black beard and a heavy stoop—one whom he believed he had never seen before."

"Two days after came the *Inverness Courier*, out of which I cut and send you enclosed slip. (The paragraph related to the conviction of a notorious smuggler named McInnes, belonging to a north-western parish of Ross-shire, who had been captured in a raid on a bothy a week or two before. He was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment; and when committed to gaol, confessed that he had been concerned in the affray which had taken place in Glenartan in March.) I have no doubt we shall find that it was this man McInnes who fired the pistol shot; but on that point I mean to make further inquiries."

"As the outcome of the above facts and of various communications which I have had with the authorities, I am now assured that no further steps of any kind will be taken against Archibald Graham. He was no more than an accessory; and those really responsible for the smuggling have been already tried, convicted and sent to prison for various terms of confinement. I hope that this settlement removes fully any objections which Mr. Archibald may entertain against returning home without delay."

"Then, in addition, I have a motive to urge to which I think he cannot be indifferent. His father has recently made wonderful progress toward recovery, and now that he is able fully to take in all that has happened, is longing intensely to see Mr. Archibald at home. He authorises me to press that desire of his strongly upon you both, and to convey to you personally his warm thanks for your great kindness in the whole matter."

"Perhaps it is well that I should let Mr. Archibald know that I have recently, and in quite an accidental way, come to know of the engagement between him and my niece Carrie. I say no more at present, and would not have said even so much were I not aware that you also are cognizant of their relations to one another."

"I cannot close this letter without adding sad intelligence. We have had two deaths, both somewhat sudden, quite recently among us. Sir Arthur Munro died in London on Saturday last; and I hear the property is likely to come into the market. The other, I am sorry to say, is a greater and sadder loss. Mr. Macintosh, the much respected minister of Glen Feoch, is no more. He had been ailing for some weeks (severe bronchitis, I believe), and was taken to his rest and reward at an early hour on Tuesday. I feel much for his poor widow and family."

"Hoping soon to hear that you are both on your way home to Glenartan, and with best wishes from all here, I am, my dear McKay, yours most truly, J. M. CRAIG."

When Roderick and Archie had read and discussed this

business-like letter, they finally agreed to leave next morning for home. Their friends the Wyatts, with the Lieutenant in attendance, had already left for Germany; and they themselves travelled on the day fixed—first by diligence along the famous Corniche road to Nice, thence by rail to Paris.

CHAPTER XV.—HOME AGAIN, AND JOY.

On Friday, the 27th June, Roderick McKay and Archibald Graham arrived in Glenartan, and were cordially welcomed in their respective homes. Mr. Craig had driven over for them in his carriage, a distance of more than twenty miles; and in the course of their journey from the railway station to the glen, they had such an interchange of views on many matters as could not have been realized through fifty letters. Mr. Craig and the student came to the conclusion that they should as early as possible make certain calls in the glen, which they hoped would in more ways than one have a beneficial effect. The lawyer told Archie to say to his father that they hoped to call on him next afternoon, and would, if agreeable to him and Miss Graham, take tea at the farm.

Before noon on the morrow Mr. Craig drove down to the catechist's house, and there dismissed his carriage. Entering the house, he conversed with Dugald McKay, and had a few quiet jokes with Ellen, while Roderick was preparing to accompany him. He and the student then walked down to the village, for their first visit was to be paid to Ross the exciseman. They found him greatly improved—in truth, almost quite well again, and able to converse with freedom, and even cheerfulness. He had heard in full detail of the confession made by McInnes the smuggler, and expressed the belief that it was honest and true. He was deeply interested to hear from Roderick some scraps of the version given by Graham of the night's proceedings, and declared his persuasion that it was the stranger who had fired the shot, though with Graham's pistol. Before leaving, Mr. Craig slipped into Ross' hand a sum of money, sufficient not only to meet the expenses of his illness, but to leave a handsome balance besides.

Returning up the glen, they called at the Free Church Manse, and were glad to find Mr. Morrison at home. He gave McKay a most hearty welcome; and for some time the three gentlemen eagerly discussed the situation together. The minister then rang the bell, and told Aggie to say to his sister that Mr. Craig and Mr. McKay were in the dining room, and would be glad to see her. After considerable delay Miss Morrison appeared. She walked smartly up to Mr. Craig, and, with a smile, bade him cordially welcome; then turned, and, with a countenance utterly devoid of any sign of emotion, touched rather than shook the student by the hand. All three gentlemen at once observed the contrast in her behaviour toward the lawyer and the student. Mr. Morrison alone knew the cause, and tried to hide it, but in vain.

"My dear," said the minister, addressing his sister, "we have just been talking over quite a number of things connected with the long journey which Mr. McKay has had. I am sure we're all glad to see him back again, and looking so well."

"I hope he may prove himself worthy of your joy," was Miss Morrison's freezing response. Evidently there was something seriously wrong somewhere.

"Margaret," said her brother beseechingly, "you must really not introduce anything unpleasant to-night. Wait till Roderick and we are alone, if you have any complaint to prefer against him."

"I cannot do that," was the lady's decisive reply, uttered with rigid lips, and confirmed by an emphatic forward nod. "It concerns Mr. Craig as well as us—in fact more."

"What is it then, Miss Morrison?" said the lawyer calmly. "We had better have it out, and be done with it."

Miss Morrison nervously fumbled in her pocket, and threw out on the table first a handkerchief, then a pair of garden gloves. Then a ball of worsted, and finally Miss Carrie Craig' s r of acknowledgment to Mr. McKay for Archie's ring. All opening the precious epistle, she tossed it on the table, and said:

"I believe that belongs to Mr. McKay. He left it upstairs on the toilet table—ay, within the leaves of the Bible" (she added solemnly)—"the morning he went away." (Miss Morrison then detailed the circumstances of its discovery, and wound up by saying)—"I return it to him now, and I think he owes you, Mr. Craig, some explanation of the relation in which he stands to your niece. That's all I have to say, though I could say more. There's some one else will suffer unless I am much mistaken."

"What's the meaning of all this, McKay? Can you not tell us?" asked Mr. Craig.

"I am really at a loss to know," said the student. "The letter is certainly mine, and I claim it. I got it from Miss Craig after one I had sent to her, but unfortunately I lost it, and had no idea I had left it here. As to what Miss Morrison has said, there is the letter, Mr. Craig; take and read it for yourself. I believe you will understand it, and if it needs any explanations, I am here to give them, but—to you alone."

Mr. Craig took the letter from McKay's hands, and, advancing to the window, carefully read it there. Had any one at that time been looking in from without, they might have watched a smile quietly forming about the edges of the lawyer's mouth, but to those within the room nothing was visible save the somewhat shaggy back of his head. At length, turning round, he bent his body downward, and placed a hand on each knee, while his pent-up feelings fairly exploded in laughter. The burst was soon past, and he checked himself suddenly.

"I beg pardon, Miss Morrison: I beg pardon most humbly. I have been very naughty, very naughty. Believe me, I was not laughing at you—by no means—but at the really comical element in this misunderstanding. Allow me, good sir" (addressing Mr. Morrison), "and you madam" (addressing the sister), "to explain this matter as I conceive it really stands."

Miss Morrison stood still, but uttered not a word. She