

The Merry Men.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GALE.

I FOUND my uncle at the gable end, watching the signs of the weather, with a pipe in his fingers.

“Uncle,” said I, “there were men ashore at Sandag Bay ——”

I had no time to go further; indeed, I not only forgot my words, but even my weariness, so strange was the effect on Uncle Gordon. He dropped his pipe and fell back against the end of the house with his jaw fallen, his eyes staring, and his long face as white as paper. We must have looked at one another silently for a quarter of a minute, before he made answer in this extraordinary fashion: “Had he a hair kep on?”

I knew as well as if I had been there, that the man who now lay buried at Sandag had worn a hairy cap, and that he had come ashore alive. For the first and only time I lost toleration for the man who was my benefactor, and the father of the woman I hoped to call my wife.

“These were living men,” said I, “perhaps Jacobites, perhaps the French, perhaps pirates, perhaps adventurers come here to seek the Spanish treasure ship; but, whatever they may be, dangerous at least to your daughter and my cousin. As for your own guilty terrors, man, the dead sleeps well where you have laid him. I stood this morning by his grave. He will not wake before the trump of doom.”

My kinsman looked upon me, blinking, while I spoke; then he fixed his eyes for a little on the ground, and pulled his fingers foolishly; but it was plain that he was past the power of speech.

“Come,” said I. “You must think for others. You must come up the hill with me, and see this ship.”

He obeyed without a word or a look, following slowly after my impatient strides. The spring seemed to have gone out of his body, and he scrambled heavily up and down the rocks, instead of leaping, as he was wont, from one to another. Nor could I, for all my cries, induce him to make better haste. Only once he replied to me complainingly, and like one in bodily pain: “Aye, aye, man, I’m coming.” Long before we had reached the top, I had no other thought for him but pity. If the crime had been monstrous, the punishment was in proportion.

At last we emerged above the sky-line of the hill, and could see around us. All was black and stormy to the eye; the last gleam of sun had vanished; a wind had sprung up, not yet high, but gusty and un-

steady to the point; the rain, on the other hand, had ceased. Short as was the interval, the sea already ran vastly higher than when I had stood there last; already it had begun to break over some of the outward reefs, and already it moaned aloud in the sea-caves of Aros. I looked, at first, in vain for the schooner.

"There she is," I said at last. But her new position, and the course she was now laying, puzzled me. "They cannot mean to beat to sea," I cried.

"That's what they mean," said my uncle, with something like joy; and just then the schooner went about and stood upon another tack, which put the question beyond the reach of doubt. These strangers, seeing a gale on hand, had thought first of sea-room. With the wind that threatened, in these reef-sown waters and contending against so violent a stream of tide, their course was certain death.

"Good God!" said I, "they are all lost."

"Ay," returned my uncle, "a'—a' lost. They hadnae a chance but to rin for Kyle Dona. The gate they're gaun the noo, they couldnae win through an the muckle deil were there to pilot them. Eh, man," he continued, touching me on the sleeve, "it's a braw nicht for a shipwreck! Twa in ae twalmonth! Eh, but the Merry Men 'll dance bony!"

I looked at him, and it was then that I began to fancy him no longer in his right mind. He was peering up to me, as if for sympathy, a timid joy in his eyes. All that had passed between us was already forgotten in the prospect of this fresh disaster.

"If it were not too late," I cried with indignation, "I would take the coble and go out to warn them."

"Na, na," he protested. "Ye maunnae interfere; ye maunnae meddle wi' the like o' that. It's His"—doffing his bonnet—"His wull. And, eh, man! but it's a braw nicht for't!"

A sense of loathing began to fill my soul; and, reminding him that I had not yet dined, I proposed we should return to the house. But no; nothing would tear him from his place of outlook.

"I maun see the hail thing, man Cherie," he explained; and then as the schooner went about a second time, "Eh, but they han'le her bony!" he cried. "The *Christ-Anna* was naething to this."

Already the men on board the schooner must have begun to realise some part, but not yet the twentieth, of the dangers that environed their doomed ship. At every lull of the capricious wind they must have seen how fast the current swept them back. Each tack was made shorter, as they saw how little it prevailed. Every moment the rising swell began to boom and foam upon another sunken reef; and ever and again a breaker would fall in sounding ruin under the very bows of her, and the brown reef and streaming tangle appear in the hollow of the wave. I tell you, they had to stand to their tackle: there was no idle man aboard that ship, God knows. It was upon the progress of a scene so horrible to any human-hearted man, that my misguided uncle now pared

and gloated like a connoisseur.' As I turned to go down the hill, he was lying on his belly on the summit, with his hands stretched forth and clutching in the heather. He seemed rejuvenated, mind and body.

When I got back to the house already dismally affected, I was still more sadly downcast at the sight of Mary. She had her sleeves rolled up over her strong arms, and was quietly making bread. I got a bannock from the dresser and sat down to eat it in silence.

"Are ye wearied, lad?" she asked after a while.

"I am not so much wearied, Mary," I replied, getting on my feet, "as I am weary of delay, and perhaps of Aros too. You know me well enough to judge me fairly, say what I like. Well, Mary, you may be sure of this: you had better be anywhere but here."

"I'll be sure of one thing," she returned; "I'll be where my duty is."

"You forget, you have a duty to yourself," I said.

"Ay, man?" she replied, pounding at the dough; "will you have found that in the Bible, now?"

"Mary," I said solemnly, "you must not laugh at me just now. God knows I am in no heart for laughing. Right or wrong, we have to marry. If we could get your father with us, it would be best; but, with him or without him, I want you far away from here, my girl; for your own sake, and for mine, ay, and for your father's too, I want you far—far away from here. I came with other thoughts; I came here as a man comes home; now it is all changed, and I have no desire nor hope but to flee—for that's the word—flee, like a bird out of the fowler's snare, from this accursed island."

She had stopped her work by this time.

"And do you think, now," said she, "do you think, now, I have neither eyes nor ears? Do ye think I havenae broken my heart to have these brows (as he calls them, God forgive him!) thrown into the sea? Do ye think I have lived with him, day in, day out, and not seen what you saw in an hour or two? No," she said, "I know there's wrong in it; what wrong, I neither know nor want to know. There was never an ill thing made better by meddling, that I could hear of. But, my lad, you must never ask me to leave my father. While the breath is in his body, I'll be with him. And he's not long for here, either: that I can tell you, Charlie—he's not long for here. The mark is on his brow; and better so—maybe better so."

I could never rightly tell the reason; but at this, like a poor child, I began to cry. She came over to me, and put her hand upon my shoulder kindly.

"Charlie," she said, "what's right for me, neednae be right for you. There's sin upon this house, and trouble; you are a stranger—though well loved, I tell you that; take your things upon your back and go your ways to better places and to better folk. It'll not be me that blames you, Charlie. If you were ever minded to come back, though it were twenty years from now, you would be blythe and

welcome still; and there's not a soul in Aros but would say the same with me."

"Mary Ellen," I said, "I asked you to be my wife, and you said, yes. That's done for good. Wherever you are, I am; whatever you wish, I wish; as I shall answer to my God."

As I said the words, the wind suddenly burst out raving, and then seemed to stand still and shudder around the house of Aros. It was the first squall, or prologue, of the coming tempest, and as we started and looked about us, we found that a gloom, like the approach of evening, had settled round the house.

"God pity all poor folks at sea!" she said. "We'll see no more of your uncle, poor man, till the morrow's morning."

And then she told me, as we sat by the fire and hearkened to the rising gusts, of how this change had fallen upon her father. All last winter he had been dark and fitful in his mind. Whenever the Roost ran high, or, as Mary said, whenever the Merry Men were dancing, he would lie out for hours together on the Head, if it were at night, or on the top of Aros by day, watching the tumult of the sea, and sweeping the horizon for a sail. After February 11, when the wealth-bringing wreck was cast ashore at Sandag, he had been at first unnaturally gay, and his excitement had never fallen in degree, but only changed in kind from dark to darker. He neglected his work, and kept Rorie idle. They two would speak together by the hour at the gable end, in guarded tones and with an air of secrecy and almost of guilt; and if she questioned either, as at first she sometimes did, her inquiries were put aside with confusion. Since Rorie had first remarked the fish that hung about the ferry, his master had never set foot but once upon the mainland of the Ross. That once—it was in the height of the springs—he had passed dryshod while the tide was out; but, having lingered overlong on the far side, found himself cut off from Aros by the returning waters. It was with a shriek of agony that he had leaped across the gut, and he had reached home thereafter in a fever-fit of fear. A fear of the sea, a constant haunting thought of the sea, appeared in his talk and devotions, and even in his looks when he was silent.

Rorie alone came in to supper; but a little later my uncle appeared, took a bottle under his arm, put some bread in his pocket, and set forth again to his outlook, followed this time by Rorie. I heard that the schooner was losing ground, but the crew were still fighting every inch with hopeless ingenuity and courage; and the news filled my mind with blackness.

A little after sundown the full fury of the gale broke forth, such a gale as I have never seen in summer, nor, seeing how swiftly it had come, even in winter. Mary and I sat in silence, the house quaking overhead, the tempest howling without, the fire between us sputtering with raindrops. Our thoughts were far away with the poor fellows on the schooner, or my not less unhappy uncle, houseless on the promontory;

and yet ever and again we were startled back to ourselves, when the wind would rise and strike the gable like a solid body, or suddenly fall and draw away, so that the fire leaped into flame and our hearts bounded in our sides. Now the storm in its might would seize and shake the four corners of the roof, roaring like Leviathan in anger. Anon, in a lull, cold eddies of tempest moved shudderingly in the room, lifting the hair upon our heads and passing between us as we sat. And again the wind would break forth in a chorus of melancholy sounds, hooting low in the chimney, wailing with flutelike softness round the house.

It was perhaps eight o'clock when Rorie came in and pulled me mysteriously to the door. My uncle, it appeared, had frightened even his constant comrade; and Rorie, uneasy at his extravagance, prayed me to come out and share the watch. I need not say I hastened to do as I was asked; the more so, as, what with fear and horror, and the electrical tension of the night, I was myself restless and disposed for action. I told Mary to be under no alarm, for I should be a safeguard on her father; and, wrapping myself warmly in a plaid, I followed Rorie into the open air.

The night, though we were so little past midsummer, was as dark as January. Intervals of a groping twilight alternated with spells of utter blackness; and it was impossible to trace the reason of these changes in the flying horror of the sky. The wind blew the breath out of a man's nostrils; all heaven seemed to thunder overhead like one huge sail; and, when there fell a momentary lull on Aros, we could hear the gusts dismally sweeping in the distance. Over all the lowlands of the Ross, the wind must have blown as fierce as on the open ocean; and God only knows the uproar that was raging around the head of Ben Kyaw. Sheets of mingled spray and rain were driven in our faces. All round the isle of Aros the surf, with an incessant, hammering thunder, beat upon the reefs and beaches. Now louder in one place, now lower in another, like the combinations of orchestral music, the constant mass of sound was hardly varied for a moment. And loud above all this hurly-burly I could hear the changeful voices of the Roost and the intermittent roaring of the Merry Men. At that hour, there flashed into my mind the reason of the name that they were called. For the noise of them seemed almost mirthful, as it out-topped the other noises of the night; or, if not mirthful, yet instinct with a portentous joviality. Nay, and it seemed even human. As when savage men have drunk away their reason, and, discarding speech, bawl together in their madness by the hour; so, to my ears, these deadly breakers shouted by Aros in the night.

Arm in arm, and staggering against the wind, Rorie and I won every yard of ground with conscious effort. We slipped on the wet sod, we fell together sprawling on the rocks. Bruised, drenched, beaten, and breathless, it must have taken us near half an hour to get from the house down to the Head that overlooks the Roost. It was there, it seemed, that was my uncle's favourite observatory. Right in the face of it,

where the cliff is highest and most sheer, a hump of earth, like a parapet, makes a place of shelter from the common winds, where a man may sit in quiet and see the tide and the mad billows contending at his feet. As he might look down from the window of a house upon some street disturbance, so, from this post, he looks down upon the tumbling of the Merry Men. On such a night, of course, he peers upon a world of blackness, where the waters wheel and boil, where the waves joust together with the noise of an explosion, and the foam towers and vanishes in the twinkling of an eye. Never before had I seen the Merry Men thus violent. The fury, height, and transiency of their spoutings was a thing to be seen and not recounted. High over our heads on the cliff rose their white columns in the darkness; and the same instant, like phantoms, they were gone. Sometimes three at a time would thus aspire and vanish; sometimes a gust took them, and the spray would fall about us, heavy as a wave. And yet the spectacle was rather maddening in its levity than impressive by its force. Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar; a gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin to madness; and I found myself at times following the dance of the Merry Men as it were a tune upon a jiggling instrument.

I first caught sight of my uncle when we were still some yards away in one of the flying glimpses of twilight that chequered the pitch darkness of the night. He was standing up behind the parapet, his head thrown back and the bottle to his mouth. As he put it down, he saw and recognised us with a leap and a toss of one hand fleringly above his head.

“Has he been drinking?” shouted I to Rorie.

“He will aye be drunk when the wind blaws,” returned Rorie in the same high key, and it was all that I could do to hear him.

“Then—was he so—in February?” I inquired.

Rorie’s “Ay” was a cause of joy to me. The murder, then, had not sprung in cold blood from calculation; it was an act of madness no more to be condemned than to be pardoned. My uncle was a dangerous madman, if you will, but he was not cruel and base as I had feared. Yet what a scene for a carouse, what an incredible vice, was this that the poor man had chosen! I have always thought drunkenness a wild and almost fearful pleasure, rather demoniacal than human; but drunkenness, out here in the roaring blackness, on the edge of a cliff above that hell of waters, the man’s head spinning like the Roost, his foot tottering on the edge of death, his ear watching for the signs of shipwreck, surely that, if it were credible in any one, was morally impossible in a man like my uncle, whose mind was set upon a damnatory creed and haunted by the darkest superstitions. Yet so it was; and, as we reached the bight of shelter and could breathe again, I saw the man’s eyes shining in the night with an unholy glimmer.

“Eh, Charlie, man, it’s grand!” he cried. “See to them!” he continued, dragging me to the edge of the abyss from whence arose that

deafening clamour and those clouds of spray ; “see to them dancin’, man ! Is that no wicked ?”

He pronounced the word with gusto, and I thought it suited with the scene.

“They’re yowlin’ for thon schooner,” he went on, his thin, insane voice clearly audible in the shelter of the bank, “an’ she’s comin’ aye nearer, aye nearer, aye nearer an’ nearer an’ nearer ; an’ they ken’t, the folk kens it, they ken weel it’s by wi’ them. Charlie, lad, they’re a’ drunk in yon schooner, a’ dizened wi’ drink. They were a’ drunk in *Christ-Anna*, at the hinder end. There’s nane could droon at sea, wantin’ the brandy. Hoot awa, what do you ken ?” with a sudden blast of anger. “I tell ye, it cannae be ; they daurnae droon without it. Ha’e,” holding out the bottle, “tak’ a sowp.”

I was about to refuse, but Rorie touched me as if in warning ; and indeed I had already thought better of the movement. I took the bottle, therefore, and not only drank freely myself, but contrived to spill even more as I was doing so. It was pure spirit, and almost strangled me to swallow. My kinsman did not observe the loss, but, once more throwing back his head, drained the remainder to the dregs. Then, with a loud laugh, he cast the bottle forth among the Merry Men, who seemed to leap up, shouting to receive it.

“Ha’e, bairns !” he cried, “there’s your han’sel. Ye’ll get bonnier nor that, or morning.”

For a moment, he stood stupefied ; then, the whisky working in his brain, he began to gesticulate, and to bow, and to step to and fro, and back and forward, in a sort of formless dance. We could hear him accompany his movements, now with a snatch of a sea drinking-song ; now, as he bettered the pace, with such cries as young men utter in a reel ; and now, as again he moved more slowly, with old Scottish psalm tunes and verses of the Psalms of David. Sometimes a gust would strike and almost overthrow him ; sometimes great, lashing sprays fell upon us and hid him from our sight ; and again, in a lull, we could hear the words of his song, and see him modulate his steps and gestures to the air.

Suddenly, out in the black night before us, and not two hundred yards away, we heard, at a moment when the wind was silent, the clear note of a human voice. Instantly the wind swept howling down upon the Head, and the Roost bellowed, and churned, and danced with a new fury. But we had heard the sound, and we knew, with agony, that this was the doomed ship now close on ruin, and that what we had heard was the voice of her master issuing his last command. My uncle, too, had heard it, and had ceased his dance. He, and I, and Rorie, crouching together on the edge, waited, straining every sense, for the inevitable end. It was long, however, and to us it seemed like ages, ere the schooner suddenly appeared for one brief instant, relieved against a tower of glimmering foam. I still see her reefed mainsail flapping loose,

as the boom fell heavily across the deck ; I still see the black outline of the hull, and still think I can distinguish the figure of a man stretched upon the tiller. Yet the whole sight we had of her passed swifter than lightning ; the very wave that disclosed her fell burying her for ever ; the mingled cry of many voices at the point of death rose and was quenched in the roaring of the Merry Men. And with that the tragedy was at an end. The strong ship, with all her gear, and the lamp perhaps still burning in the cabin, the lives of so many men, precious surely to others, dear, at least, as heaven to themselves, had all, in that one moment, gone down into the surging waters. They were gone like a dream. And the wind still ran and shouted, and the senseless waters in the Roost still leaped and tumbled as before.

How long we lay there together, we three, speechless and motionless, is more than I can tell, but it must have been for long. At length, one by one, and almost mechanically, we crawled back into the shelter of the bank ; and there my own emotion was relieved by tears. As I lay against the parapet, wholly wretched and not entirely master of my mind, I could hear my kinsman maundering to himself in an altered and melancholy mood. Now he would repeat to himself with maudlin iteration, " Sic a fecht as they had—sic a sair fecht as they had, puir lads, puir lads ! " and anon he would bewail that " a' the gear was as gude's tint," because the ship had gone down among the Merry Men instead of stranding on the shore ; and throughout, the name—the *Christ-Anna*—would come and go in his divagations, pronounced with shuddering awe. The storm all this time was rapidly abating. In half an hour the wind had fallen to a breeze, and the change was accompanied or caused by a heavy, cold, and plumping rain. I must then have fallen asleep, and when I came to myself, drenched, stiff, and unrefreshed, day had already broken, grey, wet, discomfortable day ; the wind blew in faint and shifting capfuls, the tide was out, the Roost was at its lowest, and only the strong beating surf round all the coasts of Aros remained to witness of the furies of the night.

CHAPTER V.

A MAN OUT OF THE SEA.

ROBIE set out for the house in search of warmth and breakfast ; but my uncle was bent upon examining the shores of Aros, and I felt it part of my duty to Mary to accompany him throughout. He was now docile and quiet, but tremulous and weak in mind and body ; and it was with the eagerness of a child that he pursued his exploration. He climbed far down upon the rocks ; on the beaches, he pursued the retreating breakers. The merest broken plank or rag of cordage was a treasure in his eyes to

be secured at the peril of his life. To see him, with weak and stumbling footsteps, expose himself to the pursuit of the surf, or the snares and pitfalls of the weedy rock, kept me in a perpetual terror. My arm was ready to support him, my hand clutched him by the skirt, I helped him to draw his pitiful discoveries beyond the reach of the returning surf; a nurse accompanying a child of seven would have had no different experience.

Yet, weakened as he was by the reaction from his madness of the night before, the passions that smouldered in his nature were those of a strong man. His terror of the sea, although conquered for the moment, was still undiminished; had the sea been a lake of living flames, he could not have shrunk more panically from its touch; and once, when his foot slipped and he plunged to the midleg into a pool of water, the shriek that came up out of his soul was like the cry of death. He sat still for a while, panting like a dog, after that; but his desire for the spoils of shipwreck triumphed once more over his fears; once more he tottered among the curded foam; once more he crawled upon the rocks among the bursting bubbles; once more his whole heart seemed to be set on driftwood, fit, if it was fit for anything, to throw upon the fire. Pleased as he was with what he found, he still incessantly grumbled at his ill-fortune.

“Aros,” he said, “is no a place for wrecks ava!—no ava.’ A’ the years I’ve dwalt here, this ane maks the second; and the best o’ the gear clean tint!”

“Uncle,” said I, for we were now on a stretch of open sand, where there was nothing to divert his mind, “I saw you last night, as I never thought to see you—you were drunk.”

“Na, na,” he said, “no so bad as that. I had been drinking, though. And to tell ye the God’s truth, it’s a thing I cannae mend. There’s nae soberer man than me in my ord’nar; but when I hear the wind blaw in my lug, it’s my belief that I gang gyte.”

“You are a religious man,” I replied, “and this is sin.”

“Ou,” he returned, “if it wasnae sin, I dinna ken that I would care for’t. Ye see, man, it’s defiance. There’s a sair spang o’ the auld sin o’ the warld in yon sea; it’s an unchristian business at the best o’t; an’ whiles when it gets up, an’ the wind skreighs—the wind an’ her are a kind o’ sib, I’m thinkin’—an’ thae Merry Men, the daft callants, blawin’ and lauchin’, and puir souls in the deid thraws warstlin’ the leelang nicht wi’ their bit ships—weel, it comes ower me like a glamour. I’m a deil, I ken ’t. But I think naething o’ the puir sailor lads; I’m wi’ the sea, I’m just like ane o’ her ain Merry Men.”

I thought I should touch him in a joint of his harness. I turned me towards the sea; the surf was running gaily, wave after wave, with their manes blowing behind them, riding one after another up the beach, towering, curving, falling one upon another on the trampled sand. Without, the salt air, the scared gulls, the wide-spread army of the sea-chargers, neighing to each other, as they gathered together to the assault

of Aros ; and close before us, that line on the flat sands that, with all their number and their fury, they might never pass.

“ Thus far shalt thou go,” said I, “ and no further.” And then I quoted as solemnly as I was able a verse that I had often before fitted to the chorus of the breakers :

“ But yet the Lord that is on high,
Is more of might by far,
Than noise of many waters is
As great sea billows are.”

“ Ay,” said my kinsman, “ at the hinder end, the Lord will triumph ; I dinnae misdoobt that. But here on earth, even silly men-folk dare Him to His face. It is nae wise ; I amnae sayin’ that it’s wise ; but it’s the pride of the eye, and it’s the lust o’ life, an’ it’s the wale o’ pleasures.”

I said no more ; for we had now begun to cross a neck of land that lay between us and Sandag ; and I withheld my last appeal to the man’s better reason till we should stand upon the spot associated with his crime. Nor did he pursue the subject. But he walked beside me with a firmer step. The call that I had made upon his mind acted like a stimulant ; and I could see that he had forgotten his search for worthless jetsom, in a profound, gloomy, and yet stirring train of thought. In three or four minutes we had topped the brae and begun to go down upon Sandag. The wreck had been roughly handled by the sea ; the bow had been spun round and dragged a little lower down ; and perhaps the stem had been forced a little higher, for the two parts now lay entirely separate on the beach. When we came to the grave, I stopped, uncovered my head in the thick rain, and, looking my kinsman in the face, addressed him.

“ A man,” said I, “ was in God’s providence suffered to escape from mortal dangers ; he was poor, he was naked, he was wet, he was weary, he was a stranger ; he had every claim upon the bowels of your compassion ; it may be that he was the salt of the earth, holy, helpful, and kind ; it may be he was a man laden with iniquities to whom death was the beginning of torment. I ask you in the sight of heaven : Gordon Darnaway, where is the man for whom Christ died ? ”

He started visibly at the last words ; but there came no answer, and his face expressed no feeling but a vague alarm.

“ You were my father’s brother,” I continued ; “ you have taught me to count your house as if it were my father’s house ; and we are both sinful men walking before the Lord among the sins and dangers of this life. It is by our evil that God leads us into good ; we sin, I dare not say by His temptation, but I must say with His consent ; and to any but the brutish man, his sins are the beginning of wisdom. God has warned you by this crime ; He warns you still by the bloody grave between our feet ; and if there shall follow no repentance, no improvement, no return to Him, what can we look for but the following of some memorable judgment ? ”

Even as I spoke the words, the eyes of my uncle wandered from my face. A change fell upon his looks that cannot be described; his features seemed to dwindle in size, the colour faded from his cheeks, one hand rose waveringly and pointed over my shoulder into the distance, and the oft-repeated name fell once more from his lips: "The *Christ-Anna!*"

I turned; and if I was not appalled to the same degree, as I return thanks to Heaven that I had not the cause, I was still startled by the sight that met my eyes. The form of a man stood upright on the cabin-hutch of the wrecked ship; his back was towards us; he appeared to be scanning the offing with shaded eyes; and his figure was relieved to its full height, which was plainly very great, against the sea and sky. I have said a thousand times that I am not superstitious; but at that moment, with my mind running upon death and sin, the unexplained appearance of a stranger on that sea-girt, solitary island filled me with a surprise that bordered close on terror. It was not possible that any human soul should have come ashore alive in such a sea as had raged last night along the coasts of Aros; and the only vessel within miles had gone down before our eyes among the Merry Men. I was assailed with doubts that made suspense unbearable; and to put the matter to the touch at once, stepped forward and hailed the figure like a ship.

He turned about, and I thought he started to behold us. Then he stooped and clasped his hands, as if in supplication. At this my courage instantly revived; and I called and signed to him to draw near. He dropped immediately to the sands, and began slowly to approach, with many stops and hesitations, crouching and clasping his hands, and making a world of gesticulative signals. At each repeated mark of the man's uneasiness, I grew the more confident myself; and I advanced another step, encouraging him as I did so with my head and hand. It was plain the poor castaway had heard indifferent accounts of our island hospitality; and indeed, about this time, the people further north had an indifferent reputation.

"Why," I said, "the man is black!"

And just at that moment, in a voice that I could scarce have recognised, my kinsman began swearing and praying in a mingled stream. I looked at him; he had fallen on his knees, his face was agonised; at each step of the castaway's, the pitch of his voice rose, the volubility of his utterance and the fervour of his language redoubled. I call it prayer, for it was addressed to God; but surely no such ranting incongruities were ever before addressed to the Creator by a creature; surely if prayer can be a sin, this mad harangue was sinful. I ran to my kinsman, I seized him by the shoulders, I dragged him to his feet.

"Silence, man," said I, "respect your God in words, if not in action. Here, on the very scene of your transgressions, He sends you an occasion of atonement. Forward and embrace it; welcome like a father you creature who comes trembling to your mercy."

With that, I tried to force him towards the negro; but he felled me

to the ground, burst from my grasp, leaving the shoulder of his jacket, and fled up the hillside towards the top of Aros like a deer. I staggered to my feet again, bruised and somewhat stunned; the negro had paused in surprise, perhaps in terror, some halfway between me and the wreck; my uncle was already far away, bounding from rock to rock; and I thus found myself torn for a time between two duties. But I judged, and I pray Heaven that I judged rightly, in favour of the poor wretch upon the sands; his misfortune was at least not plainly of his own creation; it was one besides that I could certainly relieve; and I had begun by that time to regard my uncle as an incurable and dismal lunatic. I advanced accordingly towards the negro, who now awaited my approach with undisguised alarm. As I came nearer, I held out my hand; and the poor creature ran to it, kissed it, and placed it on his heart, breaking at the same time into a torrent of words that were incomprehensible to me. My eyes filled with tears, partly at his gratitude, partly at thought of the far different scene in February; but I signed to my castaway that I was unable to comprehend him, and tried him with a few words, first of English and then of Gaelic, in vain. It was plain that we should have to rely upon the language of looks and gestures; and I was reminded of a book that I had read, *Robinson Crusoe*, where, upon an island in a far part of the world, another Englishman relates difficulties of the same nature with another negro. I motioned him to follow me, which he readily did. As we passed the grave, I paused and raised my eyes and hands to heaven in token of respect and sorrow for the dead. As if to show that he understood me, he fell at once upon his knees and appeared to offer up a prayer, looking up when he had done, nodding and smiling, with an irreverence that somewhat shocked my notions of religion. Then he turned, pointed to my uncle, whom we could just see perched upon the top of Aros, and touched his head, to indicate that he was mad.

I was anxious if possible to discover whether he had belonged to the schooner. We took the long way round the shore, for I feared to excite my uncle if we struck across the island; and as we walked, I had time enough to mature the little dramatic exhibition by which I hoped to satisfy my doubts. Accordingly, pausing on a rock, I proceeded to imitate before the negro the action of the man whom I had seen the day before taking bearings with the compass at Sandag. He understood me at once. Nodding and smiling, he took the imitation out of my hands, showed me where the boat was, pointed out seaward as if to indicate the position of the schooner, and then down along the edge of the rock with the words "Espirito Santo," strangely pronounced, but clear enough for recognition. I had thus been right in my conjecture; the pretended historical inquiry had been but a cloak for treasure-hunting; the man who had played on Dr. Robertson was the same as the foreigner who visited Grisapol in spring, and now, with many others, lay dead under the Roost of Aros: there had their greed brought them, there should

their bones be tossed for evermore. In the meantime the negro continued his imitation of the scene, mingling and distinguishing the different parts with what seemed to me the talent of an actor, now looking up skyward as though watching the approach of the storm ; now, in the character of a seaman, waving the rest to come aboard ; now as an officer, running along the rock and entering the boat ; and anon bending over imaginary oars with the air of a hurried boatman. Lastly, he indicated to me, by a pantomime not to be described in words, how he himself had gone up to examine the stranded wreck, and, to his grief and indignation, had been deserted by his comrades. Throughout the performance, for I can call it nothing else, he assumed in turn the port and the grimace of every character he represented ; now strutting and turning out his toes, now squinting and hanging the lip, so that, had I known the parties, or even seen them nearer hand, I might have recognised each as he appeared.

The mystery of his presence being thus solved for me, I explained to him by means of a sketch the fate of the vessel and of all aboard her. He showed no surprise and, I thought, little sorrow ; his gestures seemed to indicate a philosophical acquiescence in the laws of nature and the common fate of man ; and next moment he had picked a flower and was trying to explain to me, as I thought I gathered, some virtue latent in the plant, now in words, now by vigorous pantomime, smiling the while from ear to ear.

There was something in this poor castaway that engaged my affectionate interest. For all his height, which was almost gigantic, and his strength and activity, which seemed truly formidable, he appealed to me rather as a child than as a full-grown man. In our necessary pantomime, he plainly found the relish of play ; his eye and his mind were continually wandering ; and I have never seen any one who smiled so often or so brightly. Even his black face was beautified ; and before we reached the house of Aros I had entirely conquered the first repulsion of his looks.

To Mary I told all that had passed without suppression, though I own my heart failed me ; but I did wrong to doubt her sense of justice.

“ You did the right,” she said. “ God’s will be done.” And she set out meat for us at once.

As soon as I was satisfied, I bade Rorie keep an eye upon the castaway, who was still ravenously eating, and set forth again myself to find my uncle. I had not gone far before I saw him sitting in the same place, upon the very topmost knoll, and seemingly in the same attitude as when I had last observed him. From that point, as I have said, the most of Aros and the neighbouring Ross would be spread below him like a map ; and it was plain that he kept a bright look-out in all directions, for my head had scarcely risen above the summit of the first ascent before he had leaped to his feet and turned as if to face me. I hailed him at once, as well as I was able, in the same tones and words

as I had often used before, when I had come to summon him to dinner. He made not so much as a movement in reply. I passed on a little further, and again tried parley with the same result. But when I began a second time to advance, his insane fears blazed up again, and still in dead silence, but with incredible speed, he began to flee from before me along the rocky summit of the hill. An hour before, he had been dead weary, and I had been comparatively active. But now his strength was recruited by the fervour of insanity, and it would have been vain for me to dream of pursuit. Nay, the very attempt, I thought, might have inflamed his terrors, and thus increased the miseries of our position. And I had nothing left but to turn homeward and make my sad report to Mary.

She heard it, as she had heard the first, with a concerned composure, and, bidding me lie down and take that rest of which I stood so much in need, set forth herself in quest of her misguided father. At that age it would have been a strange thing that put me from either meat or sleep; I slept long and deep; and it was already long past noon before I awoke and came downstairs into the kitchen. Mary, Rorie, and the negro castaway were seated about the fire in silence; and I could see that Mary had been weeping. There was cause enough, as I soon learned, for tears. First she, and then Rorie, had been forth to seek my uncle; each in turn had found him perched upon the hill-top, and from each in turn he had silently and swiftly fled. Rorie had tried to chase him, but in vain; madness lent a new vigour to his bounds; he sprang from rock to rock over the widest gullies; he scoured like the wind along the hill-tops; he doubled and twisted like a hare before the dogs; and Rorie at length gave in; and the last that he saw, my uncle was seated as before upon the crest of Aros. Even during the hottest excitement of the chase, even when the fleet-footed servant had come, for a moment, very near to capture him, the poor lunatic had uttered not a sound. He fled, and he was silent, like a beast; and this silence had terrified his pursuer.

There was something heart-breaking in the situation. How to capture the madman, how to feed him in the meanwhile, and what to do with him when he was captured, were the three difficulties that we had to solve.

“The negro,” said I, “is the cause of this attack. It may even be his presence in the house that keeps my uncle on the hill. We have done the fair thing; he has been fed and warmed under this roof; now I propose that Rorie put him across the bay in the coble, and take him through the Ross as far as Grisapol.”

In this proposal Mary heartily concurred; and bidding the black follow us, we all three descended to the pier. Certainly, Heaven's will was declared against Gordon Darnaway; a thing had happened, never paralleled before in Aros; during the storm, the coble had broken loose, and, striking on the rough splinters of the pier, now lay in four feet of

water with one side stove in. Three days of work at least would be required to make her float. But I was not to be beaten. I led the whole party round to where the gut was narrowest, swam to the other side, and called to the negro to follow me. His terror at the idea was extreme; the more I insisted, the more abject became his signals of reluctance and petition; and when at last, weary with the whole business, I swam back again to Aros, he greeted my arrival with the most speaking pantomime of affection, submission, and gratitude for his escape.

“Poor lamb,” said Mary, “he durstn’t. And I’ll tell ye one thing, Charlie Darnaway: whether he was sent here in Heaven’s anger or Heaven’s mercy, I would think shame upon the house of Aros if we drove him forth. Man, or bairn, or beast, I hardly can tell which to think him, he shall have a seat at the fireside and a spoon at the table for me.”

Even Rorie was of much the same way of thinking. “He will be a fine, canny body at all,” was his opinion of the negro; and I can hardly explain how glad I was to hear their verdict. Perhaps his special gratitude to myself had touched me; but I have never felt a more affectionate pity for any creature calling himself man. Indeed, in the long hours that followed, he began to show a sympathy with our sorrow and an intelligent understanding of its cause and nature, that endeared him equally to all. I could never reproduce in words the series of fantastic gestures and grimaces by which he managed to explain his meaning; it was a strange business, and made stranger by the glee and the noisy laughter with which he perceived he had been understood. He must have closely and thoughtfully observed our comings and goings, and the behaviour of the maniac on the hill; for, absurd as it may seem, we owed to his suggestion the simple and obvious plan by which food was conveyed to my uncle. Acting, as he had done before, two parts in succession, he climbed the hill with a basket in the character of Rorie, observed him from the hilltop in that of the madman; came higher as Rorie, ran away as my uncle; as Rorie, left the basket on the summit and descended to the house; returned as my uncle to his perch, and, finding the basket, opened it with every sign of joy, and supped with the most laughable and unnecessary details, such as licking the lips and fingers or smacking gluttonously with the mouth.

It was like a ray of light to the rest of us, and no sooner understood than put in execution. Rorie carried it out, Rorie speechless in admiration of the negro. From that moment, in fact, the Hebridean servant began to regard our castaway with eyes of singular respect, like some odd sort of collie, especially intelligent and kind. And it is here, among all these events, that I can see most plainly the mark of the hand of God. Judging by guess, I should have thought this superstitious old fellow would have held the stranger in the extreme degree of horror.

But his superstitions were of another order ; he had not been fed in youth, like my uncle among the Cameronians, on tales of the devil appearing in the similitude of a black man, and, with cozening words and specious pretexts, luring men to ruin. It was rather as an animal than as a fiend that Rorie thought of our visitor ; and as he found him more and more human in his ways, he came more and more both to admire and condescend.

Again my uncle was visible on his perch ; again he fled in silence. But food and a great cloak were at least left for his comfort ; the rain, besides, had cleared away, and the night promised to be even warm. We might compose ourselves, we thought, until the morrow ; rest was the chief requisite, that we might be strengthened for unusual exertions ; and as none cared to talk, we separated at an early hour. The black once more embraced and kissed my hand with the same humble gratitude. He even offered to follow me, but when I signed to him to stay with Rorie, he cheerfully obeyed, nodding and smiling to his new companion.

I lay long awake, planning a campaign for the morrow. I was to place the negro on the side of Sandag, whence, with his remarkable agility, he should head my uncle towards the house ; Rorie in the west, I on the east, were to complete the cordon, as best we might. It seemed to me, the more I recalled the configuration of the island, that it should be possible, though hard, to force him down upon the low ground along Aros Bay ; and once there, even with the strength of his madness, ultimate escape was hardly to be feared. It was on his terror of the negro that I relied ; for I made sure, however he might run, it would not be in the direction of the man whom he supposed to have returned from the dead, and thus one point of the compass at least would be secure.

When at length I fell asleep, it was to be awakened shortly after by a dream of wrecks, black men, and submarine adventure ; and I found myself so shaken and fevered that I arose, descended the stair, and stepped out before the house. Within Rorie and the black were snoring together in the kitchen ; outside was a wonderful clear night of stars, with here and there a cloud still hanging, last stragglers of the tempest. It was near the top of the flood, and the Merry Men were roaring in the windless quiet of the night. Never, not even in the height of the tempest, had I heard their song with greater awe. Now, when the winds were gathered home, when the deep was dandling itself back into its summer slumber, and when the stars, the countless regents of the moon, rained their gentle light over land and sea, the voice of these tide-breakers was still raised for havoc. They seemed, indeed, to be a part of the world's evil and the tragic side of life. Nor were their meaningless vociferations the only sounds that broke the silence of the night. For I could hear, now shrill and thrilling and now almost drowned, the note of a human voice that accompanied the uproar of the Roost. I knew it for my kinsman's voice ; and a great fear fell upon me of

God's judgments, and the evil in the world. I went back again into the darkness of the house as into a place of shelter, and lay long upon my bed, pondering these mysteries.

It was late when I again awoke, and I leaped into my clothes and hurried to the kitchen. No one was there; Rorie and the black had both stealthily departed long before; and my heart stood still at the discovery. I could rely on Rorie's heart, but I placed no trust in his discretion. If he had thus set out without a word, he was plainly bent upon some service to my uncle. But what service could he hope to render even alone, far less in the company of the man in whom my uncle found his fears incarnated? Even if I were not already too late to prevent some deadly mischief, it was plain I must delay no longer. With the thought I was out of the house; and often as I have run on the rough sides of Aros, I never ran as I did that fatal morning. I do not believe I put twelve minutes to the whole ascent.

My uncle was gone from his perch. The basket had indeed been torn open and the meat scattered on the turf; but, as we found afterwards, no mouthful had been tasted; and there was not another trace of human existence in that wide field of view. Day had already filled the clear heavens; the sun already lighted, in a rosy bloom, upon the crest of Ben Kyaw; but all below me the rude knolls of Aros and the shield of sea lay steeped in the clear darkling twilight of the dawn.

"Rorie!" I cried; and again, "Rorie!" My voice died in the silence, but there came no answer back. If there were indeed an enterprise afoot to catch my uncle, it was plainly not in fleetness of foot, but in dexterity of stalking, that the hunters placed their trust. I ran on further, keeping the higher spurs, and looking right and left, nor did I pause again till I was on the mount above Sandag. I could see the wreck, the uncovered belt of sand, the waves idly beating, the long ledge of rocks, and on either hand the tumbled knolls, boulders, and gullies of the island. But still no human thing.

At a stride the sunshine fell on Aros, and the shadows and colours leaped into being. Not half a moment later, below me to the west, sheep began to scatter as in a panic. There came a cry. I saw my uncle running. I saw the black jump up in hot pursuit; and before I had time to understand, Rorie also had appeared, calling directions in Gaelic as to a dog herding sheep.

I took to my heels to interfere, and perhaps I had done better to have waited where I was, for I was the means of cutting off the madman's last escape. There was nothing before him from that moment but the grave, the wreck, and the sea in Sandag Bay. And yet Heaven knows that what I did was for the best.

My uncle Gordon saw in what a direction, horrible to him, the chase was driving him. He doubled, darting to the right and left; but, high as the fever was in his veins, the black was still the swifter. Turn where he would, he was still forestalled, still driven toward the scene of

his crime. Suddenly he began to shriek aloud, so that the coast re-echoed; and now both I and Rorie were calling on the black to stop. But all was vain, for it was written otherwise. The pursuer still ran, the chase still sped before him screaming; they avoided the grave, and skimmed close past the timbers of the wreck; in a breath they had cleared the sand; and still my kinsman did not pause, but dashed straight into the surf; and the black, now almost within reach, still followed swiftly behind him. Rorie and I both stopped, for the thing was now beyond the hands of men, and these were the decrees of God that came to pass before our eyes. There was never a sharper ending. On that steep beach they were beyond their depth at a bound; neither could swim; the black rose once for a moment with a throttling cry; but the current had them, racing seaward; and if ever they came up again, which God alone can tell, it would be ten minutes after, at the far end of Aros Roost, where the sea-birds hover fishing.

NOTE: In the first part, Ben Kyaw was accidentally printed Ben Ryan.