

now, sir, you'll be standing up for that knock-me-down kind of thing?"

"Explain yourself, my lad."

"Beg your pardon, sir, what they call love at first sight." He wore an ingenuous blush and an expression at once shy and insinuating.

"The poets, Rowley, are on my side."

"Mrs. McRankine, sir——"

"The Queen of Navarre, Mr. Rowley——"

But he so far forgot himself as to interrupt. "It took Mrs. McRankine years, sir, to get used to her first husband. She told me so."

"It took us some days, if I remember, to get used to Mrs. McRankine. To be sure, her cooking——"

"That's what I say, Mr. Anne: it's more than skin-deep: and you'll hardly believe me, sir—that is, if you didn't take note of it—but she hev got an ankle."

He had produced the pieces of his flageolet, and was adjusting them nervously, with a face red as a turkey-cock's wattles. I regarded him with a new and incredulous amusement. That I served Mr. Rowley for a glass of fashion and a mould of form was of course no new discovery: and the traditions of body-service allow, nay enjoin, that when the gentleman goes a-wooing, the valet shall take a sympathetic wound. What could be more natural than that a gentleman of sixteen should select a lady of fifty for his first essay in the tender passion. Still—Bethiah McRankine!

I kept my countenance with an effort. "Mr. Rowley," said I, "if music be the food of love, play on." And Mr. Rowley gave "The Girl I left Behind me," shyly at first, but anon with terrific expression. He broke off with a sigh: "Heigho!" in fact, said Rowley: and started off again while I tapped out the time, and hummed:

"But now I'm bound for Brighton camp,  
Kind heaven then pray guide me,  
And send me safely back again  
To the girl I left behind me!"