



THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA

New 6s. Novels

- THE ETERNAL CITY
- By Hall Caine
- THE ASSASSINS

- By N. M. Meakin
- SCARLET AND HYSSOP
- By E. F. Benson
- THE LUCK OF THE VAILS
- By E. F. Benson
- THE STORY OF EDEN
- By Dolf Wyllarde
- A PROPHET OF THE REAL
- By Esther Miller
- SONS OF THE SWORD
- By Margaret L. Woods
- BY BREAD ALONE
- By J. K. Friedman
- THE RIGHT OF WAY
- By Gilbert Parker
- FOUR-LEAVED CLOVER
- By Maxwell Gray
- JACK RAYMOND
- By E. L. Voynich
- LOVE AND HIS MASK
- By Ménie Muriel Down
- TANGLED TRINITIES
- By Daniel Woodroffe
- GILLETTE'S MARRIAGE
- By Mamie Bowles
- VOYSEY

- By R. O. Prowse
- SAWDUST
- By Dorothea Gerard
- FOREST FOLK
- By James Prior

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
21 Bedford Street, W.C.

The
Mystery of the Sea

By
Bram Stoker
Author of "Dracula"



London
William Heinemann
1902

All rights reserved.

This Edition enjoys copyright in all countries signatory to the Berne Treaty, and has been copyrighted in the United States of America by Bram Stoker, 1902.

TO
DAISY GILBEY RIVIERE
OF THE
THIRD GENERATION

OF
LOVING AND LOYAL FRIENDS

ℓ δαυδληη δλοηελλρεεδ ε'εωεηη,
'Se δ'φοξλαηη επε ρεωλ-μυη ηεη ρεωδ.
Υοηελ ηε ηεηεθεεηη ρο ζα λωε :-
Ρεε ερ ημυρ υοηεδ ζεελεδ δμδε ηερ ορ,
Υς εμλεεηη ληερεδμλ ρο ζεερεδδρ ζμη
'Sρεερ ρεδμρ ρεη δερ υς ηερ εμλε-ρορδ'.

“To win the mystery o’ the sea,“An’ learn the secrets that there be,“Gather in ane these weirds three:

“A gowden moon on a flowin’ tide;“An’ Lammas floods for the spell to bide;“An’ a gowden mon wi death for his bride.”

[Gaelic verse and English translation.]

[ix]

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Second Sight	3
II. Gormala	9
III. An Ancient Rune	16
IV. Lammas Floods	23
V. The Mystery of the Sea	32
VI. The Ministers of the Doom	44

VII.	From Other Ages and the Ends of the Earth	51
VIII.	A Run on the Beach	66
IX.	Confidences and Secret Writing	80
X.	A Clear Horizon	94
XI.	In the Twilight	104
XII.	The Cipher	113
XIII.	A Ride Through the Mountains	122
XIV.	A Secret Shared	130
XV.	A Peculiar Dinner Party	138
XVI.	Revelations	145
XVII.	Sam Adams's Task	152
XVIII.	Fireworks and Joan of Arc	159
XIX.	On Changing One's Name	165
XX.	Comradeship	173
XXI.	The Old Far West and the New	180
XXII.	Crom Castle	187
XXIII.	Secret Service	195
XXIV.	A Subtle Plan	200
XXV.	Inductive Ratiocination	207
XXVI.	A Whole Wedding Day	215[x]

XXVII.	Entrance to the Cavern	222
XXVIII.	Voices in the Dark	229
XXIX.	The Monument	237
XXX.	The Secret Passage	244
XXXI.	Marjory's Adventure	251
XXXII.	The Lost Script	260
XXXIII.	Don Bernardino	269
XXXIV.	The Accolade	277
XXXV.	The Pope's Treasure	285
XXXVI.	The Rising Tide	293
XXXVII.	Round the Clock	302
XXXVIII.	The Duty of a Wife	310
XXXIX.	An Unexpected Visitor	317
XL.	The Redemption of a Trust	326
XLI.	Treasure Trove	335
XLII.	A Struggle	346
XLIII.	The Honour of a Spaniard	355
XLIV.	The Voice in the Dust	364
XLV.	Danger	374
XLVI.	Ardiffery Manse	382

XLVII.	The Dumb can Speak	394
XLVIII.	Dunbuy Haven	403
XLIX.	Gormala's Last Help	413
L.	The Eyes of the Dead	423
LI.	In the Sea Fog	433
LII.	The Skares	443
LIII.	From the Deep	451

[xi]

3233362143318194723312382934118621344275161134233
3168146335219364815321382634318432131443245716811
3203435166161816322711285923641181243736281012433
5449963436161423823123741281161812816162114611381
1618906126721322323364118814273612321263181243316
1491184331684811411881691106451033213143831231243
3453261432332234396614253233223314818132433104332
7661262373223552125472180

[xii]

Vagabonds, Beggars, &c.

allowaunce or benefite of Clergie or Sanctuary.

And for the full expressing what person and persons shall bee extended within this branch to be rogges, vagabonds, and Curdie beggers, to haue and receiue the punishment aforesayd, for the sayd lewde manner of life: It is now published, declared and set forth by the authoritie of this present parliament, that all any such person and persons, that be or were themselves to bee protectours or procurours, going in or about any countrey or counties within this realme without sufficient authoritie deuied from, or vnder our louetie iudie the queene: and all other idle persons going about in any countrey of the sayde realme, vsing subtil, craftie, and vnlawfull games or playes, and some of them taking themselves to haue knowledge in Philosophie, Mathematicke or other abused sciences, whereby they beate & people in hand they can tell their destinies, deaths, continuities, and such other the fantasticall imaginations: and all any such person or persons, being whole and mightie in bodie, and able to labour, hauing not land or matter, nor being any lawfull marchandise, craft, or manerie, whereby he or she might get his or her liuing, and can giue no certifying how he or she dooth lawfully get

[1]

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA

[2]

[3]

CHAPTER I
SECOND SIGHT

I had just arrived at Cruden Bay on my annual visit, and after a late breakfast was sitting on the low wall which was a continuation of the escarpment of the bridge over

the Water of Cruden. Opposite to me, across the road and standing under the only little clump of trees in the place was a tall, gaunt old woman, who kept looking at me intently. As I sat, a little group, consisting of a man and two women, went by. I found my eyes follow them, for it seemed to me after they had passed me that the two women walked together and the man alone in front carrying on his shoulder a little black box—a coffin. I shuddered as I thought, but a moment later I saw all three abreast just as they had been. The old woman was now looking at me with eyes that blazed. She came across the road and said to me without preface:

“What saw ye then, that yer e’en looked so awed?” I did not like to tell her so I did not answer. Her great eyes were fixed keenly upon me, seeming to look me through and through. I felt that I grew quite red, whereupon she said, apparently to herself: “I thoct so! Even I did not see that which he saw.”

[4]

“How do you mean?” I queried. She answered ambiguously: “Wait! Ye shall perhaps know before this hour to-morrow!”

Her answer interested me and I tried to get her to say more; but she would not. She moved away with a grand stately movement that seemed to become her great gaunt form.

After dinner whilst I was sitting in front of the hotel, there was a great commotion in the village; much running to and fro of men and women with sad mien. On questioning them I found that a child had been drowned in the little harbour below. Just then a woman and a man, the same that had passed the bridge earlier in the day, ran by with wild looks. One of the bystanders looked after them pityingly as he said:

“Puir souls. It’s a sad home-comin’ for them the nicht.”

“Who are they?” I asked. The man took off his cap reverently as he answered:

“The father and mother of the child that was drowned!” As he spoke I looked round as though some one had called me.

There stood the gaunt woman with a look of triumph on her face.

The curved shore of Cruden Bay, Aberdeenshire, is backed by a waste of sandhills in whose hollows seagrass and moss and wild violets, together with the pretty “grass of Parnassus” form a green carpet. The surface of the hills is held together by bent-grass and is eternally shifting as the wind takes the fine sand and drifts it to and fro. All

behind is green, from the meadows that mark the southern edge of the bay to the swelling uplands that stretch away and away far in the distance,[5] till the blue mist of the mountains at Braemar sets a kind of barrier. In the centre of the bay the highest point of the land that runs downward to the sea looks like a miniature hill known as the Hawklaw; from this point onward to the extreme south, the land runs high with a gentle trend downwards.

Cruden sands are wide and firm and the sea runs out a considerable distance. When there is a storm with the wind on shore the whole bay is a mass of leaping waves and broken water that threatens every instant to annihilate the stake-nets which stretch out here and there along the shore. More than a few vessels have been lost on these wide stretching sands, and it was perhaps the roaring of the shallow seas and the terror which they inspired which sent the crews to the spirit room and the bodies of those of them which came to shore later on, to the churchyard on the hill.

If Cruden Bay is to be taken figuratively as a mouth, with the sand hills for soft palate, and the green Hawklaw as the tongue, the rocks which work the extremities are its teeth. To the north the rocks of red granite rise jagged and broken. To the south, a mile and a half away as the crow flies, Nature seems to have manifested its wildest forces. It is here, where the little promontory called Whinnyfold juts out, that the two great geological features of the Aberdeen coast meet. The red sienite of the north joins the black gneiss of the south. That union must have been originally a wild one; there are evidences of an upheaval which must have shaken the earth to its centre. Here and there are great masses of either species of rock hurled upwards in every conceivable variety of form, sometimes fused or pressed together so that it is impossible to say exactly where gneiss ends or sienite begins; but broadly speaking here is an irregular line of separation. This[6] line runs seawards to the east and its strength is shown in its outcrop. For half a mile or more the rocks rise through the sea singly or in broken masses ending in a dangerous cluster known as "The Skares" and which has had for centuries its full toll of wreck and disaster. Did the sea hold its dead where they fell, its floor around the Skares would be whitened with their bones, and new islands could build themselves with the piling wreckage. At times one may see here the ocean in her fiercest mood; for it is when the tempest drives from the south-east that the sea is fretted amongst the rugged rocks and sends its spume landwards. The rocks that at calmer times rise dark from the briny deep are lost to sight for moments in the grand onrush of the waves. The seagulls which usually whiten them, now flutter around screaming, and the sound of their shrieks comes in on the gale almost in a continuous note, for the single cries are merged in the multitudinous roar of sea and air.

The village, squatted beside the emboucher of the Water of Cruden at the northern side of the bay is simple enough; a few rows of fishermen's cottages, two or three great red-tiled drying-sheds nestled in the sand-heap behind the fishers' houses. For the rest of the place as it was when first I saw it, a little lookout beside a tall flagstaff on the northern cliff, a few scattered farms over the inland prospect, one little hotel down on the western bank of the Water of Cruden with a fringe of willows protecting its sunk garden which was always full of fruits and flowers.

From the most southern part of the beach of Cruden Bay to Whinnyfold village the distance is but a few hundred yards; first a steep pull up the face of the rock; and then an even way, beside part of which runs a tiny stream. To the left of this path, going towards Whinnyfold, the ground rises in a bold slope and then^[7] falls again all round, forming a sort of wide miniature hill of some eighteen or twenty acres. Of this the southern side is sheer, the black rock dipping into the waters of the little bay of Whinnyfold, in the centre of which is a picturesque island of rock shelving steeply from the water on the northern side, as is the tendency of all the gneiss and granite in this part. But to east and north there are irregular bays or openings, so that the furthest points of the promontory stretch out like fingers. At the tips of these are reefs of sunken rock falling down to deep water and whose existence can only be suspected in bad weather when the rush of the current beneath sends up swirling eddies or curling masses of foam. These little bays are mostly curved and are green where falling earth or drifting sand have hidden the outmost side of the rocks and given a foothold to the seagrass and clover. Here have been at some time or other great caves, now either fallen in or silted up with sand, or obliterated with the earth brought down in the rush of surface-water in times of long rain. In one of these bays, Broad Haven, facing right out to the Skares, stands an isolated pillar of rock called locally the "Puir mon" through whose base, time and weather have worn a hole through which one may walk dryshod.

Through the masses of rocks that run down to the sea from the sides and shores of all these bays are here and there natural channels with straight edges as though cut on purpose for the taking in of the cobbles belonging to the fisher folk of Whinnyfold.

When first I saw the place I fell in love with it. Had it been possible I should have spent my summer there, in a house of my own, but the want of any place in which to live forbade such an opportunity. So I stayed in the little hotel, the Kilmarnock Arms.

The next year I came again, and the next, and the^[8] next. And then I arranged to take a feu at Whinnyfold and to build a house overlooking the Skares for myself. The details

of this kept me constantly going to Whinnyfold, and my house to be was always in my thoughts.

Hitherto my life had been an uneventful one. At school I was, though secretly ambitious, dull as to results. At College I was better off, for my big body and athletic powers gave me a certain position in which I had to overcome my natural shyness. When I was about eight and twenty I found myself nominally a barrister, with no knowledge whatever of the practice of law and but little less of the theory, and with a commission in the Devil's Own—the irreverent name given to the Inns of Court Volunteers. I had few relatives, but a comfortable, though not great, fortune; and I had been round the world, dilettante fashion.

[9]

CHAPTER II GORMALA

All that night I thought of the dead child and of the peculiar vision which had come to me. Sleeping or waking it was all the same; my mind could not leave the parents in procession as seen in imagination, or their distracted mien in reality. Mingled with them was the great-eyed, aquiline-featured, gaunt old woman who had taken such an interest in the affair, and in my part of it. I asked the landlord if he knew her, since, from his position as postmaster he knew almost everyone for miles around. He told me that she was a stranger to the place. Then he added:

“I can't imagine what brings her here. She has come over from Peterhead two or three times lately; but she doesn't seem to have anything at all to do. She has nothing to sell and she buys nothing. She's not a tripper, and she's not a beggar, and she's not a thief, and she's not a worker of any sort. She's a queer-looking lot anyhow. I fancy from her speech that she's from the west; probably from some of the far-out islands. I can tell that she has the Gaelic from the way she speaks.”

Later on in the day, when I was walking on the shore near the Hawklaw, she came up to speak to me. The shore was quite lonely, for in those days it was rare to see anyone on the beach except when the salmon fishers drew their nets at the ebbing tide. I was walking towards Whinnyfold when she came upon me silently^[10] from behind. She must have been hidden among the bent-grass of the sandhills for had she been anywhere in view I must have seen her on that desolate shore. She was evidently a most imperious person; she at once addressed me in a tone and manner which made me feel as though I were in some way an inferior, and in somehow to blame:

“What for did ye no tell me what ye saw yesterday?” Instinctively I answered:

“I don’t know why. Perhaps because it seemed so ridiculous.” Her stern features hardened into scorn as she replied:

“Are Death and the Doom then so redeekulous that they pleasure ye intil silence?” I somehow felt that this was a little too much and was about to make a sharp answer, when suddenly it struck me as a remarkable thing that she knew already. Filled with surprise I straightway asked her:

“Why, how on earth do you know? I told no one.” I stopped for I felt all at sea; there was some mystery here which I could not fathom. She seemed to read my mind like an open book, for she went on looking at me as she spoke, searchingly and with an odd smile.

“Eh! laddie, do ye no ken that ye hae een that can see? Do ye no understand that ye hae een that can speak? Is it that one with the Gift o’ Second Sight has no an understandin’ o’ it. Why, yer face when ye saw the mark o’ the Doom, was like a printed book to een like mine.”

“Do you mean to tell me” I asked “that you could tell what I saw, simply by looking at my face?”

“Na! na! laddie. Not all that, though a Seer am I; but I knew that you had seen the Doom! It’s no that varied that there need be any mistake. After all Death[11] is only one, in whatever way we may speak!” After a pause of thought I asked her:

“If you have the power of Second Sight why did you not see the vision, or whatever it was, yourself?”

“Eh! laddie” she answered, shaking her head “’Tis little ye ken o’ the wark o’ the Fates! Learn ye then that the Voice speaks only as it listeth into chosen ears, and the Vision comes only to chosen een. None can will to hear or to see, to pleasure themselves.”

“Then” I said, and I felt that there was a measure of triumph in my tone “if to none but the chosen is given to know, how comes it that you, who seem not to have been chosen on this occasion at all events, know all the same?” She answered with a touch of impatience:

“Do ye ken, young sir, that even mortal een have power to see much, if there be behind them the thocht, an’ the knowledge and the experience to guide them aright. How, think ye, is it that some can see much, and learn much as they gang; while others go blind as the mowdiwart, at the end o’ the journey as before it?”

“Then perhaps you will tell me how much you saw, and how you saw it?”

“Ah! to them that have seen the Doom there needs but sma’ guidance to their thochts. Too lang, an’ too often hae I mysen seen the death-sark an’ the watch-candle an’ the dead-hole, not to know when they are seen tae ither een. Na, na! laddie, what I kent o’ yer seein’ was no by the Gift but only by the use o’ my proper een. I kent not the muckle o’ what ye saw. Not whether it was ane or ither o’ the garnishins o’ the dead; but weel I kent that it was o’ death.”

“Then,” I said interrogatively “Second Sight is altogether a matter of chance?”

“Chance! chance!” she repeated with scorn. “Na![12] young sir; when the Voice has spoken there is no more chance than that the nicht will follow the day.”

“You mistake me,” I said, feeling somewhat superior now that I had caught her in an error, “I did not for a moment mean that the Doom—whatever it is—is not a true forerunner. What I meant was that it seems to be a matter of chance in whose ear the Voice—whatever it is—speaks; when once it has been ordained that it is to sound in the ear of some one.” Again she answered with scorn:

“Na, na! there is no chance o’ ocht about the Doom. Them that send forth the Voice and the Seein’ know well to whom it is sent and why. Can ye no comprehend that it is for no bairn-play that such goes forth. When the Voice speaks, it is mainly followed by tears an’ woe an’ lamentation! Nae! nor is it only one bit manifestation that stands by its lanes, remote and isolate from all ither. Truly ’tis but a pairt o’ the great scheme o’ things; an’ be sure that whoso is chosen to see or to hear is chosen weel, an’ must hae their pairt in what is to be, on to the verra end.”

“Am I to take it” I asked, “that Second Sight is but a little bit of some great purpose which has to be wrought out by means of many kinds; and that whoso sees the Vision or hears the Voice is but the blind unconscious instrument of Fate?”

“Aye! laddie. Weel eneuch the Fates know their wishes an’ their wark, no to need the help or the thoct of any human—blind or seein’, sane or silly, conscious or unconscious.”

All through her speaking I had been struck by the old woman’s use of the word ‘Fate,’ and more especially when she used it in the plural. It was evident that, Christian though she might be—and in the West they are generally devout observants of the duties of their[13] creed—her belief in this respect came from some of the old pagan mythologies. I should have liked to question her on this point; but I feared to shut her lips against me. Instead I asked her:

“Tell me, will you, if you don’t mind, of some case you have known yourself of Second Sight?”

“Tis no for them to brag or boast to whom has been given to see the wark o’ the hand o’ Fate. But sine ye are yerself a Seer an’ would learn, then I may speak. I hae seen the sea ruffle wi’oot cause in the verra spot where later a boat was to gang doon, I hae heard on a lone moor the hammerin’ o’ the coffin-wright when one passed me who was soon to dee. I hae seen the death-sark fold round the speerit o’ a drowned one, in baith ma sleepin’ an’ ma wakin’ dreams. I hae heard the settin’ doom o’ the Spaiks, an’ I hae seen the Weepers on a’ the crood that walked. Aye, an’ in mony anither way hae I seen an’ heard the Coming o’ the Doom.”

“But did all the seeings and hearings come true?” I asked. “Did it ever happen that you heard queer sounds or saw strange sights and that yet nothing came of them? I gather that you do not always know to whom something is going to happen; but only that death is coming to some one!” She was not displeased at my questioning but replied at once:

“Na doot! but there are times when what is seen or heard has no manifest following. But think ye, young sir, how mony a corp, still waited for, lies in the depths o’ the sea; how mony lie oot on the hillsides, or are fallen in deep places where their bones whiten unkennt. Nay! more, to how many has Death come in a way that men think the wark o’ nature when his hastening has come frae the hand of man, untold.” This was a difficult matter to answer so I changed or rather varied the subject.

[14]

“How long must elapse before the warning comes true?”

“Ye know yersel’, for but yestreen ye hae seen, how the Death can follow hard upon the Doom; but there be times, nay mostly are they so, when days or weeks pass away ere the Doom is fulfilled.”

“Is this so?” I asked “when you know the person regarding whom the Doom is spoken.” She answered with an air of certainty which somehow carried conviction, secretly, with it.

“Even so! I know one who walks the airth now in all the pride o’ his strength. But the Doom has been spoken of him. I saw him with these verra een lie prone on rocks, wi’ the water rinnin’ down from his hair. An’ again I heard the minute bells as he went by me on a road where is no bell for a score o’ miles. Aye, an’ yet again I saw him in the kirk itsel’ wi’ corbies flyin’ round him, an’ mair gatherin’ from afar!”

Here was indeed a case where Second Sight might be tested; so I asked her at once, though to do so I had to overcome a strange sort of repugnance:

“Could this be proved? Would it not be a splendid case to make known; so that if the death happened it would prove beyond all doubt the existence of such a thing as Second Sight.” My suggestion was not well received. She answered with slow scorn:

“Beyon’ all doot! Doot! Wha is there that doots the bein’ o’ the Doom? Learn ye too, young sir, that the Doom an’ all thereby is no for traffickin’ wi’ them that only cares for curiosity and publeecity. The Voice and the Vision o’ the Seer is no for fine madams and idle gentles to while away their time in play-toy make-believe!” I climbed down at once.

“Pardon me!” I said “I spoke without thinking. I should not have said so—to you at any rate.” She accepted^[15] my apology with a sort of regal inclination; but the moment after she showed by her words she was after all but a woman!

“I will tell ye; that so in the full time ye may hae no doot yersel’. For ye are a Seer and as Them that has the power hae gien ye the Gift it is no for the like o’ me to cumber the road o’ their doin’. Know ye then, and remember weel, how it was told ye by Gormala MacNiel that Lauchlane Macleod o’ the Outer Isles hae been Called; tho’ as yet the Voice has no sounded in his ears but only in mine. But ye will see the time——”

She stopped suddenly as though some thought had struck her, and then went on impressively:

“When I saw him lie prone on the rocks there was ane that bent ower him that I kent not in the nicht wha it was, though the licht o’ the moon was around him. We shall see! We shall see!”

Without a word more she turned and left me. She would not listen to my calling after her; but with long strides passed up the beach and was lost among the sandhills.

[16]

CHAPTER III AN ANCIENT RUNE

On the next day I rode on my bicycle to Peterhead, and walked on the pier. It was a bright clear day, and a fresh northern breeze was blowing. The fishing boats were ready to start at the turn of the tide; and as I came up the first of them began to pass out through the harbour mouth. Their movement was beautiful to see; at first slowly,

and then getting faster as the sails were hoisted, till at last they swept through the narrow entrance, scuppers under, righting themselves as they swung before the wind in the open sea. Now and again a belated smacksman came hurrying along to catch his boat before she should leave the pier.

The eastern pier of Peterhead is guarded by a massive wall of granite, built in several steps or tiers, which breaks the fury of the gale. When a northern storm is on, it is a wild spot; the waves dash over it in walls of solid green topped with mountainous masses of foam and spray. But at present, with the July sun beating down, it was a vantage post from which to see the whole harbour and the sea without. I climbed up and sat on the top, looking on admiringly, and lazily smoked in quiet enjoyment. Presently I noticed some one very like Gormala come hurrying along the pier, and now and again crouching behind one of the mooring posts. I said nothing but kept an eye on her, for I supposed that she was at her usual game of watching some one.

[17]

Soon a tall man strode leisurely along, and from every movement of the woman I could see that he was the subject of her watching. He came near where I sat, and stood there with that calm unconcerned patience which is a characteristic of the fisherman.

He was a fine-looking fellow, well over six feet high, with a tangled mass of thick red-yellow hair and curly, bushy beard. He had lustrous, far-seeing golden-brown eyes, and massive, finely-cut features. His pilot-cloth trousers spangled all over with silver herring scales, were tucked into great, bucket-boots. He wore a heavy blue jersey and a cap of weazel skin. I had been thinking of the decline of the herring from the action of the trawlers in certain waters, and fancied this would be a good opportunity to get a local opinion. Before long I strolled over and joined this son of the Vikings. He gave it, and it was a decided one, uncompromisingly against the trawlers and the laws which allowed them to do their nefarious work. He spoke in a sort of old-fashioned, biblical language which was moderate and devoid of epithets, but full of apposite illustration. When he had pointed out that certain fishing grounds, formerly most prolific of result to the fishers, were now absolutely worthless he ended his argument:

“And, sure, good master, it stands to rayson. Suppose you be a farmer, and when you have prepared your land and manured it, you sow your seed and plough the ridges and make it all safe from wind and devastatin’ storm. If, when the green corn be shootin’ frae the airth, you take your harrow and drag it ath’art the springin’ seed, where be then the promise of your golden grain?”

For a moment or two the beauty of his voice, the deep, resonant, earnestness of his tone and the magnificent, simple purity of the man took me away from the scene. He seemed as though I had looked him through and[18] through, and had found him to be throughout of golden worth. Possibly it was the imagery of his own speech and the colour which his eyes and hair and cap suggested, but he seemed to me for an instant as a small figure projected against a background of rolling upland clothed in ripe grain. Round his feet were massed the folds of a great white sheet whose edges faded into air. In a moment the image passed, and he stood before me in his full stature.

I almost gasped, for just behind him, where she had silently come, stood Gormala, gazing not at the fisherman but at me, with eyes that positively blazed with a sort of baleful eagerness. She was looking straight into my eyes; I knew it when I caught the look of hers.

The fisherman went on talking. I did not, however, hear what he was saying, for again some mysterious change had come over our surroundings. The blue sea had over it the mystery of the darkness of the night; the high noon sun had lost its fiery vigour and shone with the pale yellow splendour of a full moon. All around me, before and on either hand, was a waste of waters; the very air and earth seemed filmed with moving water, and the sound of falling waters was in my ears. Again, the golden fisherman was before me for an instant, not as a moving speck but in full size now he lay prone; limp and lifeless, with waxen cold cheeks, in the eloquent inaction of death. The white sheet—I could see now that it was a shroud—was around him up to his heart. I seemed to feel Gormala's eyes burning into my brain as I looked. All at once everything seemed to resume its proper proportion, and I was listening calmly to the holding forth of the Viking.

I turned instinctively and looked at Gormala. For an instant her eyes seemed to blaze triumphantly; then she pulled the little shawl which she wore closer round her[19] shoulders and, with a gesture full of modesty and deference turned away. She climbed up the ridges of the harbour wall and sat looking across as at the sea beyond, now studded with a myriad of brown sails.

A little later the stolid indifference as to time slipped all at once from the fisherman. He was instinct with life and action, and with a touch of his cap and a "Farewell good Master!" stood poised on the very edge of the pier ready to spring on a trim, weather-beaten smack which came rushing along almost grazing the rough stone work. It made our hearts jump as he sprang on board and taking the tiller from the hand of the steersman turned the boat's head to the open sea. As she rushed out through the

harbour mouth we heard behind us the voice of an old fisherman who had hobbled up to us:

“He’ll do that once too often! Lauchlane Macleod is like all these men from Uist and the rest of the Out Islanders. They don’t care ‘naught about naught.”

Lauchlane Macleod! The very man of whom Gormala had prophesied! The very mention of his name seemed to turn me cold.

After lunch at the hotel I played golf on the links till evening drew near. Then I got on my bicycle to return home. I had laboured slowly up the long hill to the Stirling quarry when I saw Gormala sitting on the roadside on a great boulder of red granite. She was evidently looking out for me, for when I came near she rose up and deliberately stood in the roadway in my path. I jumped off my wheel and asked her point blank what she wanted with me so much that she stopped me on the road.

Gormala was naturally an impressive figure, but at present she looked weird and almost unearthly. Her tall, gaunt form lit by the afterglow in a soft mysterious light was projected against the grey of the darkening[20] sea, whose sombreness was emphasised by the brilliant emerald green of the sward which fell from where we stood to the jagged cliff-line.

The loneliness of the spot was profound. From where we stood not a house was to be seen, and the darkening sea was desert of sails. It seemed as if we two were the only living things in nature’s vast expanse. To me it was a little awesome. Gormala’s first mysterious greeting when I had seen the mourning for the child, and her persistent following of me ever since, had begun to get on my nerves. She had become a sort of enforced condition to me, and whether she was present in the flesh or not, the expectation or the apprehension of her coming—I hardly knew which it was—kept my thoughts perpetually interested in her. Now, her weird, statuesque attitude and the scene around us finished my intellectual subjugation. The weather had changed to an almost inconceivable degree. The bright clear sky of the morning had become darkly mysterious, and the wind had died away to an ominous calm. Nature seemed altogether sentient, and willing to speak directly to a man in my own receptive mood. The Seer-woman evidently knew this, for she gave fully a minute of silence for the natural charm to work before she spoke. Then in a solemn warning voice she said:

“Time is flying by us; Lammas-tide is nigh.” The words impressed me, why I know not; for though I had heard of Lammas-tide I had not the smallest idea of what was meant by it. Gormala was certainly quick with her eyes—she had that gypsy quality in remarkable degree—and she seemed to read my face like an open book. There was a

suppressed impatience in her manner, as of one who must stop in the midst of some important matter to explain to a child whose aid is immediately necessary:

[21]

“Ye no ken why? Is it that ye dinna heed o’ Lammas-tide, or that ye no ken o’ the prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea and the treasures that lie hid therein.” I felt more than ever abashed, and that I should have known long ago those things of which the gaunt woman spoke, towering above me as I leaned on my wheel. She went on:

“An’ ye no ken, then listen and learn!” and she spoke the following rune in a strange, staccato cadence which seemed to suit our surroundings and to sink into my heart and memory so deep that to forget would be impossible:

“To win the Mystery o’ the Sea,“An’ learn the secrets that there be,“Gather in one these weirds three:

“A gowden moon on a flowin’ tide,“And Lammas floods for the spell to bide;“And a gowden mon wi’ death for his bride.”

There was a long pause of silence between us, and I felt very strangely. The sea before me took odd, indefinite shape. It seemed as though it was of crystal clearness, and that from where I gazed I could see all its mysteries. That is, I could see so as to know there were mysteries, though what they were individually I could not even dream. The past and the present and the future seemed to be mingled in one wild, chaotic, whirling dream, from the mass of which thoughts and ideas seemed now and again to fly out unexpectedly on all sides as do sparks from hot iron under the hammer. Within my heart grew vague indefinite yearnings, aspirations, possibilities. There came a sense of power so paramount that instinctively I drew myself up to my full height and became conscious of the physical vigour within[22] me. As I did so I looked around and seemed to wake from a dream.

Naught around me but the drifting clouds, the silent darkening land and the brooding sea. Gormala was nowhere to be seen.

[23]

CHAPTER IV LAMMAS FLOODS

When I got to Cruden it was quite dark. I had lingered by the way thinking of Gormala MacNiel and all the queer kind of mystery in which she seemed to be enmeshing me.

The more I thought, the more I was puzzled; for the strangest thing of all to me was that I understood part of what seemed to be a mystery. For instance I was but imperfectly acquainted with the Seer-woman's view of what was to be the result of her watching of Lauchlane Macleod. I knew of course from her words at our first conversation that in him she recognised a man doomed to near death according to the manifestation of her own power of Second Sight; but I knew what she did not seem to, that this was indeed a golden man. From the momentary glimpse which I had had in that queer spell of trance, or whatever it was which had come to me on the pier head, I had seemed to *know* him as a man of gold, sterling throughout. It was not merely that his hair was red gold and that his eyes might fairly be called golden, but his whole being could only be expressed in that way; so that when Gormala spoke, the old rhyme seemed at once a prime factor in the group of three powers which had to be united before the fathoming of the Mystery of the Sea. I accordingly made up my mind to speak with the Seer-woman and to ask her to explain. My own intellectual attitude to the matter interested[24] me. I was not sceptical, I did not believe; but I think my mind hung in poise. Certainly my sympathies tended towards the mysterious side, backed up by some kind of understanding of the inner nature of things which was emotional or unintentional rather than fixed.

All that night I seemed to dream, my mind working eternally round the data of the day; hundreds of different relationships between Gormala, Lauchlane Macleod, Lammas-tide, the moon and the secrets of the sea revolved before me. It was grey morning before I fell asleep to the occasional chirping of the earliest birds.

As sometimes happens after a night of uneasy dreaming of some disturbing topic, the reaction of the morning carried oblivion with it. It was well into the afternoon when all at once I remembered the existence of the witch-woman—for as such I was beginning to think of Gormala. The thought came accompanied by a sense of oppression which was not of fear, but which was certainly of uneasiness. Was it possible that the woman had in some way, or to some degree, hypnotised me. I remembered with a slightly nervous feeling how the evening before I had stopped on the roadway obedient to her will, and how I had lost the identity of my surroundings in her presence. A sudden idea struck me; I went to the window and looked out. For an instant my heart seemed to be still.

Just opposite the house stood Gormala, motionless. I went out at once and joined her, and instinctively we turned our steps toward the sand-hills. As we walked along I said to her:

“Where did you disappear to last night?”

“About that which is to be done!” Her lips and her face were set; I knew it was no use following up that branch of the subject, so I asked again:

[25]

“What did you mean by those verses which you told me?” Her answer was given in a solemn tone:

“Them that made them alone can tell; until the time shall come!”

“Who made them?”

“Nane can now tell. They are as aud as the rocky foundations o’ the isles themselves.”

“Then how did you come to know them?” There was a distinct note of pride in her answer. Such a note as might be expected from a prince speaking of his ancestry:

“They hae come doon to me through centuries. Frae mither to dochter, and from mither to dochter again, wi’ never a break in the lang line o’ the tellin’. Know ye, young master, that I am o’ a race o’ Seers. I take my name from that Gormala o’ Uist who through long years foresaw the passing o’ mony a one. That Gormala who throughout the islands of the west was known and feared o’ all men; that Gormala whose mither’s mither, and mither’s mither again, away back into the darkness o’ time when coracles crept towards the sunset ower the sea and returned not, held the fates o’ men and women in their han’s and ruled the Mysteries o’ the Sea.” As it was evident that Gormala must have in her own mind some kind of meaning of the prophecy, or spell, or whatever it was, I asked her again:

“But you must understand something of the meaning, or you would not attach so much importance to it?”

“I ken naught but what is seen to ma een, and to that inner e’e which telleth tae the soul that which it seeth!”

“Then why did you warn me that Lammas-tide was near at hand?” The grim woman actually smiled as she replied:

“Did ye no hearken to the words spoken of the Lammas floods, which be of the Powers that rule the Spell?”

[26]

“Well, the fact is that I don’t know anything of ‘Lammas-tide!’ We do not keep it in the Church of England,” I added as an afterthought, explanatory of my ignorance. Gormala

was clever enough to take advantage of having caught me in a weak place; so she took advantage of it to turn the conversation into the way she wished herself:

“What saw ye, when Lauchlane Macleod grew sma’ in yer een, and girt again?”

“Simply, that he seemed to be all at once a tiny image of himself, seen against a waste of ripe corn.” Then it struck me that I had not as yet told her or any one else of what I had seen. How then did she know it? I was annoyed and asked her. She answered scornfully:

“How kent I it, an’ me a Seer o’ a race o’ Seers! Are ma wakin’ een then so dim or so sma’ that I canna read the thochts o’ men in the glances o’ their een. Did I no see yer een look near an’ far as quick as thocht? But what saw ye after, when ye looked rapt and yer een peered side to side, as though at one lyin’ prone?” I was more annoyed than ever and answered her in a sort of stupor:

“I saw him lying dead on a rock, with a swift tide running by; and over the waters the broken track of a golden moon.” She made a sound which was almost a cry, and which recalled me to myself as I looked at her. She was ablaze. She towered to her full height with an imperious, exultant mien; the light in her eyes was more than human as she said:

“Dead, as I masel’ saw him an’ ’mid the foam o’ the tide race! An’ gowd, always gowd ahint him in the een of this greater Seer. Gowden corn, and gowden moon, and gowden sea! Aye! an’ I see it now, backie-bird that I hae been; the gowden mon indeed, wi’ his[27] gowden een an’ his gowden hair and all the truth o’ his gowden life!” Then turning to me she said fiercely:

“Why did I warn ye that Lammas-tide was near? Go ask those that value the months and days thereof, when be Lammas and what it means to them that hae faith. See what they are; learn o’ the comin’ o’ the moon and o’ the flowin’ o’ the tides that follow!”

Without another word she turned and left me.

I went back to the hotel at once, determined to post myself as to Lammas-tide; its facts and constitutions, and the beliefs and traditions that hung around it. Also to learn the hours of the tides, and the age of the moon about the time of Lammas-tide. Doubtless I could have found out all I wanted from some of the ministers of the various houses of religion which hold in Cruden; but I was not wishful to make public, even so far, the mystery which was closing around me. My feeling was partly a saving sense of humour, or the fear of ridicule, and partly a genuine repugnance to enter

upon the subject with any one who might not take it as seriously as I could wish. From which latter I gather that the whole affair was becoming woven into the structure of my life.

Possibly it was, that some trait, or tendency, or power which was individual to me was beginning to manifest itself and to find its means of expression. In my secret heart I not only believed but knew that some instinct within me was guiding my thoughts in some strange way. The sense of occult power which is so vital a part of divination was growing within me and asserting its masterdom, and with it came an equally forceful desire of secrecy. The Seer in me, latent so long, was becoming conscious of his strength, and jealous of it.

At this time, as the feeling of strength and consciousness grew, it seemed to lose something of its power from this very cause. Gradually it was forced upon me that[28] for the full manifestation of such faculty as I might possess, some kind of abstraction or surrender of self was necessary. Even a few hours of experience had taught me much; for now that my mind was bent on the phenomena of Second Sight the whole living and moving world around me became a veritable diorama of possibilities. Within two days from the episode at the Pier head I had had behind me a larger experience of effort of occult force than generally comes to a man in a lifetime. When I look back, it seems to me that all the forces of life and nature became exposed to my view. A thousand things which hitherto I had accepted in simple faith as facts, were pregnant with new meanings. I began to understand that the whole earth and sea, and air—all that of which human beings generally ordinarily take cognisance, is but a film or crust which hides the deeper moving powers or forces. With this insight I began to understand the grand guesses of the Pantheists, pagan and christian alike, who out of their spiritual and nervous and intellectual sensitiveness began to realise that there was somewhere a purposeful cause of universal action. An action which in its special or concrete working appeared like the sentience of nature in general, and of the myriad items of its cosmogony.

I soon learned that Lammas day is the first of August and is so often accompanied by heavy weather that Lammas floods are almost annually recurrent. The eve of the day is more or less connected with various superstitions.

This made me more eager for further information, and by the aid of a chance friend, I unearthed at Aberdeen a learned professor who gave me offhand all the information which I desired. In fact he was so full of astronomical learning that I had to stop him now and again in order to elucidate some point easily explainable to those[29] who understood his terminology, but which wrapped my swaddling knowledge in a mystery

all its own. I have a sneaking friendliness even now for anyone to whom the word 'syzygy' carries no special meaning.

I got at the bases of facts, however, and understood that on the night of July 31, which was the eve of Lammas-tide, the moon would be full at midnight. I learned also that from certain astronomical reasons the tide which would ostensibly begin its flow a little after midnight would in reality commence just on the stroke. As these were the points which concerned me I came away with a new feeling of awe upon me. It seemed as though the heavens as well as the earth were bending towards the realisation or fulfillment of the old prophecy. At this time my own connection with the mystery, or how it might affect me personally, did not even enter my head. I was content to be an obedient item in the general scheme of things.

It was now the 28th July so, if it were to take place at the Lammas-tide of the current year, we should know soon the full measure of the denouement. There was but one thing wanting to complete the conditions of the prophecy. The weather had been abnormally dry, and there might after all be no Lammas floods. To-day, however, the sky had been heavily overcast. Great black clouds which seemed to roll along tumbling over and over, as the sail of a foundered boat does in a current, loomed up from the west. The air grew closer, and to breathe was an effort. A sort of shiver came over the wide stretch of open country. Darker and darker grew the sky, till it seemed so like night that the birds in the few low-lying coppices and the scanty hedgerows ceased to sing. The bleat of sheep and the low of cattle seemed to boom through the still air with a hollow sound, as if coming from a distance. The intolerable stillness which^[30] precedes the storm became so oppressive that I, who am abnormally susceptible to the moods of nature, could almost have screamed out.

Then all at once the storm broke. There was a flash of lightning so vivid that it lit up the whole country away to the mountains which encircle Braemar. The fierce crash and wide roll of the thunder followed with incredible quickness. And then the hot, heavy-dropped summer rain fell in torrents.

All that afternoon the rain fell, with only a few brief intervals of glowing sunshine. All night, too, it seemed to fall without ceasing, for whenever I woke—which I did frequently with a sense over me of something impending—I could hear the quick, heavy patter on the roof, and the rush and gurgle of the overcharged gutters.

The next day was one of unmitigated gloom. The rain poured down ceaselessly. There was little wind, just sufficient to roll north-eastwards the great masses of rain-laden clouds piled up by the Gulf Stream against the rugged mountains of the western coast and its rocky islands. Two whole days there were of such rain, and then there was no

doubt as to the strength of the Lammas floods this year. All the wide uplands of Buchan were glistening with runnels of water whenever the occasional glimpses of sunshine struck them. Both the Water of Cruden and the Back Burn were running bank high. On all sides it was reported that the Lammas floods were the greatest that had been known in memory.

All this time my own spiritual and intellectual uneasiness was perpetually growing. The data for the working of the prophecy were all fixed with remarkable exactness. In theatrical parlance 'the stage was set' and all ready for the action which was to come. As the hours wore on, my uneasiness changed somewhat and apprehension became merged in a curious mixture of [31] superstition and exaltation. I was growing eager to the coming time.

The afternoon of July 31 was fine. The sun shone brightly; the air was dry and, for the time of year, cool. It seemed as though the spell of wet weather was over and that fiery August was coming to its own again. The effects of the rainstorm were, however, manifest. Not only was every rill and stream and river in the North in spate but the bogs of the mountains were so saturated with wet that many days must elapse before they could cease to send their quota to swell the streams. The mountain valleys were generally lakes in miniature. As one went through the country the murmur or rush of falling water was forever in the ears. I suppose it was in my own case partly because I was concerned in the mere existence of Lammas floods that the whole of nature seemed so insistent on the subject. The sound of moving water in its myriad gamut was so perpetually in my ears that I could never get my mind away from it. I had a long walk that afternoon through roads still too wet and heavy for bicycling. I came back to dinner thoroughly tired out, and went to bed early.

[32]

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA

I do not remember what woke me. I have a vague idea that it was a voice, but whether outside the house or within myself I know not.

It was eleven o'clock by my watch when I left the Kilmarnock Arms and took my way across the sandhills, heading for the Hawklaw which stood out boldly in the brilliant moonlight. I followed the devious sheep track amongst the dunes covered with wet bent-grass, every now and again stumbling amongst the rabbit burrows which in those days honeycombed the sandhills of Cruden Bay. At last I came to the Hawklaw, and,

climbing the steep terraced edge near the sea, sat on the top to breathe myself after the climb.

The scene was one of exquisite beauty. Its natural loveliness was enhanced by the softness of the full yellow moonlight which seemed to flood the heavens and the earth alike. To the south-east the bleak promontory of Whinnyfold stood out stark and black as velvet and the rocks of the Skares were like black dots in the quivering sea of gold. I arose and went on my way. The tide was far out and as I stumbled along the rude path above the waste of boulders I had a feeling that I should be late. I hurried on, crossed the little rill which usually only trickled down beside the fishers' zigzag path at the back of Whinnyfold but which was now a rushing stream—again the noise of falling water, the voice of the Lammas[33] floods—and took the cart track which ran hard by the cliff down to the point which looked direct upon the Skares.

When I reached the very edge of the cliff, where the long sea-grass and the deep clover felt underfoot like a luxurious carpet, I was not surprised to see Gormala seated, looking out seawards. The broad track of the moon lay right across the outmost rock of the Skares and falling across some of the jagged rocks, which seemed like fangs rising from the deep water as the heave of the waveless sea fell back and the white water streamed down, came up to where we stood and seemed to bathe both the Seer-woman and myself in light. There was no current anywhere, but only the silent rise and fall of the water in the everlasting movement of the sea. When she heard me behind her Gormala turned round, and the patient calmness of her face disappeared. She rose quickly, and as she did so pointed to a small boat which sailing up from the south was now drawing opposite to us and appeared to be making a course as close to shore as possible, just clearing the outer bulwark of the Skares.

“Look!” she said, “Lauchlane Macleod comes by his lanes. The rocks are around him, and his doom is at hand!”

There did not appear any danger in such a course; the wind was gentle, the tide was at the still moment between ebb and flow, and the smoothness of the water beyond the rock seemed to mark its great depth.

All at once the boat seemed to stand still,—we were too far off to hear a sound even on such a still night. The mast bent forward and broke short off, the sails hung limp in the water with the peak of the lug sail sticking up in a great triangle, like the fin of a mammoth shark. A few seconds after, a dark speck moved on the water which became agitated around it; it was evident that a[34] swimmer was making for the land. I would have gone to help him had it been of use; but it was not, the outer rock was

half a mile away. Indeed, though I knew it was no use, I was yet about to swim to meet him when Gormala's voice behind me arrested me:

"Do ye no see that gin ye meet him amid yon rocks, ye can, when the tide begins to race, be no help to any. If he can win through, ye may help him if ye bide here." The advice was good and I stayed my feet. The swimmer evidently knew the danger, for he hurried frantically to win some point of safety before the tide should turn. But the rocks of the Skares are deadly steep; they rise from the water sheer everywhere, and to climb them from the sea is a hopeless task. Once and again the swimmer tried to find a chink or cranny where he could climb; but each time he tried to raise himself he fell back into the water. Moreover I could see that he was wounded, for his left hand hung idle. He seemed to realise the hopelessness of the task, and turning, made desperately for the part where we stood. He was now within the most dangerous spot in the whole region of the Skares. The water is of great depth everywhere and the needlepoints of rocks rise almost to the very surface. It is only when the waves are rough at low water that they can be seen at all, when the dip of the waves leaves them bare; but from the surface in calm weather they cannot be seen as the swirl of the tide around them is invisible. Here, too, the tide, rounding the point and having the current broken by the masses of the great rock, rolls with inconceivable rapidity. I had too often watched from the headland where my home was to be the set of the tide not to know the danger. I shouted as loudly as I could, but for some reason he did not hear me. The moments ere the tide should turn seemed like ages; and yet it was with a sudden shock that I heard the gurgle of moving[35] water followed by the lap, lap, lap, getting quicker each second. Somewhere inland a clock struck twelve.

The tide had turned and was beginning to flow.

In a few seconds the swimmer felt its effects, though he did not seem to notice them. Then he was swept towards the north. All at once there was a muffled cry which seemed to reach slowly to where we stood, and the swimmer rolled over for an instant. It was only too apparent what had happened; he had struck his arm against one of the sunken rocks and injured it. Then he commenced a mad struggle for life, swimming without either arm in that deadly current which grew faster and faster every moment. He was breathless, and now and again his head dipped; but he kept on valiantly. At last in one of these dips, borne by the momentum of his own strength and the force of the current, he struck his head against another of the sunken rocks. For an instant he raised it, and I could see it run red in the glare of the moonlight.

Then he sank; from the height where I stood I could see the body roll over and over in the fierce current which made for the outmost point to the north-east of the

promontory. I ran over as fast as I could, Gormala following. When I came to the rock, which here shelved, I plunged in and after a few strokes met by chance the body as it rolled upward. With a desperate effort I brought it to land.

The struggle to lift the body from the water and to bear it up the rock exhausted me, so that when I reached the top of the cliff I had to pause for a few seconds to breathe hard. Since the poor fellow's struggle for life had begun I had never for an instant given the prophecy a thought. But now, all at once, as I looked past the figure, lying limp before me with the poor arms twisted unnaturally and the head turned—away past the moonlit sea and the great, golden orb whose track was wrinkled over the^[36] racing tide, the full force of it burst upon me, and I felt a sort of spiritual transformation. The air seemed full of fluttering wings; sea and land alike teemed with life that I had not hitherto dreamed of. I fell in a sort of spiritual trance. But the open eyes were upon me; I feared the man was dead, but Briton-like I would not accept the conviction without effort. So I raised the body to my shoulders, determined to make with what speed I could for Whinnyfold where fire and willing hands could aid in restoration. As I laid the limp body across my shoulders, holding the two hands in my right hand to steady the burden whilst with the left I drew some of the clothing tight, I caught Gormala's eye. She had not helped me in any possible way, though more than once in distress I had called to her. So now I said angrily:

“Get away woman! You should be ashamed of yourself never to help at such a time,” and I took my way unaided. I did not heed at the time her answer, spoken with a certain measure of deprecation, though it afterwards came back to me:

“Am I to wark against the Fates when They have spoken! The Dead are dead indeed when the Voice has whispered in their ears!”

Now, as I passed along with the hands of the dead man in mine—the true shell of a man whose spirit could be but little space away whilst the still blood in the veins was yet warm—a strange thing began to happen. The spirits of earth and sea and air seemed to take shape to me, and all the myriad sounds of the night to have a sentient cause of utterance. As I panted and struggled on, my physical effort warring equally with the new spiritual experience so that nothing remained except sentience and memory, I could see Gormala walking abreast me with even steps. Her eyes glared balefully with a fierce disappointment; never once did she remit the vigilant,^[37] keen look which seemed to pierce into my very soul.

For a short space of time there was something of antagonism to her; but this died away imperceptibly, and I neither cared nor thought about her, except when my

attention would be called to her. I was becoming wrapped in the realisation of the mightier forces around me.

Just where the laneway from the cliff joins Whinnyfold there is a steep zigzag path running down to the stony beach far below where the fishers keep their boats and which is protected from almost the wildest seas by the great black rock—the Caudman,—which fills the middle of the little bay, leaving deep channels on either hand. When I was come to this spot, suddenly all the sounds of the night seemed to cease. The very air grew still so that the grasses did not move or rustle, and the waters of the swirling tide ceased to run in grim silence on their course. Even to that inner sense, which was so new to me that the change in everything to which it was susceptible became at once noticeable, all things stood still. It was as though the spirits of earth and air and water were holding their breath for some rare portent. Indeed I noticed as my eye ranged the surface of the sea, that the moon track was for the time no longer rippled, but lay in a broad glistening band.

The only living thing in all the wide world was, it seemed to me, the figure of Gormala as, with lowering eyes and suspended breath, she stood watching me with uncompromising, persistent sternness.

Then my own heart seemed to stand still, to be a part of the grim silence of the waiting forces of the world. I was not frightened; I was not even amazed. All seemed so thoroughly in keeping with the prevailing influence of the time that I did not feel even a moment of surprise.

Up the steep path came a silent procession of ghostly^[38] figures, so misty of outline that through the grey green of their phantom being the rocks and moonlit sea were apparent, and even the velvet blackness of the shadows of the rocks did not lose their gloom. And yet each figure was defined so accurately that every feature, every particle of dress or accoutrement could be discerned. Even the sparkle of their eyes in that grim waste of ghostly grey was like the lambent flashes of phosphoric light in the foam of moving water cleft by a swift prow. There was no need for me to judge by the historical sequence of their attire, or by any inference of hearing; I knew in my heart that these were the ghosts of the dead who had been drowned in the waters of the Cruden Skares.

Indeed the moments of their passing—and they were many for the line was of sickening length—became to me a lesson of the long flight of time. At the first were skin-clad savages with long, wild hair matted; then others with rude, primitive clothing. And so on in historic order men, aye, and here and there a woman, too, of many lands, whose garments were of varied cut and substance. Red-haired Vikings

and black-haired Celts and Phoenicians, fair-haired Saxons and swarthy Moors in flowing robes. At first the figures, chiefly of the barbarians, were not many; but as the sad procession passed along I could see how each later year had brought its ever-growing tale of loss and disaster, and added more and faster to the grim harvest of the sea. A vast number of the phantoms had passed when there came along a great group which at once attracted my attention. They were all swarthy, and bore themselves proudly under their cuirasses and coats of mail, or their garb as fighting men of the sea. Spaniards they were, I knew from their dress, and of three centuries back. For an instant my heart leapt; these were men of the great Armada, come up from the wreck of some lost galleon or patache to visit once[39] again the glimpses of the Moon. They were of lordly mien, with large aquiline features and haughty eyes. As they passed, one of them turned and looked at me. As his eyes lit on me, I saw spring into them, as though he were quick, dread, and hate, and fear.

Hitherto I had been impressed, awed, by the indifference of the passing ghosts. They had looked nowhere, but with steady, silent, even tread had passed on their way. But when this one looked at me it was a glance from the spirit world which chilled me to the very soul.

But he too passed on. I stood at the head of the winding path, having the dead man still on my shoulders and looking with sinking heart at the sad array of the victims of the Cruden Skares. I noticed that most who came now were seamen, with here and there a group of shoresmen and a few women amongst them. The fishermen were many, and without exception wore great sea boots. And so with what patience I could I waited for the end.

At length it came in the shape of a dim figure of great stature, and both of whose arms hung limp. The blood from a gash on his forehead had streamed on to his golden beard, and the golden eyes looked far away. With a shudder I saw that this was the ghost of the man whose body, now less warm, lay upon my shoulders; and so I knew that Lauchlane Macleod was dead. I was relieved when I saw that he did not even look at me; though as I moved on, following the procession, he walked beside me with equal steps, stopping and moving as I stopped and moved.

The silence of death was upon the little hamlet of Whinnyfold. There was not a sign of life; not a dog barked as the grim procession had moved up the steep path or now filed across the running stream and moved along the footpath toward Cruden. Gormala with eager eyes kept watching me; and as the minutes wore on I[40] began to resume my double action of thought, for I could see in her face that she was trying to reason out from my own expression something of what I was looking at. As we moved along

she now began to make suggestions to me in a fierce whisper, evidently hoping that she might learn something from my acquiescence in, or negation of, her thought. Through that ghostly silence her living voice cut with the harshness of a corncrake.

“Shearing the silence of the night with ragged edge.”

Perhaps it was for the best; looking back now on that awful experience, I know that no man can say what his mind may suffer in the aftertime who walks alone with the Dead. That I was strung to some amazing pitch was manifested by the fact that I did not seem to feel the great weight which lay upon my shoulders. I have naturally vast strength and the athletic training of my youth had developed it highly. But the weight of an ordinary man is much to hold or carry for even a short time, and the body which I bore was almost that of a giant.

The path across the neck of land which makes the Skares a promontory is flat, with here and there a deep cleft like a miniature ravine where the water from the upland rushes in flood time down to the sea. All these rills were now running strong, but I could hear no sound of murmuring water, no splash as the streams leapt over the edge of the cliff on the rocks below in whitening spray. The ghostly procession did not pause at any of these streams, but moved on impassively to the farther side where the path trends down to the sands of Cruden Bay. Gormala stood a moment watching my eyes as they swept the long line passing the angle so that I could see them all at once. That she guessed something was evident from her speech:

“They are many; his eyes range wide!” I started,[41] and she knew that she had guessed aright. This one guess seemed to supply her with illimitable data; she evidently knew something of the spirit world, though she could not see into its mysteries. Her next words brought enlightenment to me:

“They are human spirits; they follow the path that the feet o’ men hae made!”

It was so. The procession did not float over the surface of field or sand, but took its painful way down the zigzag of the cliff and over the rocky path through the great boulders of the foreshore. When the head of it reached the sand, it passed along the summit of the ridge, just as every Sunday night the fishermen of Whinnyfold and Collieston did in returning to their herring boats at Peterhead.

The tramp across the sands was long and dreary. Often as I had taken that walk in rain or storm, with the wind almost sweeping me off my feet whilst the sand drift from the bent-covered hills almost cut my cheeks and ears, I had never felt the way to be so long or so hard to travel. Though I did not realise it at the time, the dead man’s weight was beginning to tell sorely upon me. Across the Bay I could see the few lights in the

village of Port Erroll that were to be seen at such a time of night; and far over the water came the cold grey light which is the sign of the waning of the night rather than of the coming of the morning.

When we came to the Hawklaw, the head of the procession turned inward through the sandhills. Gormala, watching my eyes, saw it and an extraordinary change came over her. For an instant she was as if stricken, and stood stock still. Then she raised her hands in wonder, and said in an awed whisper:

“The Holy Well! They gang to St. Olaf’s well! The Lammas floods will aye serve them weel.”

[42]

With an instinct of curiosity strong upon me I hurried on so as to head the procession. As I moved along the rough path amongst the sandhills I felt the weight of the burden on my shoulders grow heavier and heavier, so that my feet dragged as do the feet of one in a night-mare. As I moved on, I looked round instinctively and saw that the shade of Lauchlane Macleod no longer kept pace with me, but retained its place in the procession. Gormala’s evil eye was once more upon me, but with her diabolical cunning she guessed the secret of my looking round. She moved along, not with me but at the rate she had been going as though she liked or expected to remain in juxtaposition to the shade of the dead man; some purpose of her own was to be fulfilled.

As I pressed on, the shades around me seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer still; till at the last I could see little more than a film or haze. When I came to St. Olaf’s well—then merely a rough pool at the base of the high land that stretches back from the Hawklaw—the ghostly mist was beginning to fade into the water. I stood hard by, and the weight upon my shoulders became dreadful. I could hardly stand; I determined, however, to hold on as long as I could and see what would happen. The dead man, too, was becoming colder! I did not know whether the dimming of the shadows was from this cause, or because the spirit of the man was farther away. It was possibly both, for as the silent, sad procession came on I could see more distinctly. When the wraith of the Spaniard turned and looked at me, he seemed once more to look with living eyes from a living soul. Then there was a dreary wait whilst the rest came along and passed in awesome stillness down into the well and disappeared. The weight upon my shoulders now became momentarily more intolerable. At last I could bear it no longer, and half bending I allowed the body[43] to slip to the ground, I only holding the hands to steady the descent. Gormala was now opposite to me, and seeing what I

had done leaped towards me with a loud cry. For one dim moment the wraith of the dead man stood above its earthly shell; and then I saw the ghostly vision no more.

At that instant, just as Gormala was about to touch the dead body, there was a loud hiss and murmur of waters. The whole pool burst up in a great fountain, scattering sand and water around for a wide space. I rushed back; Gormala did the same.

Then the waters receded again, and when I looked, the corpse of Lauchlane Macleod was gone. It was swallowed up in the Holy Well.

Overcome with physical weariness and strange horror of the scene I sank down on the wet sand. The scene whirled round me.... I remember no more.

[44]

CHAPTER VI

THE MINISTERS OF THE DOOM

When at last I looked around me I was not surprised at anything I saw; not even at the intense face of Gormala whose eyes, bright in the full moonlight, were searching my face more eagerly than ever. I was lying on the sand, and she was bending over me so closely that her face almost touched mine. It was evident, even to my half-awake sensibilities, that she was listening intently, lest even a whispered word from me should be missed.

The witch-woman was still seemingly all afire, but withal there was manifested in her face and bearing a sense of disappointment which comforted me. I waited a few minutes until I felt my brain clear, and my body rested from the intolerable strain which it had undergone in carrying that terrific burden from Whinnyfold.

When I looked up again Gormala recognised the change in me, and her own expression became different. The baleful glitter of her eyes faded, and the blind, unreasoning hate and anger turned to keen inquiry. She was not now merely baffled in her hopes, and face to face with an unconscious man; there was at least a possibility of her gaining some knowledge, and all the energy of her nature woke again as she spoke:

“So ye are back wi’ the moon and me. Whither went ye when ye lay down upon the sand. Was it back ye went, or forrart; wi’ the ghaists into the Holy Well and[45] beyond in their manifold course; or back to their comin’ frae the sea and all that could there be told? Oh! mon, what it is to me that any ither can gang like that into spirit land, and

me have to wait here by my lanes; to wring my hands an' torture my hairt in broken hopes!" I answered her question with another:

"How do you mean that ghosts go into the well and beyond?" Her answer was at the first given in a stern tone which became, however, softer, as she went on.

"Knew ye not, that the Lammas Floods are the carriers o' the Dead; that on Lammas nicht the Dead can win their way to where they will, under the airth by wherever there is rinnin' watter. Happy be they that can gain a Holy Well, an' so pass into the bowels o' the airth to where they list."

"And how and when do they return?"

"Dinna jest wi' Fate an' the Dead. They in their scope can gang and return again; no een, save your ain, o' man or Seer has seen the method o' their gangin'. No een, even yours, can see them steal out again in the nicht, when the chosen graves that they hae sought hae taken from them the dross o' the airth." I felt it was not wise to talk further, so without a word I turned and walked home by the sheep tracks amongst the sand hills. Now and again I stumbled in a rabbit hole, and as I would sink forward the wet bent would brush against my face.

The walk back in the dark dawn seemed interminable. All this time my mind was in a turmoil. I did not even seem to remember anything definitely, or think consecutively; but facts and fancies swept through my mind in a chaotic whirl. When I got to the house, I undressed quickly and got into bed; I must have instantly fallen into a deep sleep.

Next afternoon I walked by the shore to Whinnyfold.[46] It was almost impossible to believe that I was looking at the same place as on last night. I sat on the cliff where I had sat last night, the hot August sun and the cool breeze from the sea being inconceivably soothing. So I thought and thought.... The lack of sufficient sleep the night before and the tired feeling of the physical strain I had undergone—my shoulders still ached—told upon me, and I fell asleep.

When I waked Gormala stood in front of me.

After a long pause she spoke:

"I see that ye remember, else would ye ha' spoken to me. Will ye no tell me all that ye saw? Then, wi' your Seer's een an' my knowledge o' the fact we may thegither win oot the great Secret o' the Sea." I felt stronger than ever the instinctive conviction that I must remain keenly on guard with her. So I said nothing; waiting thus I should learn something, whether from her words or her silence. She could not stand this. I saw her

colour rise till her face was all aglow with a red flush that shamed the sunset; and at last the anger blazed in her eyes. It was in a threatening tone which she spoke, though the words were themselves sufficiently conciliatory:

“The Secrets o’ the Sea are to be won; and tae thee and me it is given to win them. What hae been is but an earnest of what will be. For ages ithers have tried to win but hae failed; and if we fail too for lack o’ purpose or because ye like me not, then to ithers will come in time the great reward. For the secrets are there, and the treasures lie awaiting. The way is open for those to whom are the Gifts. Throw not away the favour of the Fates. For if they be kind to give where they will, they are hard to thwart, and their revenge is sure!” I must confess that her words began to weaken my purpose. In one way inexorable logic was on her side. Powers such as were mine were surely given for some purpose.[47] Might I not be wrong in refusing to use them. If the Final Cause of my powers were purposeful, then might not a penalty be exacted from me because I had thwarted the project. Gormala, with that diabolical cunning of hers, evidently followed the workings of my mind, for her face lit up. How she knew, I know not, but I do know that her eyes never left mine. I suppose it may be that the eyes which have power to see at times the inwardness of things have some abnormal power also of expressing the thoughts behind them. I felt, however, that I was in danger. All my instincts told me that once in Gormala’s power I should rue it, so I spoke out on the instant strongly:

“I shall have nothing to do with you whatever. Last night when you refused to help me with the wounded man—whom you had followed, remember, for weeks, hoping for his death—I saw you in your true colours; and I mean to have nothing to do with you.” Fierce anger blazed again in her eyes; but again she controlled herself and spoke with an appearance of calm, though it was won with great effort, as I could see by the tension of her muscles:

“An’ so ye would judge me that I would not help ye to bring the Dead to life again! I knew that Lauchlane was dead! Aye! and ye kent it too as weel as I did mase!’. It needed no Seer to tell that, when ye brocht him up the rocks oot o’ the tide. Then, when he was dead, for why wad ye no use him? Do the Dead themselves object that they help the livin’ to their ends while the blood is yet warm in them? Is it ye that object to the power of the Dead? You whose veins have the power o’ divination of the quick; you to whom the heavens themselves opened, and the airth and the watters under the airth, when the spirit of the Dead that ye carried walked beside ye as ye ganged to St. Olaf’s Well. An’ as for me, what hae I[48] done that you should object. I saw, as you did, that Lauchlane’s sands were run. You and I are alike in that. To us baith was given to see, by signs that ages have made sacred, that Fate had spoken in his ears though

he had himself not heard the Voice. Nay more, to me was only given to see that the Voice had spoken. But to you was shown how, and when, and where the Doom should come, though you yersel' that can read the future as no ither that is known, canna read the past; and so could na tell what a lesser one would ha' guessed at lang syne. I followed the Doom; you followed the Doom. I by my cunnin'; you when ye waked frae yer sleep, followin' yer conviction, till we met thegither for Lauchlane's death, amid Lammas floods and under the gowden moon on the gowden sea. Through his aid—aye, young sir—for wi'oot a fresh corp to aid, no Seer o' airth could hae seen as ye did, that lang line o' ghaists ye saw last nicht. Through his aid the wonders o' the heavens and the deep, o' airth and air, was opened till ye. Wha then be ye that condemn me that only saw a sign an' followed? Gin I be guilty, what be you?"

It would be impossible to describe the rude, wild, natural eloquence with which this was spoken. In the sunset, the gaunt woman seemed to tower above me; and as she moved her arms, the long shadows of them stretched over the green down before us and away over the wrinkled sea as though her gestures were, giant like, appealing to all nature.

I was distinctly impressed, for all that she said was quite true. She had in reality done nothing that the law would call wrong. Lauchlane's death was in no possible way due to any act of hers. She had only watched him; and as he did not even know that she watched he could not have been influenced in any way by it or by her. As to my own part! Her words gave me a new light. Why^[49] had I risen in the night and come out to Whinnyfold? Was it intuition, or a call from the witch-woman, who in such case must have had some hypnotic influence over me? Or was it——?

I stood appalled at the unspoken thought. Could it be that the powers of Nature which had been revealed to me in the dread hour had not only sentience but purpose!

I felt that my tone was more conciliatory as I answered her:

"I did not mean to blame you for anything you had done. I see now that your wrong was only passive." I felt that my words were weak, and my feeling was emphasised by the scorn of her reply:

"My wrang was only passive! My wrang! What wrang hae I done that you should sit in judgment on me. Could I hae helpit it when Lauchlane met his death among the rocks in the tide. Why you yersel' sat here beside me, an' ye no helpit him or tried to, strong man though ye be, that could carry his corp frae here to St. Olaf's Well; for ye kenned that no livin' arm could aid him in that hour o' doom. Aye! laddie, the Fates know their wark o'er weel to hae ony such betterment o' their plans! An' div ye think that by any

act o' yer ain, or by any refusal o' act or speech, ye can baffle the purpose o' the Doom. Ye are yet young and ye must learn; then learn it now whiles ye can, that when the Word is spoken all follows as ordained. Aye! though the Ministers o' the Doom be many an' various, an' though they hae to gather in ane from many ages an' frae the furthest ends o' the airth!"

Gormala's logic and the exactness of her statement were too much for me. I felt that I owed her some reparation and told her so. She received it in her gaunt way with the dignity of an empress.

[50]

But there her dignity stopped; for seeing that she had got a lever in her hands she began at once, womanlike, to use it. Without any hesitation or delay she asked me straightly to tell her what I had seen the night before. The directness of her questioning was my best help; my heart hardened and my lips closed. She saw my answer before I had spoken it, and turned away with an eloquent, rugged gesture of despair. She felt that her last hope was gone; that her last bolt had been sped in vain.

With her going, the link with last night seemed to break, and as she passed up the road the whole of that strange experience became dimmer and dimmer.

I walked home by Cruden sands in a sort of dream. The chill and strain of the night before seemed to affect me more and more with each hour. Feeling fatigued and drowsy I lay down on my bed and sank into a heavy, lethargic sleep.

The last thing I remember is the sounding of the dinner-gong, and a dim resolution not to answer its call....

It was weeks after, when the fever had passed away, that I left my bed in the Kilmarnock Arms.

[51]

CHAPTER VII FROM OTHER AGES AND THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

The last week in June of next year, 1898, found me back in Cruden. My own house was in process of building. I had purposely arranged with the builders that the fitting up and what the conveyancers call "beautifyings" should not be done until I should be on

the spot myself next year, to be consulted about everything. Every day I went over to see the place and become familiar with it before the plans for decoration should be taken in hand. Still there was no enjoyment in getting wet every time I went and came, or in remaining in wet clothes, so that my day was mainly spent at home.

One of my first visits was to Peterhead which seemed to be in a state of absolute activity, for the herring fishing had been good and trade of all kinds was brisk. At the market place which was half full of booths, could be had almost everything required for the needs or comfort of life such as it can be on a fishing boat. Fruit and all sorts of summer luxuries were abundant. Being Saturday the boats had returned early and had got their nets away to the drying-grounds, and the men had been able to shave and dress tidily. The women, too, had got their dressing done early—the fish first and themselves afterwards.

For awhile I wandered about aimlessly amongst the booths, with that sort of unsatisfaction upon me which[52] had of late been the prelude to many of the manifestations of the power of Second Sight. This used to be just as if something within me was groping or searching unsuccessfully for something unknown, the satisfaction coming with the realization of the objective of the search.

Presently I came to an itinerant auctioneer who was dealing with a small cart-load of odds and ends, evidently picked up in various places. His auction or “roup” was on the “Dutch” plan; an extravagant price, according to his own idea, being placed on each article, and the offer decreasing in default of bidders. The auctioneer was ready with his tongue; his patter showed how well he understood the needs and ideas of the class whom he addressed.

“Here’s the works of the Reverend Robert William McAlister of Trottermaverish in twal volumes, wantin’ the first an’ the last twa; three damaged by use, but still full of power in dealing with the speeritual necessities o’ men who go down to the great deep in ships. A sermon for every day in the year, in the Gaelic for them as has na got the English, an’ in good English for them as has. How much for the twal volumes, wantin’ but three? Not a bawbee less than nine shellin’, goin’ goin’. Wha says eight shellin’ for the lot. Seven shellin’ an’ no less. Goin’ for six. Five shellin’ for you sir. Any bidder at four shellin’. Not a bawbee less than three shellin’; Half a croon. Any bidder at twa shellin’. Gone for you sir!” the nine volumes were handed over to a grave-looking old man, and the two shillings which he produced from a heavy canvas bag duly pocketed by the auctioneer.

Everything he had, found some buyer; even a blue-book seemed to have its attraction. The oddness of some of the odd lots was occasionally amusing. When I had been

round the basins of the harbour and had seen the[53] dressings and barrelling of the fish, I again came across the auctioneer in the market place. He had evidently been using his time well, for the cart was almost empty. He was just putting up the last article, an old oak chest which up to now he had used as a sort of table on which to display the object for sale. An old oak chest has always charms for me, and I was about furnishing a house. I stepped over, opened the lid and looked in; there were some papers tossed on the bottom of it. I asked the auctioneer if the contents went with the chest, my real object being to get a look at the lock which seemed a very old one of steel, though it was much damaged and lacked a key. I was answered with a torrent of speech in true auctioneer fashion:

“Aye, good master. Take the lot just as it stands. An oaken kist, hundreds of years aud and still worthy a rest in the house-place of any man who has goods to guard. It wants a key, truth to tell; but the lock is a fine aud one and you can easy fit a key. Moreover the contents, be they what they may, are yours also. See! aud letters in some foreign tongue—French I think. Yellow in age an’ the ink faded. Somebody’s love letters, I’m thinkin’. Come now, young men here’s a chance. Maybe if ye’re no that fameeliar in writin’ yer hairts oot to the lassies, ye can get some hints frae these. They can learn ye, I warrant!”

I was not altogether unaccustomed to auctions, so I affected a nonchalance which I did not feel. Indeed, I was unaccountably excited. It might have been that my feelings and memories had been worked up by the seeing again the pier where first I had met Lauchlane Macleod, and the moving life which then had environed him. I felt coming over me that strange impalpable influence or tendency which had been a part of my nature in the days immediately before the drowning of the Out-islander. Even[54] as I looked, I seemed to feel rather than see fixed upon me the baleful eyes of the man in the ghostly procession on that Lammas eve. I was recalled to myself by the voice of the auctioneer:

“The kist and its contents will be sold for a guinea and not a bawbee less.”

“I take it!” I cried impulsively. The auctioneer who in his wildest dreams had no hope of such a price seemed startled into momentary comparative silence. He quickly recovered himself and said: “The kist is yours, good master; and that concludes the roup!”

I looked around to see if there was present any one who could even suggest in any way the appearance of the man in the ghostly procession. But there was no such person. I met only *mirabile dictu*, the greedy eyes of Gormala MacNiel.

That evening in my room at the Kilmarnock Arms, I examined the papers as well as I could by lamplight. They were in an old-fashioned style of writing with long tails and many flourishes which made an added difficulty to me. The language was Spanish, which tongue I did not know; but by aid of French and what little Latin I could remember I made out a few words here and there. The dates ranged between 1598 and 1610. The letters, of which there were eight, were of manifest unimportance, short notes directed: "Don de Escoban" and merely arranging meetings. Then there were a number of loose pages of some printed folio, used perhaps as some kind of tally or possibly a cipher, for they were marked all over with dots. The lot was completed by a thin, narrow strip of paper covered with figures—possibly some account. Papers of three centuries ago were valuable, were it only for their style of writing. So I locked them all up carefully before I went to bed, with full intention to examine them thoroughly some day. The[55] appearance of Gormala just at the time when I had become possessed of them seemed to connect them in some mysterious way with the former weird experiences in which she had so prominent a part.

That night I dreamed as usual, though my dreaming was of a scattered and incoherent character. Gormala's haunting presence and all that had happened during the day, especially the buying of the chest with the mysterious papers, as well as what had taken place since my arrival at Cruden was mixed up in perpetually recurring images with the beginning of my Second Sight and the death of Lauchlane Macleod. Again, and again, and again, I saw with the eyes of memory, in fragmentary fashion, the grand form of the fisherman standing in a blaze of gold, and later fighting his way through a still sea of gold, of which the only reliefs were the scattered piles of black rock and the pale face patched with blood. Again, and again, and again, the ghostly procession came up the steep path from the depths of the sea, and passed in slow silent measure into St. Olaf's Well.

Gormala's words were becoming a truth to me; that above and around me was some force which was impelling to an end all things of which I could take cognizance, myself amongst the rest. Here I stopped, suddenly arrested by the thought that it was Gormala herself who had set my mind working in this direction; and the words with which she had at once warned and threatened me when after the night of Lauchlane's death we stood at Witsennan point:

"When the Word is spoken all follows as ordained. Aye! though the Ministers of the Doom may be many and various, and though they may have to gather in one from many ages and from the furthest ends of the earth!"

The next few days were delightfully fine, and life^[56] was one long enjoyment. On Monday evening there was a sunset which I shall never forget. The whole western sky seemed ablaze with red and gold; great masses of cloud which had rolled up seemed like huge crimson canopies looped with gold over the sun throned on the western mountains. I was standing on the Hawklaw, whence I could get a good view; beside me was a shepherd whose flock patched the steep green hillside as with snow. I turned to him and said:

“Is not that a glorious sight?”

“Aye! ’Tis grand. But like all beauty o’ the warld it fadeth into naught; an’ is only a mask for dool.”

“You do not seem to hold a very optimistic opinion of things generally.” He deliberately stoked himself from his snuff mull before replying:

“Optimist nor pessimist am I, eechie nor ochie. I’m thinkin’ the optimist and the pessimist are lears alike; takin’ a pairt for the whole, an’ so guilty o’ the logical sin o’ *a particulari ad universale*. Sophism they misca’ it; as if there were anything but a lee in a misstatement o’ fac’. Fac’s is good eneuch for me; an’ that, let me tell ye, is why I said that the splendour o’ the sunset is but a mask for dool. Look yon! The clouds are all gold and glory, like a regiment goin’ oot to the battle. But bide ye till the sun drops, not only below the horizon but beyond the angle o’ refraction. Then what see ye? All grim and grey, and waste, and dourness and dool; like the army as it returns frae the fecht. There be some that think that because the sun sets fine i’ the nicht, it will of necessity rise fine i’ the morn. They seem to no ken that it has to traverse one half o’ the warld ere it returns; and that the averages of fine and foul, o’ light and dark hae to be aye maintained. It may be that the days o’ fine follow ane anither fast; or that the foul times linger likewise. But in the end, the figures of fine and^[57] foul tottle up, in accord wi’ their ordered sum. What use is it, then, to no tak’ heed o’ fac’s? Weel I ken, that the fac’ o’ the morrow will differ sair frae the fac’s o’ this nicht. Not in vain hae I seen the wisdom and glory o’ the Lord in sunsets an’ dawns wi’oot learnin’ the lessons that they teach. Mon, I tell ye that it’s all those glories o’ pomp and pageantry—all the lasceevious luxuries o’ colour an’ splendour, that are the forerinnars o’ disaster. Do ye no see the streaks o’ wind rinnin’ i’ the sky, frae the east to the west? Do ye ken what they portend? I’m tellin’ ye, that before the sun sets the morrow nicht there will be ruin and disaster on all this side o’ Scotland. The storm will no begin here. It is perhaps ragin’ the noo away to the east. But it will come quick, most likely wi’ the risin’ o’ the tide; and woe be then to them as has no made safe wi’ all they can. Hark ye the stillness!” Shepherd-like he took no account of his own sheep whose ceaseless

bleating, sounding in every note of the scale, broke the otherwise universal silence of nature. "I'm thinkin' it's but the calm before the storm. Weel sir, I maun gang. The yowes say it is time for the hame comin'. An' mark ye, the collie! He looks at me reproachful, as though I had forgot the yowes! My sairvice to ye, sir!"

"Good night" I answered, "I hope I shall meet you again."

"I'm thinkin' the same masel'. I hae much enjoyed yer pleasin' converse. I hope it's mony a crack we yet may hae thegither!" And so my philosophical egoist moved homewards, blissfully unconscious of the fact that my sole contribution to the "pleasing converse" was the remark that he did not seem optimistic.

The whole mass of his charge moved homewards at an even footpace, the collie making frantic dashes here and there to keep his flock headed in the right direction.[58] Presently I saw the herd pouring like a foam-white noisy river across the narrow bridge over the Water of Cruden.

The next morning was fine, very hot, and of an unusual stillness. Ordinarily I should have rejoiced at such a day; but the warning of the erudite and philosophical shepherd made me mistrust. To me the worst of the prophecy business was that it became a disturbing influence. To-day, perforce, because it was fine, I had to expect that it would end badly. About noon I walked over to Whinnyfold; it being Saturday I knew that the workmen would have gone away early, and I wanted to have the house to myself so that I could go over it quietly and finally arrange the scheme of colouring. I remained there some hours, and then, when I had made up my mind as to things, I set off for the hotel.

In those few hours the weather had changed marvellously. Busy within doors and thinking of something else, I had not noticed the change, which must have been gradual however speedy. The heat had increased till it was most oppressive; and yet through it all there was now and then a cold shiver in the air which almost made me wince. All was still, so preternaturally still that occasional sounds seemed to strike the ear as disturbances. The screaming of the seagulls had mainly ceased, and the sound of breaking waves on rocks and shore was at variance with the silence over the sea; the sheep and cattle were so quiet that now and again the "moo" of a cow or the bleat of a sheep seemed strangely single. As I stood looking out seaward there seemed to be rising a cold wind; I could not exactly feel it, but I knew it was there. As I came down the path over the beach I thought I heard some one calling—a faint far-away sound. At first I did not heed it, as I knew it could not be any one calling to me; but when I found it continued, I looked round. There is at least a sufficient amount of curiosity[59] in each of us to make us look round when there is a calling. At first I could

not locate it; but then sight came to aid of sound, and I saw out on a rock two women waving handkerchiefs. The calling manifestly came from them. It was not good for any one to be isolated on a rock at a time when a storm was coming up; and I knew well the rocks which these women were amongst. I hurried on as quickly as I could, for there was a good way to go to reach them.

Near the south end of Cruden Bay there is a cluster of rocks which juts out from shore, something like a cock's spur. Beyond this cluster are isolated rocks, many of them invisible at high tide. These form part of the rocky system of the Skares, which spread out fan-like from the point of Whinnyfold. Amongst these rocks the sea runs at change of tide with great force; more than once when swimming there I had been almost carried away. What it was to be carried away amongst the rocks of the Skares I knew too well from the fate of Lauchlane Macleod. I ran as fast as I could down the steep pathway and along the boulder-strewn beach till I came to the Sand Craigs. As I ran I could see from the quick inrush of waves, which though not much at present were gathering force every instant, that the storm which the shepherd had predicted was coming fast upon us. In such case every moment was precious. Indeed it might mean life; and so in breathless haste I scrambled over the rocks. Behind the main body of the Sand Craigs are two isolated rocks whose tops are just uncovered at high tide, but which are washed with every wave. The near one of these is at low water not separated from the main mass, but only joined by a narrow isthmus a few feet long, over which the first waves of the turning tide rush vigourously, for it is in the direct sweep of the flowing tide. Beyond this, some ninety[60] or a hundred feet off and separated by a deep channel, is the outer rock, always in island form. From this spot at low water is the best view of the multitudinous rocks of the Skares. On all sides they rise round you as you stand, the granite seeming yellow with the washing of the sea between the lines of high and low water; above the latter the black seaweed ceases growing. This island is so hidden by the higher rocks around it that it cannot be seen from any part of Cruden Bay or from Port Erroll across it; it can only be seen from the path leading to Whinnyfold. It was fortunate that some one had been passing just then, or the efforts of the poor women to attract attention might have been made in vain.

When I reached the Sand Craigs I scrambled at once to the farthest point of the rocks, and came within sight of the isolated rock. Fortunately it was low water. The tide had only lately turned and was beginning to flow rapidly through the rocks. When I had scrambled on the second last rock I was only some thirty yards from the outermost one and could see clearly the two women. One was stout and elderly, the other young and tall and of exceeding beauty. The elderly one was in an almost frantic condition of

fright; but the younger one, though her face was deadly pale—and I could see from the anxious glances which she kept casting round her that she was far from at ease—was outwardly calm. For an instant there was a curious effect as her pale face framed in dark hair stood out against the foam of the tide churning round the far off rocks. It seemed as though her head were dressed with white flowers. As there was no time to lose, I threw off my coat and shoes and braced myself for a swim. I called as I did so: “What has become of your boat?” The answer came back in a clear, young voice of manifestly American intonation:

[61]

“It drifted away. It has gone off amongst those rocks at the headland.”

I had for a moment an idea that my best plan might be to fetch it first, but a glance at the distance and at the condition of the sea made me see the futility of any such hope. Already the waves were rising so fast that they were beginning to sweep over the crest of the rocks. Even that in front of me where the women stood was now topped by almost every wave. Without further delay I jumped into the sea and swam across. The girl gave me a hand up the rock, and I stood beside them, the old lady holding tight to me whilst I held the younger one and the rising waves washing round our feet. For a moment or two I considered the situation, and then asked them if either of them could swim. The answer was in the negative. “Then,” I said decisively, “you must leave yourselves to me, and I shall swim across with each of you in turn.” The old lady groaned. I pointed out that there was no other way, and that if we came at once it would not be difficult, as the distance was short and the waves were not as yet troublesome. I tried to treat the matter as though it were a nice holiday episode so that I might keep up their spirits; but all the same I felt gravely anxious. The distance to swim was only some thirty yards, but the channel was deep, and the tide running strong. Moreover the waves were rising, and we should have to get a foothold on the slippery seaweed-covered rock. However there was nothing to be done but to hasten; and as I was considering how best I should take the old lady across I said:

“What a pity it is that we haven’t even a strong cord, and then we could pull each other across.” The girl jumped at the idea and said:

“There was plenty in the boat, but of course it is gone. Still there should be a short piece here. I took[62] care to fasten the painter to a piece of rock; but like a woman forgot to see that the other end was fixed to the boat, so that when the tide turned she drifted away with the stream. The fast end should be here still.” When the coming wave had rolled on she pointed to a short piece of rope tied round a jutting piece of rock; its loose end swayed to and fro with every wave. I jumped for it at once, for I saw

a possible way out of our difficulty; even if the rope were short, so was the distance, and its strands ravelled might cover the width of the channel. I untied the rope as quickly as I could. It was not an easy task, for the waves made it impossible to work except for a few seconds at a time; however, I got it free at last and pulled it up. It was only a fragment some thirty feet in length; but my heart leaped for I saw my way clear now. The girl saw it too and said at once:

“Let me help you.” I gave her one end of the rope and we commenced simultaneously to ravel the piles. It was a little difficult to do, standing as we did upon the uneven surface of the rock with the waves rushing over our feet and the old lady beside us groaning and moaning and imploring us to hasten. Mostly she addressed herself to me, as in some way the *deus ex machina* and thus superior to the occasion where helpless women were concerned; but occasionally the wail was directed to her companion, who would then, even in that time of stress and hurry, spare a moment to lay a comforting hand on her as she said:

“Hush! oh hush! Do not say anything, dear. You will only frighten yourself. Be brave!” and such phrases of kindness and endearment. Once the girl stopped as a wave bigger than the rest broke over her feet. The old lady tried to still her shriek into a moan as she held on^[63] to her, saying “Oh Miss Anita! Oh Miss Anita!” plaintively over and over again.

At last we had ravelled the four strands of the rope and I began to knot them together. The result was a rope long enough to reach from rock to rock, though it was in places of very doubtful strength. I made a big loop at one end of it and put it over the stout lady's head and under her armpits. I cautioned both women not to tax the cord too severely by a great or sudden strain. The elder lady protested against going first, but was promptly negated by the young lady, whose wishes on the subject were to me a foregone conclusion. I took the loose end of the rope and diving into the water swam across to the other rock upon the top of which I scrambled with some little trouble, for the waves, though not as yet in themselves dangerous, made difficult any movement which exposed me to their force. I signed to the old lady to slide into the sea which, assisted by the girl, she did very pluckily. She gasped and gurgled a good deal and clutched the loop with a death grip; but I kept a steady even strain on the rope whose strength I mistrusted. In a few seconds she was safely across, and I was pulling her up by the hands up the rock. When she was firmly fixed I gave her the loose end of the cord to hold and swam back with the loop. The girl did not delay or give any trouble. As she helped me up the rock I could not but notice what strength she had; her grip of my wet hand was firm and strong, and there was in it no quiver of anxiety. I felt that she had no care for herself, now that her companion was safe. I signalled to the old lady to

be ready; the girl slipped into the water, I going in at the same time and swimming beside her. The old lady pulled zealously. So absorbed was she in her work that she did not heed my warning^[64] cry not to pull too hard. She pulled as though on her strength rested the issue of life and death; with the result that before we were a third of the way across the rope broke and she fell sitting on the rock behind her. For an instant the girl was submerged and came up gasping. In the spasmodic impulse common at such moments she gripped me so hard round the neck that I felt we were both in danger. Before we sank I wrenched, though with some difficulty her hands away from me, so that when we rose I had her at arm's length. For a few seconds I held her so that she could get her breath; and as I did so I could hear the old lady screaming out in an agonised way:

“Marjory! Marjory! Marjory!” With her breath came back the girl's reason, and she left herself to me passively. As I held her by the shoulder, a wave sweeping over the rock took us, and in my sudden effort to hold her I tore away the gown at her throat. It was quite evident her wits were all about her now for she cried out suddenly:

“Oh, my brooch! my brooch!” There was no time to waste and no time for questions. When a man has to swim for two in a choppy sea, and when the other one is a fully clothed woman, there is little to waste of strength or effort. So I swam as I had never done, and brought her up to the rock where the old lady helped her to scramble to her feet. When I had got my breath I asked her about her brooch. She replied:

“I would not have lost it for all the world. It is an heirloom.”

“Was it gold?” I asked, for I wanted to know its appearance as I intended to dive for it.

“Yes!” she said, and without another word I jumped into the channel again to swim to the outer rock, for^[65] it was close there it must have been lost and I could dive from there. The channel between the rocks has a sandy bottom, and it would be easy to see the gold. As I went she called out to me to come back, not to mind, that she would rather lose it a thousand times than have me run any risk, and so forth; things mightily pleasant to hear when spoken by such lips. For myself I had only exultation. I had got off both the women without accident, and the sea was as yet, not such as to give any concern to a good swimmer. I dived from the rock and got bottom easily, the depth being only ten or twelve feet; and after a few seconds looking round me I saw the gleam of gold. When I had risen and swam to the inner rock the two women pulled me up to my feet.

When I gave her the brooch the young lady pressed it to her lips, and turning to me with tears in her eyes said:

“Oh you brave man! You kind, brave man! I would not have lost this for anything I call mine. Thank you that you have saved our lives; and that you have saved this for me.” Then with girlish impulsiveness and unpremeditation she put up her face and kissed me.

That moment, with her wet face to mine, was the happiest of my life.

[66]

CHAPTER VIII

A RUN ON THE BEACH

The girl's kiss was so spontaneous and so natural that it could not convey any false impression to me. It was a manifest expression of gratitude, and that only. Nevertheless it set my heart beating and my veins tingling with delight. From that instant I did not feel quite a stranger to the giver; nor could I ever feel as quite a stranger again. Something of the same idea may have passed through the girl's mind, for she blushed and looked around her shyly; but, with a proud lifting of her head and a slight stamp of her foot on the rock, she put the matter behind her, for the present. The old lady, in the midst of her concern for her companion and herself, was able to throw a glance of disapproval on me, as though I had done something wrong; from which I gathered that the younger lady was not only very dear to her, but held in some sort of unusual respect as well. It was peculiar that she should in the midst of her present condition be able to give a thought to so trivial a thing. For though death did not now stare her in the face, she was cold and wet; the rock she stood on was hard and slippery, and the foam of the breaking waves was even now curling around her feet.

She looked about her apprehensively; she did not know whether or no we were on another isolated rock. I reassured her on this subject, and we scrambled as quickly as we could over the rocks on our way shoreward. The[67] elder lady took up most of my time. Here and there in a difficult place, for the wind by now blew so strongly that one found it hard to balance oneself as is necessary when walking on rocks, I offered the younger my hand. At first she firmly declined; but then, manifestly thinking it churlish, she relented and let me help her. That kiss was evidently rankling in her mind.

Both the women breathed more freely when we had reached the shore and stood secure from the sea. And indeed by this time the view, as we looked back, was enough to frighten one. Great waves topped with white were rolling in from as far as we could see; dashing over the rocks, sending up here and there white towers of spray, or rolling

in on the flat shore in front of us with an ominous roar. Woe betide any one who might be isolated now on any rock beyond; he would be swept off, and beaten on the rocks. The old lady groaned as she saw it, and then said audibly a prayer of thankfulness. Even the girl grew white for a moment; then, to my secret joy, unconsciously she drew closer to me. I took control of the party.

“Come,” I said, “you mustn’t stand here in your wet clothes. Hurry to the hotel and get dried. You will get your death of cold. We must all run! Or hasten, at all events!” I added, as I took in the dimensions of the elder lady.

“We have left our trap at the hotel” said the younger lady as we began to walk quickly in the direction of Port Erroll.

As we were moving off it suddenly struck me that Gormala might have seen the episode of the rescue. The very thought of such a thing filled me with such dismay that I groaned aloud. Not for all the world would I have had her have a hand in this; it was too sacred—too delightful—too much apart from ordinary things! Whilst[68] I was lost in a reverie of inexpressible sweetness for perhaps two or three seconds altogether, I was recalled to myself by the voice of the girl who came close to me:

“Are you hurt? Please tell me if you are. I am a First Aid.”

“Hurt?” I asked, surprised “not at all. What on earth makes you think so?”

“I heard you groan!”

“Oh that——” I began with a smile. Then I stopped, for again the haunting fear of Gormala’s interference closed over my heart like a wet mist. With the fear, however, came a resolution; I would not have any doubt to torment me. In my glance about the shore, as we came off the rocks on to the beach, I had not seen a sign of anyone. At this part of the shore the sandhills have faded away into a narrow flat covered with bent-grass, beyond which the land slopes up directly to the higher plain. There was not room or place for any one to hide; even one lying amongst the long bents could be seen at a glance from above. Without a word I turned to the left and ran as quickly as I could across the beach and up the steep bank of the sandy plateau. With a certain degree of apprehension, and my heart beating like a trip-hammer—I had certainly taken this matter with much concern—I looked around. Then I breathed freely; there was not a sign of anyone as far as I could see. The wind, now coming fiercely in from the sea, swept the tall bent-grass till it lay over, showing the paler green of its under side; the blue-green, metallic shimmer which marks it, and which painters find it so hard to reproduce, had all vanished under the stress.

I ran back to join the ladies. The elder one had continued walking stolidly along the shore, leaving a track of wet on the half dry sand as she went; but the[69] younger one had lingered and came towards me as I approached.

“I hope there was nothing wrong?” she asked in a most natural way.

“No,” I said it without thinking, for there was something about the girl which made me feel as if we were old friends, and I spoke to her unconsciously in this strain. “It’s all right. She’s not there!”

“Who?” she asked with unconsciousness of any *arrière pensée*, an unconsciousness similar to my own.

“Gormala!” I answered.

“And who is Gormala?” For quite a minute or two I walked on without speaking, for I wanted to think before I answered. I felt that it would be hard to explain the odd way in which the Seer-woman seemed to have become tangled up in my life; and yet I wanted to tell this girl. I feared that she might laugh at me; that she might think me ridiculous; that she might despise me; or even that she might think me a lunatic! Then again Gormala might come and tell things to her. There was no accounting for what the woman might do. She might come upon us at any moment; she might be here even now! The effect of her following or watching me had begun to tell on my mind; her existence haunted me. I looked around anxiously, and breathed freely. There was no sign of her. My eyes finally fetched up on the face of the girl.... Her beautiful, dark eyes were fixed on me with interest and wonder.

“Well!” she said, after a pause, “I don’t suppose I’m more inquisitive than my neighbours, but I should just like to know, right here, what’s wrong with you. You looked round that time just as if you were haunted! Why did you run away that time and search round as if some one had taken a pot-shot at you and you wanted to locate him? Why did you groan before you went,[70] and come back humming? Who is Gormala, anyhow; and why were you glad that you didn’t see her? Why didn’t you answer me when I asked you who she was? Why did you walk along with your head up and your eyes staring, as though you were seeing visions? And why——”

All at once she stopped, and a swift blush swept over her face and even her neck.

“Oh,” she said in a low tone with a note of pathos in her voice, “I beg your pardon! my unruly tongue ran away with me. I have no right to ask so many questions—and from a stranger too!” She stopped as suddenly as she had begun.

“You might have spared me that!” I said “I know I have been rude in delaying to answer your question about Gormala; but the fact is that there are so many odd things in connection with her that I was really considering whether you would think me a fool or a lunatic if I told them to you. And you certainly would not understand why I didn’t want to see her, if I didn’t. And perhaps not even if I did,” I added as an afterthought. The girl’s awkwardness slipped from her like a robe; the blush merged into a smile as she turned to me and said:

“This is most interesting. O! do tell me—if you don’t mind.”

“I shall be delighted” I said, and I only expressed my thought. “Gormala” I began; but just then the stout lady in front of us, who was now a considerable way ahead, turned round and called to us. I could only hear “Miss Anita;” but the girl evidently understood, for she called out:

“All right! We are coming at once!” and she hurried on. It gave me a thrill of pleasure that she said “we” not “I;” it was sweet to have a part in such a comprehension. As we went she turned to me and said:

“You must tell me all about it; I shan’t be happy till[71] I hear the whole story, whatever it is. This is all too lovely and exciting. I hadn’t an idea when we went out sleepily this morning that there would be so much in the day to think of afterwards.” I felt that I had taken my courage in both hands as I said:

“You’ll both dine with me at the hotel, won’t you. You have missed lunch and must be hungry, so we can dine early. It will be such a true pleasure to me; and I can tell you all about everything afterwards, if we can manage to get a moment alone.”

She paused, and I waited anxiously. Then she spoke with a delightful smile:

“That must be as Mrs. Jack says. But we shall see!” With this I had to be content for the present.

When we came up to her, Mrs. Jack said in a woeful way:

“Oh, Miss Anita, I don’t know what to do. The sand is so heavy, and my clothes are so weighty with the wet, and my boots squish so with the water in them that I’m beginning to think I’ll never be able to get warm or dry again; though I’m both warm enough and dry enough in other ways.” As she spoke she moved her feet somewhat after the manner of a bear dancing, so as to make her wet boots squeak. I would have liked to have laughed, though I really pitied the poor thing; but a glance at the concern on Miss Anita’s face checked me. Very tenderly she began to help and comfort the old lady, and looked at me pleadingly to help her. “Why dear” she said “no wonder it is

hard walking for you with your clothes so wringing wet,” and she knelt down on the wet sand and began to wring them out. I looked around to see what I could do to help. Just opposite, where we were the outcrop of rock on which the Hawklaw is based sent up a jagged spur of granite through the sand, close under the bent-covered hillocks. I pointed[72] to this and we led the old lady over to it and made her sit down on a flat rock. Then we proceeded to wring her out, she all the while protesting against so much trouble being taken about her. We pulled off her spring-side boots, emptied them out and, with considerable difficulty, forced them on again. Then we all stood up, and the girl and I took her arms and hurried her along the beach; we all knew that nothing could be done for real comfort till we should have reached the hotel. As we went she said with gratitude in every note of her voice, the words joggling out of her as she bumped along:

“Oh, my dears, you are very good to me.”

Once again the use of the plural gave me pleasure. This time, however, it was my head, rather than my heart, which was affected; to be so bracketted with Miss Anita was to have hope as well as pleasure.

Things were beginning to move fast with me.

When we got to Cruden there was great local excitement, and much running to and fro on the part of the good people of the hotel to get dry clothes for the strange ladies. None of us gave any detail as to how the wetting took place; by some kind of common consent it was simply made known for the time that they had been overtaken by the tide. When once the incomplete idea had been started I took care not to elaborate it. I could see plainly enough that though the elder lady had every wish to be profuse in the expression of her gratitude to me, the younger one not only remained silent but now and again restrained her companion by a warning look. Needless to say, I let things go in their own way; it was too sweet a pleasure to me to share anything in the way of a secret with my new friend, to imperil such a bliss by any breach of reticence. The ladies were taken away to bedrooms to change, and I asked that dinner for the three of us[73] might be served in my room. When I had changed my own clothes, over which operation I did not lose any time, I waited in the room for the arrival of my guests. Whilst the table was being laid I learned that the two ladies had come to the hotel early in the day in a dogcart driven by the younger one. They had given no orders except that the horse should be put up and well cared for.

It was not long before the ladies appeared. Mrs. Jack began to express her gratitude to me. I tried to turn it aside, for though it moved me a little by its genuineness, I felt somewhat awkward, as though I were accepting praise under false pretences. Such

service as I had been able to render, though of the utmost importance to them, had been so easy of execution to me that more than a passing expression of thanks seemed out of place. After all I had only accepted a wetting on behalf of two ladies placed in an awkward position. I was a good swimmer; and my part of the whole proceeding was unaccompanied by any danger whatever, I thought, of course, had it been later in the coming of the storm, things might have been very different. Here I shuddered as my imagination gave me an instantaneous picture of the two helpless women in the toils of the raging sea amongst those grim rocks and borne by that racing tide which had done poor Lauchlane Macleod to death. As if to emphasise my fears there now came a terrific burst of wind which seemed to sweep over the house with appalling violence. It howled and roared above us, so that every window, chimney and door, seemed to bear the sound right in upon us. Overhead was heard, between the burst which shook the windows and doors, that vague, booming sound, which conveys perhaps a better sense of nature's forces when let loose, than even the concrete expression of their violence. In this new[74] feeling of the possibilities of the storm, I realised the base and the truth of the gratitude which the ladies felt; and I also realised what an awful tragedy might have come to pass had I or some one else not come down the path from Whinnyfold just when I did.

I was recalled to myself by an expression of concern by Mrs. Jack:

"Look how pale he has got. I do hope he has not been hurt." Mechanically I answered:

"Hurt! I was never better in my life," then I felt that my pallor must have left me and that I grew red with pleasure as I heard Miss Anita say:

"Ah! I understand. He did not have any fear for himself; but he is beginning to feel how terrible it was for us." The fulness of understanding on the part of the beautiful girl, her perfect and ready sympathy, the exactness of her interpretation of my mind, made for me an inexpressible pleasure.

When I told Mrs. Jack that I had ventured to claim them both as my guests, and hoped that they would honour me by dining with me, she looked at her companion in the same inquiring way which I had already noticed. I could not see the face of the younger lady at the moment as it was turned away from me, but her approval was manifest; the answer was made gladly in the affirmative. Then I put forth a hope that they would allow me to have a carriage ready to take them home, whenever they might desire, so that they might feel at ease in remaining till they had been thoroughly restored after their fatigue. I added that perhaps it would be good for Miss Anita. Mrs. Jack raised her eyebrows slightly, and I thought there was a note of distance in her voice, as though she resented in a quiet way my mentioning the name:

“Miss Anita!” she said; and there was that unconscious^[75] stiffening of the back which evidences that one is on guard. I felt somewhat awkward, as though I had taken a liberty. The younger lady saw my difficulty, and with a quick smile jumped to the rescue.

“Oh Mrs. Jack” she said “I quite forgot that we were never introduced; but of course he heard you mention my name. It was rather hurried our meeting; wasn’t it? We must set it right now.” Then she added very demurely:

“Dear Mrs. Jack, will you present to Miss Anita, Mr.—” she looked at me interrogatively.

“Archibald Hunter” I said, and the presentation was formally made. Then Miss Anita answered my question about the carriage:

“Thank you for your kind offer, Mr. Archibald Hunter” I thought she dwelt on the name, “but we shall drive back as we came. The storm will not be quite so bad inland, and as it does not rain the cart will be all right; we have plenty of wraps. The lamps are good, and I know the road; I noted it well as we came. Is not that right?” she added, turning to her companion.

“Quite right, my dear! Do just as you like,” and so the manner of their going was arranged.

Then we had dinner; a delightful, cosy meal. The fire leaped whenever the wind roared; and as the darkness of the storm made a sort of premature nightfall, it gave a pleasant, homely look to everything. After dinner we sat round the fire, and I think for a time we were all content. To me it was so like a dream. To sit there close to the beautiful stranger, and to think of the romantic beginning of our acquaintance, was enjoyment beyond words. As yet I did not dare to cast a glance forwards; but I was content to wait for that. I had a conviction that my own mind was made up.

[76]

After a little while we all became silent. Mrs. Jack was beginning to doze in her chair, and we two young folk instinctively banded ourselves together with our youthful superiority over sleep and fatigue. I sat quite still; there was something so sweet in this organised companionship of silence that it enraptured me. I did not need Miss Anita’s look of caution to remain quiet; there was something in her face, some power or quality which was as eloquent as speech. I began to think of it; and the habit of introspection, which had now become a part of my nature, asserted itself. How much

of this quality I thought, was in her face, how much in my own eyes and the brain that lay behind them. I was recalled to myself by a whisper:

“I thought for a moment you were going to sleep too. Hsh!” she placed a finger on her lip a moment and then tiptoed over to the sofa; taking a soft cushion she placed it under Mrs. Jack’s head, which had now fallen over sideways upon the arm of the chair. Then she sat beside me again, and bending over said softly:

“While she is asleep would you mind walking down to the beach, I want to see the waves. They must be big by now; I can hear their roaring from here.”

“I will go with delight;” I said “but you must wrap up properly. It will not do to run any chance of a chill.”

“All right, oh wise man! I obey, King Solomon! I shall wait to put on my own clothes till I get back; and you can lend me a mackie-coat if you will.” I got one of mine for her, the newest; and we walked over the sandhills to the beach.

The wind was blowing furiously. It never left off for a moment; but occasionally there were bursts of such added violence that we found it difficult to keep our feet. We clung to each other at such moments, and the very[77] sense of the strength which enabled me to shield her somewhat from the violence of the storm, made a new feeling of love—I could not now disguise it from myself. Something went out from me to her; some subtle feeling which must, I suppose, have manifested itself in some way, how I know not, for I kept guard upon myself. For one blissful moment, possibly of forgetfulness, she clung to me as the weak cling to the strong, the clinging of self-surrender which is equally dear to the weak and the strong, to the woman and the man. And then she drew herself sharply away from me.

There was no misunderstanding the movement; it was an intentional and conscious one, and the motive which lay behind both was her woman’s mystery. I did not know much about women, but I could make no mistake as to this. Inasmuch as Providence has thought fit in its wisdom to make men and women different, it is just as well that each sex should at critical times use its own potentialities for its protection and advancement. Herein comes, in the midst of an unnatural civilisation, the true utility of instinct. Since we have lost the need of early information of the presence of game or of predatory animals or hostile men, even our instincts adapt themselves to our surroundings. Many an act which may afterwards seem the result of long and careful premeditation is, on reflection, found to be simply the result of that form of momentary impulse which is in reality a blind obedience to some knowledge of our ancestors gained through painful experience. Some protective or militant instinct

whose present exercise is but a variant of its primal use. For an instant the man and the woman were antagonistic. The woman shrank, therefore it was the man's interest to advance; all at once the man in me spoke through the bashfulness and reticence of years:

[78]

"Why do you shrink from me? Have I done anything?"

"Oh no!"

"Then why?" A hot blush mantled her face and neck. Had she been an English girl I should not probably have had a direct answer; she would have switched conversation on some safer track, or have, after some skirmishing, forbidden the topic altogether. This girl's training, however, had been different. Her equal companionship in study with boys in school and college had taught her the futility of trying to burke a question when her antagonist was masculine; and the natural pluck and dominance—the assertion of individuality which is a part of an American woman's birthright—brought up her pride. Still blushing, but bearing herself with additional dignity, she spoke. Had she been more self-conscious, and could she have seen herself at the moment, she would have recognised to the full that with so much pride and so much dignity she could well afford to discuss any topic that she chose.

"The fault is not yours. It is, or it was, my own."

"You mean when I gave you back your brooch?" The blood deepened and deepened to a painful intensity. In a low voice, in the tone of speech, but with only the power of a whisper she answered me:

"Yes!" This was my chance and I said with all the earnestness I had, and which I felt to the full:

"Let me say something. I shall not ever allude to it again unless you wish. I took that sweet acknowledgment of your gratitude exactly as it was meant. Do believe that I am a gentleman. I have not got a sister, I am sorry to say, but if I had, I should not mind her giving a kiss to a stranger under such circumstances. It was a sweet and womanly act and I respect—and—like you more for it. I wouldn't, of course, for all the world[79] you hadn't done it; and I shall never forget it. But believe me I shall never forget myself on account of it. If I did I should be a howling cad;—and—that's all."

As I spoke her face brightened and she sighed with an expression of relief. The blush almost faded away, and a bright smile broke over her face. With a serious deep look in the eyes which glistened through her smile she held out her hand and said:

“You are a good fellow, and I thank you with all my heart.”

I felt as if I walked on air as we forced our way through the storm which roared around us, over the sandhills towards the sea. It was with an exultation that made my head swim that I noticed that she kept step with me.

[80]

CHAPTER IX

CONFIDENCES AND SECRET WRITING

The shore was a miracle of wild water and white foam. When the wind blows into Cruden Bay there is no end or limit to the violence of waves, which seem to gather strength as they rush over the flat expanse of shore. The tide was now only half in, and ordinarily there would have been a great stretch of bare sand between the dunes and the sea. To-night, however, the piling up of the waters sent in an unnatural tide which swept across the flat shore with exceeding violence. The roaring was interminable, and as we stood down on the beach we were enveloped in sheets of flying foam. The fierce blasts came at moments with such strength that it was physically impossible for us to face them. After a little we took shelter behind one of the wooden bathing-boxes fastened down under the sandhills. Here, protected from the direct violence of the storm, the shelter seemed like a calm from which we heard the roaring of wind and wave as from far off. There was a sense of cosiness in the shelter which made us instinctively draw close together. I could have remained happy in such proximity forever, but I feared that it would end at any moment. It was therefore, with delight that I heard the voice of Miss Anita, raised to suit the requirements of the occasion:

“Now that we are alone, won’t you tell me about Gormala and the strange occurrences?” I tried to speak,[81] but the storm was too great for the purposes of narrative. So I suggested that we should come behind the sandhill. We went accordingly, and made a nest in a deep hollow behind the outer range of hillocks. Here crouched among the tall bent, which flew like whip lashes when the wilder bursts of the storm came, and amid a never-ending scourge of fine sand swept from the top of the sandhills, I told her of all my experiences of Gormala and Second Sight.

She listened with a rapt attention. At times I could not see her face, for the evening was closing in and the driving clouds overhead, which kept piling up in great masses along the western horizon, shut out the remnants of the day. When, however, in the pauses of drifting sand and flying foam I could see her properly, I found her face positively alight with eager intelligence. Throughout, she was moved at times, and now

and again crept a little closer to me; as for instance when I told her of the dead child and of Lauchlane Macleod's terrible struggle for life in the race of the tide amongst the Skares. Her questions were quite illuminating to me at moments, for her quick woman's intuition grasped possibilities at which my mere logical faculties had shied. Beyond all else, she was interested in the procession of ghosts on Lammas Eve. Only once during my narrative of this episode she interrupted me; not an intentional interruption but a passing comment of her own, candidly expressed. This was where the body of armed men came along; at which she said with a deep hissing intake of her breath through her teeth:

"Spaniards! I knew it! They were from some lost ship of the Armada!" When I spoke of the one who turned and looked at me with eyes that seemed of the quick, she straightened her back and squared her shoulders, and looking all round her alertly as though for^[82] some hidden enemy, clenched her hands and shut her lips tightly. Her great dark eyes seemed to blaze; then she grew calm again in a moment.

When I had finished she sat silent for a while, her eyes fixed in front of her as with one whose mind is occupied with introspection. Suddenly she said:

"That man had some secret, and he feared you would discover it. I can see it all! He, coming from his grave, could see with his dead eyes what you could see with your living ones. Nay, more; he could, perhaps, see not only that you saw, and what you saw, but where the knowledge would lead you. That certainly is a grand idea of Gormala's, that of winning the Secret of the Sea!" After a pause of a few moments she went on, standing up as she did so and walking restlessly to and fro with clenched hands and flashing eyes:

"And if there be any Secrets of the Sea why not win them? If they be of Spain and the Spaniard, why not, a thousand times more, win them. If the Spaniard had a secret, be sure it was of no good to our Race. Why—" she moved excitedly as she went on: "Why this is growing interesting beyond belief. If his dead eyes could for an instant become quick, why should not the change last longer? He might materialise altogether." She stopped suddenly and said: "There! I am getting flighty as usual. I must think it all over. It is all too wonderful and too exciting for anything. You will let me ask you more about it, won't you, when we meet again?"

When we meet again! Then we would meet again: The thought was a delight to me; and it was only after several rapturous seconds that I answered her:

"I shall tell you all I know; everything. You will be able to help me in discovering the Mystery; perhaps working together we can win the Secret of the Sea."

“That would be too enchanting!” she said impulsively,[83] and then stopped suddenly as if remembering herself. After a pause she said sedately:

“I’m afraid we must be going back now. We have a long way to drive; and it will be quite late enough anyhow.”

As we moved off I asked her if I might not see her and Mrs. Jack safely home. I could get a horse at the hotel and drive with them. She laughed lightly as she answered:

“You are very kind indeed. But surely we shall not need any one! I am a good driver; the horse is perfect and the lamps are bright. You haven’t any ‘hold-ups’ here as we have Out West; and as I am not within Gormala’s sphere of influence, I don’t think there is anything to dread!” Then after a pause she added:

“By the way have you ever seen Gormala since?” It was with a queer feeling which I could not then analyse, but which I found afterwards contained a certain proportion of exultation I answered:

“Oh yes! I saw her only two days ago—” Here I stopped for I was struck with a new sense of the connection of things. Miss Anita saw the wonder in my face and drawing close to me said:

“Tell me all about it!” So I told her of the auction at Peterhead and of the chest and the papers with the mysterious marks, and of how I thought it might be some sort of account—“or,” I added as a new idea struck me—“secret writing.” When I had got thus far she said with decision:

“I am quite sure it is. You must try to find it out. Oh, you must, you must!”

“I shall,” said I, “if you desire it.” She said nothing, but a blush spread over her face. Then she resumed her movement towards the hotel.

We walked in silence; or rather we ran and stumbled,[84] for the fierce wind behind us drove us along. The ups and downs of the surface were veiled with the mist of flying sand swept from amongst the bent-grass on the tops of the sandhills. I would have liked to help her, but a judicious dread of seeming officious—and so losing a step in her good graces—held me back. I felt that I was paying a price of abstinence for that kiss. As we went, the silence between us seemed to be ridiculous; so to get over it I said, after searching in my mind for a topic which would not close up her sympathies with me:

“You don’t seem to like Spaniards?”

“No,” she answered quickly, “I hate them! Nasty, cruel, treacherous wretches! Look at the way they are treating Cuba! Look at the *Maine*!” Then she added suddenly:

“But how on earth did you know I dislike them.” I answered:

“Your voice told me when you spoke to yourself whilst I was telling you about the ghosts and the man with the eyes.”

“True,” she said reflectively. “So I did. I must keep more guard on myself and not let my feelings run away with me. I give myself away so awfully.” I could have made a reply to this, but I was afraid. That kiss seemed like an embodied spirit of warning, holding a sword over my head by a hair.

It was not long before I found the value of my silence. The lady’s confidence in my discretion was restored, and she began, of her own initiative, to talk. She spoke of the procession of ghosts; suddenly stopping, however, as if she had remembered something, she said to me:

“But why were you so anxious that Gormala should not have seen you saving us from the rock?”

“Because,” I answered, “I did not want her to have anything to do with this.”

[85]

“What do you mean by ‘this’?” There was something in the tone of her query which set me on guard. It was not sincere; it had not that natural intonation, even, all through, which marks a question put in simple faith. Rather was it in the tone of one who asks, knowing well the answer which will or may be given. As I have said, I did not know much about women, but the tone of coquetry, no matter how sweet, no matter how ingenuous, no matter how lovable, cannot be mistaken by any man with red blood in his veins! Secretly I exulted, for I felt instinctively that there rested some advantage with me in the struggle of sex. The knowledge gave me coolness, and brought my brain to the aid of my heart. Nothing would have delighted me more at the moment than to fling myself, actually as well as metaphorically, at the girl’s feet. My mind was made up to try to win her; my only thought now was the best means to that end. I felt that I was a little sententious as I replied to her question:

“By ‘this’ I mean the whole episode of my meeting with you.”

“And Mrs. Jack,” she added, interrupting me.

“And Mrs. Jack, of course,” I went on, feeling rejoiced that she had given me an opportunity of saying something which I would not otherwise have dared to say. “Or

rather I should perhaps say, my meeting with Mrs. Jack and her friend. It was to me a most delightful thing to meet with Mrs. Jack; and I can honestly say this day has been the happiest of my life.”

“Don’t you think we had better be getting on? Mrs. Jack will be waiting for us!” she said, but without any kind of reproach in her manner.

“All right,” I answered, as I ran up a steep sandhill and held out my hand to help her. I did not let her hand go till we had run down the other side, and up and down another hillock and came out upon the flat waste of sand[86] which lay between us and the road, and over which a sort of ghostly cloud of sand drifted.

Before we left the sand, I said earnestly:

“Gormala’s presence seems always to mean gloom and sorrow, weeping and mourning, fear and death. I would not have any of them come near you or yours. This is why I thanked God then, and thank Him now, that in our meeting Gormala had no part!”

She gave me her hand impulsively. As for an instant her soft palm lay in my palm and her strong fingers clasped mine, I felt that there was a bond between us which might some day enable me to shield her from harm.

When Mrs. Jack, and ‘her friend’, were leaving the hotel, I came to the door to see them off. She said to me, in a low voice, as I bade farewell:

“We shall, I daresay, see you before long. I know that Mrs. Jack intends to drive over here again. Thank you for all your kindness. Good night!” There was a shake of the reins, a clatter of feet on the hard road, a sweeping round of the rays of light from the lamp as the cart swayed at the start under the leap forward of the high-bred horse and swung up the steep inland roadway. The last thing I saw was a dark, muffled figure, topped by a tam-o’-shanter cap, projected against the mist of moving light from the lamp.

Next morning I was somewhat *distract*. Half the night I had lain awake thinking; the other half I had dreamt. Both sleeping and waking dreams were mixed, ranging from all the brightness of hope to the harrowing possibilities of vague, undefined fear.

Sleeping dreams have this difference over day dreams, that the possibilities become for the time actualities, and thus for good and ill, pleasure or pain, multiply the joys or sufferings. Through all, however, there remained one[87] fixed hope always verging toward belief, I should see Miss Anita—Marjory—again.

Late in the afternoon I got a letter directed in a strange hand, fine and firm, with marked characteristics and well formed letters, and just enough of unevenness to set me at ease. I am never quite happy with the writer whose hand is exact, letter by letter, and word by word, and line by line. So much can be told by handwriting, I thought, as I looked at the letter lying beside my plate. A hand that has no characteristics is that of a person insipid; a hand that is too marked and too various is disconcerting and undependable. Here my philosophising came to an end, for I had opened the envelope, and not knowing the writing, had looked at the signature, "Marjory Anita."

I hoped that no one at the table d'hote breakfast noticed me, for I felt that I was red and pale by turns. I laid the letter down, taking care that the blank back page was uppermost; with what nonchalance I could I went on with my smoked haddie. Then I put the letter in my pocket and waited till I was in my own room, secure from interruption, before I read it.

That one should kiss a letter before reading it, is conceivable, especially when it is the first which one has received from the girl he loves.

It was not dated nor addressed. A swift intuition told me that she had not given the date because she did not wish to give the address; the absence of both was less marked than the presence of the one alone. It addressed me as "Dear Mr. Hunter." She knew my name, of course, for I had told it to her; it was on the envelope. The body of the letter said that she was asked by Mrs. Jack to convey her warm thanks for the great service rendered; to which she ventured to add the expression of her own gratitude. That in the hurry and confusion of mind,[88] consequent on their unexpected position, they had both quite forgotten about the boat which they had hired and which had been lost. That the owner of it would no doubt be uneasy about it, and that they would both be grateful if I would see him—he lived in one of the cottages close to the harbour of Port Erroll—and find out from him the value of the boat so that Mrs. Jack might pay it to him, as well as a reasonable sum for the loss of its use until he should have been able to procure another. That Mrs. Jack ventured to give him so much trouble, as Mr. Hunter had been already so kind that she felt emboldened to trespass upon his goodness. And was "yours faithfully, 'Marjory Anita.'" Of course there was a postscript—it was a woman's letter! It ran as follows:

"Have you deciphered those papers? I have been thinking over them as well as other things, and I am convinced they contain some secret. You must tell me all about them when I see you on Tuesday.

M."

I fear that logic, as understood in books, had little to do with my kiss on reading this; the reasoning belonged to that higher plane of thought on which rests the happiness of men and women in this world and the next. There was not a thought in the postscript which did not give me joy—utter and unspeakable joy; and the more I thought of it and the oftener I read it the more it seemed to satisfy some aching void in my heart, “Have you deciphered the papers”—the papers whose existence was only known to her and me! It was delightful that we should know so much of a secret in common. She had been ‘thinking over them’—and other things! ‘Other things!’—I had been thinking of other things; thinking of them so often that every detail of their being or happening was photographed not only on my memory but seemingly[89] on my very soul. And of all these ‘other things’ there was one!!...

To see her again; to hear her voice; to look in her eyes; to see her lips move and watch each varying expression which might pass across that lovely face, evoked by thoughts which we should hold in common; to touch her hand....

I sat for a while like one in a rapturous dream, where one sees all the hopes of the heart fulfilled in completeness and endlessly. And this was all to be on Tuesday next—Only six days off!...

I started impulsively and went to the oak chest which stood in the corner of my room and took out the papers.

After looking over them carefully I settled quietly down to a minute examination of them. I felt instinctively that my mandate or commission was to see if they contained any secret writing. The letters I placed aside, for the present at any rate. They were transparently simple and written in a flowing hand which made anything like the necessary elaboration impossible. I knew something of secret writing, for such had in my boyhood been a favourite amusement with me. At one time I had been an invalid for a considerable period and had taken from my father’s library a book by Bishop Wilkins, the brother-in-law of Oliver Cromwell, called “Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger.” Herein were given accounts of many of the old methods of secret communication, ciphers, string writing, hidden meanings, and many of the mechanical devices employed in an age when the correspondence of ambassadors, spies and secret agents was mainly conducted by such means. This experience had set my mind somewhat on secret writing, and ever after when in the course of miscellaneous reading I came across anything relating to the subject I made[90] a note of it. I now looked over the papers to see if I could find traces of any of the methods with which I was acquainted; before long I had an idea.

It was only a rudimentary idea, a surmise, a possibility; but still it was worth going into. It was not any cause of undue pride to me, for it came as a corollary to an established conclusion, rather than as a fine piece of reasoning from acute observation. The dates of the letters gave the period as the end of the sixteenth century, when one of the best ciphers of that time had been conceived, the “Biliteral Cipher” of Francis Bacon. To this my attention had been directed by the work of John Wilkins and I had followed it out with great care. As I was familiar with the principle and method of this cipher I was able to detect signs of its existence; and this being so, I had at once strong hopes of being able to find the key to it. The Biliteral cipher has as its great advantage, that it can be used in any ordinary writing, and that its forms and methods are simply endless. All that it requires in the first instance is that there be some method arranged on between the writer and the reader of distinguishing between different forms of the same letter. In my desk I had a typewritten copy of a monograph on the subject of the Biliteral cipher, in which I half suggested that possibly Bacon’s idea might be worked out more fully so that a fewer number of symbols than his five would be sufficient. Leaving my present occupation for a moment I went and got it; for by reading it over I might get some clue to aid me. Some thought which had already come to me, or some conclusion at which I had already arrived might guide me in this new labyrinth of figures, words and symbols.[\[1\]](#)

When I had carefully read the paper, occasionally referring to the documents before me, I sat down and^[91] wrote a letter to Miss Anita telling her that I had undertaken the task at once on her suggestion and that I surmised that the method of secret writing adopted if any, was probably a variant of the Biliteral cipher. I therefore sent her my own monograph on the subject so that if she chose she might study it and be prepared to go into the matter when we met. I studiously avoided saying anything which might frighten her or make any barrier between us; matters were shaping themselves too clearly for me to allow myself to fall into the folly of over-precipitation. It was only when I had placed the letter with its enclosure in the envelope and written Marjory’s—Miss Anita’s—name that I remembered that I had not got her address. I put it in my pocket to keep for her till we should meet on Tuesday.

When I resumed my work I began on the two remaining exhibits. The first was a sheaf of some thirty pages torn out of some black-letter law-book. The only remarkable thing about it was that every page seemed covered with dots—hundreds, perhaps thousands on each page. The second was quite different: a narrow slip of paper somewhat longer than a half sheet of modern note paper, covered with an endless array of figures in even lines, written small and with exquisite care. The paper was just such a size as might be put as marker in an ordinary quarto; that it had been so used

was manifest by the discolouration of a portion of it that had evidently stuck out at the top of the volume. Fortunately, in its long dusty rest in the bookshelf the side written on had been downward so that the figures, though obscured by dust and faded by light and exposure to the air, were still decipherable. This paper I examined most carefully with a microscope; but could see in it no signs of secret writing beyond what might be contained in the disposition of the numbers themselves. I got a sheet of foolscap and made[92] an enlarged copy, taking care to leave fair space between the rows of figures and between the figures themselves.

Then I placed the copy of figures and the first of the dotted pages side by side before me and began to study them.

I confined my attention at first chiefly to the paper of figures, for it struck me that it would of necessity be the simpler of the two systems to read, inasmuch as the symbols should be self-contained. In the dotted letters it was possible that more than one element existed, for the disposition of significant appeared to be of endless variety, and the very novelty of the method—it being one to which the eyes and the senses were not accustomed—made it a difficult one to follow at first. I had little doubt, however, that I should ultimately find the dot cipher the more simple of the two, when I should have learned its secret and become accustomed to its form. Its mere bulk made the supposition likely that it was in reality simple; for it would be indeed an endless task, to work out in this laborious form two whole sheets of a complicated cipher.

Over and over and over again I read the script of numbers. Forward and backward; vertically; up and down, for the lines both horizontal and vertical were complete and exact, I read it. But nothing struck me of sufficient importance to commence with as a beginning.

Of course there were here and there repetitions of the same combination of figures, sometimes two, sometimes three, sometimes four together; but of the larger combinations the instances were rare and did not afford me any suggestion of a clue!

So I became practical, and spent the remainder of my work-time that day in making by aid of my microscope an exact but enlarged copy, but in Roman letters, of the first of the printed pages.

[93]

Then I reproduced the dots as exactly as I could. This was a laborious task indeed. When the page was finished, half-blinded, I took my hat and went out along the shore

towards Whinnyfold. I wanted to go to the Sand Craigs; but even to myself I said 'Whinnyfold' which lay farther on.

"Men are deceivers ever," sang Balthazar in the play: they deceive even themselves at times. Or they pretend they do—which is a new and advanced form of the same deceit.

[1]See Appendix A.

[94]

CHAPTER X

A CLEAR HORIZON

If any ordinary person be afflicted with ennui and want something to take his thoughts away from a perpetual consideration of his own weariness let me recommend him to take up the interpretation of secret writing. At first, perhaps, he may regard the matter lightly and be inclined to smile at its triviality. But after a little while, if he have in him at all any of the persistence or doggedness which is, and should be, a part of a man's nature, he will find the subject take possession of him to the almost entire exclusion of all else. Turn from it how he will; make he never so many resolutions to put the matter behind him; try he never so hard to find some more engrossing topic, he will still find the evasive mystery ever close before him. For my own part I can honestly say that I ate, drank, slept and dreamed secret writing during the entire of the days and nights which intervened between my taking up the task and the coming of Miss Anita to Cruden Bay. All day long the hidden mystery was before me; wherever I was, in my room, still or contorting myself; walking on the beach; or out on the headlands, with the breezes singing in my ears, and the waves lapping below my feet. Hitherto in my life my only experience of haunting had been that of Gormala; but even that experience failed before the ever-hopeful, ever-baffling subject of the cryptograms. The worst of my feeling, and that which made it more poignant, was that I was^[95] of the firm belief not only that there was a cryptogram but that my mind was already on the track of it. Every now and again, sometimes when the MS. or its copy was before me and sometimes when I was out in the open, for the moment not thinking of it at all, a sort of inspiration would come to me; some sort of root idea whose full significance I felt it difficult to grasp.

My first relief came on Tuesday when at noon I saw the high dog-cart dash past the gate and draw up short opposite the post-office.

I did not lose any time in reaching the cart so as to be able to help the ladies down. Marjory gave me both her hands and jumped lightly, but the elder lady required a good deal of help. It is always thus; the experience of every young man is the same. Every woman, old or young, except the one whom he likes to lift or carry tenderly, is willing to be lifted or carried in the most leisurely or self-denying manner.

When Mrs. Jack and 'her friend' had come into the hotel sitting-room the latter said to me:

"I hope you forgive us for all the trouble we have put you to."

"No trouble at all," I answered—and oh! it sounded so tame—"only a pleasure!"

"Thank you," she continued gravely, "that is very nice of you. Now we want you to add to your kindness and take us out again on that rock. I have not yet finished my sketch, and I don't like to be baffled."

"Finished your sketch, my dear," said Mrs. Jack, in a tone which manifestly showed that the whole thing was new to her. "Why, Marjory, it was washed into the sea before Mr. Hunter came to help us!" The slight, quick blush which rose to her face showed that she understood the false position in which the maladroit remark placed her; but she went on pluckily:

[96]

"Oh, yes, dear, I know! What I mean is, that having set my heart on making that sketch, I want to do it; even if my first effort went wrong. That is, dear Mrs. Jack, if you do not mind our going out there again."

"Oh, my dear," said the elder lady, "of course I will do just whatever you wish. But I suppose it will do if I sit on the rock near at hand? Somehow, since our experience there, I seem to prefer the mainland than any place where you may have to swim to get away from it." Marjory smiled at me as she said to her:

"That will do capitally. And you can keep the lunch basket; and have your eye on me and the rising of the tide all the time."

So I sent to Whinnyfold to have a boat ready when we should drive over. Whilst the ladies were preparing themselves for the boating trip I went to my room and took in my pocket the papers from the chest and my rescripts. I took also the letter which I had not been able to deliver.

At Whinnyfold Miss Anita and I took the steep zigzag to the beach, piloted by one of John Hay's boys whilst the other took Mrs. Jack across the neck of the headland to the Sand Craigs.

As we went down the steep path, the vision of the procession of ghosts moving steadily up it on Lammas Eve, came back to me; instinctively I looked round to see if Gormala was watching. I breathed more freely when I saw she was not about.

I should dearly have liked to take Miss Anita alone in the boat, but I feared that such was not safe. Rowing amongst the rocks of the Skares is at the best of times no child's play, and I was guardian of too great a treasure to be willing to run any risks. Young Hay and I pulled, the boy being in the bow and doing the steering. This position of affairs suited me admirably, for it kept me^[97] close to my companion and facing her. It was at all times a pleasure to me as it would have been to any man, to watch her face; but to-day her eager joy at the beauty of all around her made me thrill with delight. The day was ideal for the place; a bright, clear day with just a ripple of wind from the water which took the edge from the July heat. The sea quivered with points of light, as though it were strewn with diamonds, and the lines of the racing tide threading a way amongst the rocks below were alone an endless source of interest. We rowed slowly which is much the safest way of progression in these waters, and especially when, as now, the tide was running towards the end of the ebb. As the boy seemed to know every one of the myriad rocks which topped the water, and by a sort of instinct even those that lay below, we steered a devious course. I had told him to take us round by the outer rocks from which thousands of seabirds rose screaming as we approached; and as we crept in under the largest of them we felt that mysterious sense of unworthiness which comes to one in deep water under the shadow of rocks. I could see that Marjory had the sense of doubt, or of possible danger, which made her clutch hard at each gunwale of the boat till her knuckles grew white. As we rounded the Reivie o' Pircappies, and found the tide swirling amongst the pointed rocks, she grew so deadly pale that I felt concerned. I should have liked to question her, but as I knew from my experience of her courage that she would probably prefer that I remained silent, I pretended not to notice. Male pretence does not count for much with women. She saw through me at once, and with a faint smile, which lit the pallor of her face like sunshine on snow, she said in so low a whisper that it did not reach the fisher boy:

"I was thinking what it would have been for us that day—only for you."

[98]

"I was glad," I answered in an equally low voice, "to be able to render any help to—to Mrs. Jack and her friend."

“Mrs. Jack—and her friend—are very much obliged to you,” she answered gaily in her natural voice and tone. I could see that she had fully regained her courage, as involuntarily she took her hands from the sides of the boat. We kept now well out from the rocks and in deep water, and shortly sighted the Sand Craigs. As we could see Mrs. Jack and her escort trudging leisurely along the sand, and as we did not wish to hurry her, I asked young Hay with my companion’s consent, to keep round the outermost of the Sand Craigs, which was now grey-white with sea-gulls. On our approach the birds all rose and wheeled round with myriad screaming; the wonder and admiration of the girl’s eyes as they eagerly followed the sweep of the cloud of birds was good to see.

We hung around the great pointed rock till we saw Mrs. Jack making her way cautiously along the rocks. We rowed at once to the inner rock and placed the luncheon basket in a safe place. We then prepared a little sheltered nook for Mrs. Jack, with rugs and cushions so that she might be quite at ease. Miss Anita chose the place herself. I am bound to say it was not just as I should have selected; for when she sat down, her back was towards the rock from which she had been rescued. It was doubtless the young girl’s thoughtfulness in keeping her mind away from a place fraught with such unpleasant memories.

When she was safely installed we dismissed the boys till the half tide. Mrs. Jack was somewhat tired with her trudge over the sand, and even when we left her she was nodding her head with coming sleep. Then Miss Anita got out her little easel which I fixed for her as she^[99] directed; when her camp stool was rightly placed and her palette prepared I sat down on the rock at her feet and looked at her whilst she began her work. For a little while she painted in silence: then turning to me she said suddenly:

“What about those papers? Have you found anything yet?” It was only then I bethought me of the letter in my pocket. Without a word I took it out and handed it to her. There was a slight blush as well as a smile on her face as she took it. When she saw the date she said impulsively:

“Why did I not get it before?”

“Because I had not got your address, and did not know how to reach you.”

“I see!” she answered abstractedly as she began to read. When she had gone right through it she handed it to me and said:

“Now you read it out loud to me whilst I paint; and let me ask questions so that I may understand.” So I read; and now and again she asked me searching questions. Twice

or three times I had to read over the memorandum; but each time she began to understand better and better, and at last said eagerly:

“Have you ever worked out such reductions?”

“Not yet, but I could do so. I have been so busy trying to decipher the secret writing that I have not had time to try any such writing myself.”

“Have you succeeded in any way?”

“No!” I answered. “I am sorry to say that as yet I have nothing definite; though I am bound to say I am satisfied that there is a cipher.”

“Have you tried both the numbers and the dots?”

“Both,” I answered; “but as yet I want a jumping-off place.”

“Do you really think from what you have studied[100] that the cipher is a biliteral one, or on the basis of a biliteral cipher?”

“I do! I can’t say exactly how I came to think so; but I certainly do.”

“Are there combinations of five?”

“Not that I can see.”

“Are there combinations of less than five?”

“There may be. There are certainly.”

“Then why on earth don’t you begin by reducing the biliteral cipher to the lowest dimensions you can manage? You may light on something that way.”

A light began to dawn upon me, and I determined that my task—so soon as my friends had left Cruden—would be to reduce Bacon’s biliteral. It was with genuine admiration for her suggestion that I answered Miss Anita:

“Your woman’s intuition is quicker than my man’s ratiocination. ‘I shall in all my best obey you, Madam!’” She painted away steadily for some time. I was looking at her, covertly but steadily when an odd flash of memory came to me; without thinking I spoke:

“When I first saw you, as you and Mrs. Jack stood on the rock, and away beyond you the rocks were all fringed with foam, your head looked as if it was decked with flowers.” For a moment or two she paused before asking:

“What kind of flowers?”

Once again in our brief acquaintance I stood on guard. There was something in her voice which made me pause. It made my brain whirl, too, but there was a note of warning. At this time, God knows, I did not want any spurring. I was head over heels in love with the girl, and my only fear was lest by precipitancy I should spoil it all. Not for the wide world would I have cancelled the hopes that were dawning in me and filling me with a feverish anxiety. I could not help a sort of satisfied feeling as I answered:

[101]

“White flowers!”

“Oh!” she said impulsively, and then with a blush continued, painting hard as she spoke:

“That is what they put on the dead! I see!” This was a counter-stroke with a vengeance. It would not do to let it pass so I added:

“There is another ‘first-column’ function also in which white flowers are used. Besides, they don’t put flowers on the head of corpses.”

“Of whom then?” The note of warning sounded again in the meekness of the voice. But I did not heed it. I did not want to heed it. I answered:

“Of Brides!” She made no reply—in words. She simply raised her eyes and sent one flashing glance through me, and then went on with her work. That glance was to a certain degree encouragement; but it was to a much greater degree dangerous, for it was full of warning. Although my brain was whirling, I kept my head and let her change the conversation with what meekness I could.

We accordingly went back to the cipher. She asked me many questions, and I promised to show her the secret writings when we should go back to the hotel. Here she struck in:

“We have ordered dinner at the hotel; and you are to dine with us.” I tried not to tremble as I answered:

“I shall be delighted.”

“And now,” she said “if we are to have lunch here to-day we had better go and wake Mrs. Jack. See! the tide has been rising all the time we have been talking. It is time to feed the animals.”

Mrs. Jack was surprised when we wakened her; but she too was ready for lunch. We enjoyed the meal hugely.

At half-tide the Hay boys came back. Miss Anita^[102] thought that there was enough work for them both in carrying the basket and helping Mrs. Jack back to the carriage. "You will be able to row all right, will you not?" she said, turning to me. "You know the way now and can steer. I shall not be afraid!"

When we were well out beyond the rock and could see the figures of Mrs. Jack and the boys getting further away each step, I took my courage in both hands; I was getting reckless now, and said to her:

"When a man is very anxious about a thing, and is afraid that just for omitting to say what he would like to say, he may lose something that he would give all the rest of the world to have a chance of getting—do—do you think he should remain silent?" I could see that she, too, could realise a note of warning. There was a primness and a want of the usual reality in her voice as she answered me:

"Silence, they say, is golden." I laughed with a dash of bitterness which I could not help feeling as I replied:

"Then in this world the gold of true happiness is only for the dumb!" she said nothing but looked out with a sort of steadfast introspective eagerness over the million flashing diamonds of the sea; I rowed on with all my strength, glad to let go on something. Presently she turned to me, and with all the lambency of her spirit in her face, said with a sweetness which tingled through me:

"Are you not rowing too hard? You seem anxious to get to Whinnyfold. I fear we shall be there too soon. There is no hurry; we shall meet the others there in good time. Had you not better keep outside the dangerous rocks. There is not a sail in sight; not one, so far as I know, over the whole horizon, so you need not fear any collision. Remember, I do not advise you to cease rowing; for, after all, the current may bear us^[103] away if we are merely passive. But row easily; and we may reach the harbour safely and in good time!"

Her speech filled me with a flood of feeling which has no name. It was not love; it was not respect; it was not worship; it was not, gratitude. But it was compounded of them all. I had been of late studying secret writing so earnestly that there was now a possible secret meaning in everything I read. But oh! the poverty of written words beside the gracious richness of speech! No man who had a heart to feel or a brain to understand could have mistaken her meaning. She gave warning, and hope, and courage, and advice; all that wife could give husband, or friend give friend. I only looked at her, and without a word held out my hand. She placed hers in it frankly; for a brief, blissful moment my soul was at one with the brightness of sea and sky.

There, in the very spot where I had seen Lauchlane Macleod go down into the deep, my own life took a new being.

[104]

CHAPTER XI IN THE TWILIGHT

It was not without misgiving that I climbed the steep zigzag at Whinnyfold, for at every turn I half expected to see the unwelcome face of Gormala before me. It seemed hardly possible that everything could go on so well with me, and that yet I should not be disturbed by her presence. Miss Anita, I think, saw my uneasiness and guessed the cause of it; I saw her follow my glances round, and then she too kept an eager look out. We won the top, however, and got into the waiting carriage without mishap. At the hotel she asked me to bring to their sitting-room the papers with the secret writing. She gave a whispered explanation that we should be quite alone as Mrs. Jack always took a nap, when possible, before dinner.

She puzzled long and anxiously over the papers and over my enlarged part copy of them. Finally she shook her head and gave it up for the time. Then I told her the chief of the surmises which I had made regarding the means by which the biliteral cipher, did such exist, might be expressed. That it must be by marks of some sort was evident; but which of those used were applied to this purpose I could not yet make out. When I had exhausted my stock of surmises she said:

“More than ever I am convinced that you must begin by reducing the biliteral cipher. Every time I think of it, it seems plainer to me that Bacon, or any one else[105] using such a system, would naturally perfect it if possible. And now let us forget this for the present. I am sure you must want a rest from thinking of the cipher, and I feel that I do. Dinner is ready; after it, if you will, I should like another run down to the beach.”

“*Another*” run to the beach! then she remembered our former one as a sort of fixed point. My heart swelled within me, and my resolution to take my own course, even if it were an unwise one, grew.

After dinner, we took our way over the sandhills and along the shore towards the Hawklaw, keeping on the line of hard sand just below high-water mark.

The sun was down and the twilight was now beginning. In these northern latitudes twilight is long, and at the beginning differs little from the full light of day. There is a mellowed softness over everything, and all is grey in earth and sea and air. Light,

however, there is in abundance at the first. The mystery of twilight, as Southerners know it, comes later on, when the night comes creeping up from over the sea, and the shadows widen into gloom. Still twilight is twilight in any degree of its changing existence; and the sentiment of twilight is the same all the world over. It is a time of itself; between the stress and caution of the day, and the silent oblivion of the night: It is an hour when all living things, beasts as well as human, confine themselves to their own business. With the easy relaxation comes something of self-surrender; soul leans to soul and mind to mind, as does body to body in moments of larger and more complete intention. Just as in the moment after sunset, when the earth is lit not by the narrow disc of the sun but by the glory of the wide heavens above, twin shadows merge into one, so in the twilight two natures which are akin come closer to the identity of one. Between daylight and dark as the myriad sounds[106] of life die away one by one, the chirp of birds, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the barking of dogs, so do the natural sounds such as the rustle of trees, the splash of falling water, or the roar of breaking waves wake into a new force that strikes on the ear with a sense of intention or conscious power. It is as though in all the wide circle of nature's might there is never to be such a thing as stagnation; no moment of poise, save when the spirits of nature proclaim abnormal silence, such as ruled when earth stood "at gaze, like Joshua's moon on Ajalon."

The spirits of my companion and myself yielded to this silent influence of the coming night. Unconsciously we walked close together and in step; and were silent, wrapt in the beauty around us. To me it was a gentle ecstasy. To be alone with her in such a way, in such a place, was the good of all heaven and all earth in one. And so for many minutes we went slowly on our way along the deserted sand, and in hearing of the music of the sounding sea and the echoing shore.

But even Heaven had its revolt. It seems that whether it be on Earth or in Heaven intelligence is not content to remain in a condition of poise. Ever there are heights to be won. Out of my own very happiness and the peace that it gave me, came afresh the wild desire to scale new heights and to make the present altitude which I had achieved a stepping-off place for a loftier height. All arguments seemed to crowd in my mind to prove that I was justified in asking Marjory to be my wife. Other men had asked women whom they had known but a short time to marry them; and with happy result. It was apparent that at the least she did not dislike me. I was a gentleman, of fair stock, and well-to-do; I could offer her a true and a whole heart. She, who was seemingly only companion to a wealthy woman, could[107] not be offended at a man's offering to her all he had to give. I had already approached the subject, and she had not warned me off it; she had only given me in a sweetly artful way advice in which

hope held a distinct place. Above all, the days and hours and moments were flying by. I did not know her address or when I should see her again, or if at all. This latest thought decided me. I would speak plainly to-night.

Oh, but men are dull beside women in the way of intuition. This girl seemed to be looking over the sea, and yet with some kind of double glance, such as women have at command, she seemed to have been all the time looking straight through and through me and getting some idea of her own from my changing expression. I suppose the appearance of determination frightened her or set her on guard, for she suddenly said:

“Ought we not to be turning home?”

“Not yet!” I pleaded, all awake in a moment from my dreams. “A few minutes, and then we can go back.”

“Very well,” she said with a smile, and then added demurely; “we must not be long.” I felt that my hour had come and spoke impulsively:

“Marjory, will you be my wife?” Having got out the words I stopped. My heart was beating so heavily that I could not speak more. For a few seconds, which seemed ages to me, we were both silent. I daresay that she may have been prepared for something; from what I know now I am satisfied that her own intention was to ward off any coming difficulty. But the suddenness and boldness of the question surprised her and embarrassed her to silence. She stopped walking, and as she stood still I could see her bosom heave—like my own. Then with a great effort, which involved a long breath and the pulling up of her figure and the setting back of her shoulders, she spoke:

[108]

“But you know nothing of me!”

“I know all of you that I want to know!” This truly Hibernian speech amused her, even through her manifest emotion and awkwardness, if one can apply the word to one compact of so many graces. I saw the smile, and it seemed to set us both more at ease.

“That sounds very rude,” she said “but I understand what you mean, and take it so.” This gave me an opening into which I jumped at once. She listened, seeming not displeased at my words; but on the whole glad of a moment’s pause to collect her thoughts before again speaking:

“I know that you are beautiful; the most beautiful and graceful girl I ever saw. I know that you are brave and sweet and tender and thoughtful. I know that you are clever and

resourceful and tactful. I know that you are a good comrade; that you are an artist with a poet's soul. I know that you are the one woman in all the wide world for me; that having seen you there can never be any one else to take your place in my heart. I know that I would rather die with you in my arms, than live a king with any other queen!"

"But you have only seen me twice. How can you know so many nice things about me. I wish they were all true! I am only a girl; and I must say it is sweet to hear them, whether they be true or not. Anyhow, supposing them all true, how could you have known them?"

Hope was stepping beside me now. I went on:

"I did not need a second meeting to know so much. To-day was but a repetition of my joy; an endorsement of my judgment; a fresh rivetting of my fetters!" She smiled in spite of herself as she replied:

"You leave me dumb. How can I answer or argue[109] with such a conviction." Then she laid her hand tenderly on my arm as she went on:

"Oh, I know what you mean, my friend. I take it all in simple truth; and believe me it makes me proud to hear it, though it also makes me feel somewhat unworthy of so much faith. But there is one other thing which you must consider. In justice to me you must." She paused and I felt my heart grow cold. "What is it?" I asked. I tried to speak naturally but I felt that my voice was hoarse. Her answer came slowly, but it seemed to turn me to ice:

"But I don't know you!"

There was a pity in her eyes which gave me some comfort, though not much; a man whose soul is crying out for love does not want pity. Love is a glorious self-surrender; all spontaneity; all gladness, all satisfaction, in which doubt and forethought have no part. Pity is a conscious act of the mind; wherein is a knowledge of one's own security of foothold. The two can no more mingle than water and oil.

The shock had come, and I braced myself to it. I felt that now if ever I should do my devoir as a gentleman. It was my duty as well as my privilege to shield this woman from unnecessary pain and humiliation. Well I knew, that it had been pain to her to say such a thing to me; and the pain had come from my own selfish impulse. She had warned me earlier in the day, and I had broken through her warning. Now she was put in a false position through my act; it was necessary I should make her feelings as little painful as I could. I had even then a sort of dim idea that my best plan would have been to have taken her in my arms and kissed her. Had we both been older I might

have done so; but my love was not built in this fashion. Passion was so mingled with respect that the other course, recognition of, and[110] obedience to, her wishes seemed all that was open to me. Besides it flashed across me that she might take it that I was presuming on her own impulsive act on the rock. I said with what good heart I could:

“That is an argument unanswerable, at present. I can only hope that time will stand my friend. Only” I added and my voice choked as I said it “Do, do believe that I am in deadly earnest; that all my life is at stake; and that I only wait, and I will wait loyally with what patience I can, in obedience to your will. My feelings and my wish, and—and my request will stand unaltered till I die!” She said not a word, but the tears rose up in her beautiful eyes and ran down her blushing cheeks as she held out her hand to me. She did not object when I raised it to my lips and kissed it with all my soul in the kiss!

We turned instinctively and walked homewards. I felt dejected, but not broken. At first the sand seemed to be heavy to my feet; but when after a little I noticed that my companion walked with a buoyancy unusual even to her, I too became gay again. We came back to the hotel much in the spirit in which we had set out.

We found Mrs. Jack dressed, all but her outer cloak, and ready for the road. She went away with Marjory to finish her toilet, but came back before her younger companion. When we were alone she said to me after a few moments of 'hum'ing and 'ha'ing and awkward preparation of speech:

“Oh Mr. Hunter, Marjory tells me that she intends to ride on her bicycle down to Aberdeen from Braemar where we are going on Friday. I am to drive from Braemar to Ballater and then go on by train so that I shall be in before her, though I am to leave later. But I am fearful about the girl riding such a journey by herself. We have no gentleman friend here, and it[111] would be so good of you to take charge of her, if you happened to be anywhere about there. I know I can trust you to take care of her, you have been so good to her, and to me, already.”

My heart leaped. Here was an unexpected chance come my way. Time was showing himself to be my friend already.

“Be quite assured,” I said as calmly as I could “I shall be truly glad to be of the least service. And indeed it will just suit my plans, as I hoped to go to Braemar on my bicycle one day very soon and can arrange to go just as may suit you. But of course you understand that I must not go unless Miss Anita wishes it. I could not presume to thrust myself upon her.”

“Oh that is all right!” she answered quickly, so quickly that I took it that she had already considered the matter and was satisfied about it. “Marjory will not object.” Just then the young lady entered the room and Mrs. Jack turning to her said:

“I have asked Mr. Hunter my dear to ride down with you from Braemar; and he says that as it just suits his plans as he was going there he will be very happy if you ask him.” She smiled as she said:

“Oh since you asked him and he had said yes I need not ask him too; but I shall be very glad!” I bowed. When Mrs. Jack went out, Marjory turning to me said:

“When did you plan to go to Braemar?”

“When Mrs. Jack told me you were going” I answered boldly.

“Oh! I didn’t mean that,” she said with a slight blush “but at what time you were to be there.” To which I said:

“That will be just to suit your convenience. Will you write and let me know?” She saw through my [112] ruse of getting a letter, and smilingly held up a warning finger.

As we strolled up the road, waiting for the dog-cart to be got ready, she said to me:

“Now you can be a good comrade I know; and you said that, amongst other things, I was a good comrade. So I am; and between Braemar and Aberdeen we must both be good comrades. That and nothing more! Whatever may come after, for good or ill, that time must be kept apart.”

“Agreed!” I said and felt a secret exultation as we joined Mrs. Jack. Before they started Marjory said:

“Mrs. Jack I also have asked Mr. Hunter to come on the ride from Braemar. I thought it would please him if we both asked him, since he is so diffident and unimpulsive!”

With a smile she said good-bye and waved it with her whip as they started.

[113]

CHAPTER XII THE CIPHER

I went straight to my own room and commenced to work afresh on the biliteral cipher. More than ever had I the conviction upon me that the reading of the secret writing would be the first step to the attainment of my wishes regarding Marjory. It would have

been strange therefore if I had not first attempted the method which she had herself suggested, the reducing the Baconian cipher to its lowest elements.

For many hours I laboured at this work, and finally when I had reduced the Baconian five symbols to three I felt that I had accomplished all that was possible in that way.^[2]

When I had arrived at this result, and had tested its accuracy in working, I felt in a position to experiment with my new knowledge on the old number cipher. First I wrote out my method of reduction as a sort of addendum to the paper which I had prepared for Marjory. Then I made a key to cipher and one to de-cipher.^[3] By this time the night was well on and the grey of early morning was beginning to steal in by the edges of the blinds; I was not sleepy, however; I was too much excited to think of sleep, for the solving of the problem seemed almost within my grasp. Excited to a state which almost frightened me by its intensity, I got ready my copy of the number cipher and my newly prepared key. With an effort which took me all my resolution I^[1 14] went on steadily writing its proper letter under each combination without once looking back; for I knew that even should some of the letters be misplaced in the key the chance of recognising the right ones would be largely increased by seeing a considerable number of letters together.

Then I glanced over the whole and found that many of the symbols made up letters. With such a basis to work on, the rest was only labour. A few tentative efforts and I had corrected the key to agreement with some of the combinations in the cipher.

I found, however, that only here and there were letters revealed; try how I would, I could not piece out the intervening symbols. At last it occurred to me that there might be in the paper two or more ciphers. On trying to follow out the idea, it became apparent that there were at least a quantity of impeding numbers scattered through the cipher. These might be only put in to baffle pursuit, as I had surmised might be done when I made the cipher; or they might have a more definite purpose. At any rate they hampered my work, so I struck them out as I went along. That I continued till I had exhausted the whole list of numbers in the script.

When I looked back over the letters translated from the cipher thus depleted, I found to my inexpressible joy that the sequence and sense were almost complete. The translation read as follows:

“To read the history of the Trust use cipher of Fr. Bacon. The senses and the figures are less worthy than the Trinity B. de E.”

One step more and my work was done. I set the discarded numbers in sequence on another sheet of paper, and found to my intense satisfaction they formed an inner

record readable by the same key. The “enclosed” words, to use Bacon’s phrase, were:

[115]

“Treasure Cave cliff one and half degree Northe of East from outer rock.”

Then and then only did I feel tired. The sun was well up but I tumbled into bed and was asleep in a moment.

The gong was sounding for breakfast when I awoke. After breakfast when I resumed my work I set myself to construct a variant of my number key to suit the dotted letters, for my best chance, now that I was on the track was to construct rather than to decipher. After some hard work I at last constructed a cipher on this plan.[\[4\]](#)

I then began therefore to apply my new key to the copy of the cipher in the printed pages.

I worked steadily and completed the whole of the first page, writing down only the answer to those combinations which fitted into my scheme, and leaving all doubtful matters blank. Then I laid aside my key, and with a beating heart glanced over the result.

It more than satisfied me, for in the scattered letters though there were many blanks, was manifestly a connected narrative. Then I took the blanks and worked at them altering my key to suit the scheme of the original writer, till by slow degrees I had mastered the secret of the cipher construction.

From that hour on, till I had translated the cipher writing from beginning to end I knew no rest that I could avoid. I had to take my meals, and to snatch a few hours of sleep now and again; for the labour of translation was very arduous and slow, and the strain on my eyes was too great to be kept up continuously; with each hour, however, I acquired greater facility in the work. It was the evening of the fourth day, however,[\[116\]](#) before my work was complete. I was then absolute master of the writer’s intent.

All this time I had not heard from Marjory, and this alone made excessive work a necessary anodyne. Had I not had the long and overwhelming preoccupation to keep my mind from dwelling on the never ending disappointment, I do not know what I should have done. I fully expected a letter by the last post that night. I knew Marjory was staying somewhere in the County; it was by that post that we received local letters. None came, however, and that night I spent in making a fair transcript of the whole translation.

The first part of it was in the shape of a letter, and ran as follows:

“My deare Sonne, These from the towne of Aberdeyne in Scotland wherin I lie sick, and before I go on my quest for the fullfillment of my Trust. I have written, from time to time during my long sickness, a full narrative of what has been; so that you may know all as though your own ears had heard and your own eyes had seen. All that I have written is to the one end—that you my eldest sonne and the rest of my children, may, should I fail—and I am weak in bodie to so strive—carry on the Trust to which I have pledged you as well as myself; so that untill that Trust be yielded up complete, neither I nor you nor they are free to any that may clash with the purpose to which our race is henceforth now devoted. But that mine oath may not press overhard on my children, and if need be on their children and their children’s children to the end, it will suffice if one alone at all times shall hold himself or herself pledged to the fullfillment of the Trust. To this end I charge herewith all of my blood and race that the eldest sonne of each generation do hold himself pledged[117] to the purpose of the Trust, unless some other of the direct lineage do undertake it on his behalf. In default of which, or if such undertaken Trust shall fail, then the duty reverteth back and back till one be found whose duty it is by priority of inheritance, unless by some other of the direct lineage the Trust be undertaken on his behalf. And be mindful one and all to whom is this sacred duty that secrecy is of its very essence. The great Trust was to me in the first instance in that His Holiness Pope Sixtus Fifth and my good kinsman known as the Spanish Cardinal held graciously that I was one in whose heart the ancient honour of our dear Spain had a place of lodgement so secure that time alone could not efface it nor its continuance in the hearts of my children. To the purpose then of this great Trust His Holiness hath himself given to me and mine full powers of all kinds so to deal with such circumstances as may arise that the labour which we have undertaken may in all cases be brought to a successful issue. To the which His Holiness hath formulated a Quittance which shall be co-existent with the Trust and which shall purge the natural sin of any to whom in the discharge of the duties of the Trust any necessity may arise. But inasmuch as the Trust is a secret one and the undue publication of such Quittance might call the attention of the curious to its existence, such Document is filed in the secret record of the Vatican, where, should necessity hereafter arise, it may be found by the Holy Father who may then occupy the Chair of St. Peter on application made to him on behalf of any who may so offend against law or the rules of well-being which govern the children of Christ. And I charge you, oh! my sonne to ever bear in mind that though there be some strange things in the narrative they are in mine own eyes true[118] in all ways, though it may appear to you that they accord not with what may be said hereafter of these time’s by other men.

“And oh, my sonne, and my children all, take this my last blessing and with it my counsel that ye walk always in Faith and Righteousness, in Honour and in Good Report, with your duty ever to Holy Church and to the King in loyal service. Farewell! God and the Blessed Virgin and the Saintes and Angels watch over you and help you that your duty be done.

“Your father in all love,

“Bernardino de Escoban.”

“These will be brought by a trusty hand, for I fear lest they shall fall into the hands of the English Queene, or any of her hereticall surroundings. If it be that you fail at the first in the speedy fullfillment of the Trust—as may be, now that the purpose of our great Armada hath been checked—it may be well that whoso to whom is the Trust may come hither and dwell upon these shores so that he may watch over the purpose of the Trust and be at hand for its fullfillment when occasion may serve. But be mindful ever, oh my sonne, that who so guardeth the Trust will be ever surrounded by enemies, heathenish and without remorse, whose greed should it ever be awakened to this purpose would be fatal to all which we cherish. Dixi.”

Following this came:

“Narrative of Bernardino de Escoban, Knight of the Cross of the Holy See and Grandee of Spain.

In this was set out at full length^[5] the history of the great Treasure gathered by Pope Sixtus Fifth for the subjugation of England, and which he entrusted to the writer of the narrative who had at his own cost built and^[1 19] manned one of the vessels of the Armada the *San Cristobal* flagship of the Squadron of the Galleons of Castile. The Pope, wearied by the demands of Philip of Spain and offended by his claim to appoint bishops under the new domain and further incensed by the incautious insolence of Count de Olivares the Spanish ambassador to Rome, has chosen to make this a secret trust and has on the suggestion of the Spanish Cardinal chosen Don Bernardino de Escoban for the service. In furtherance of his design he has sent him for his new galleon a “figurehead” wrought in silver and gold for his own galley by Benvenuto Cellini. Also he has given him as a souvenir a brooch wrought by the same master-hand, the figurehead wrought *in petto*. Don Bernardino gives account of the defeat of the Armada and tells how his vessel being crippled and he being fearful of the seizure of the treasure entrusted to him buries it and the coveted figurehead in a water cave at the headland of a bay on the coast of Aberdeyne. He has blown up the

opening of the cave for safety. In the narrative were certain enlightening phrases such as when the Pope says:

“To which end I am placing with you a vastness of treasure such as no nation hath ever seen.” Which was to be applied to only the advancement of the True Faith, and which was in case of failure of the enterprise of the Armada to be given to the custody of whatever King should, after the death of Sixtus V, sit upon the throne. And again:

“The Cave was a great one on the south side of the Bay with many windings and blind offsets.... ‘The black stone on one hand and the red on the other giving back the glare of the lantern.’”

The memoranda which follow give the future history of the Trust:

[120]

“The narrative of my father, the great and good Don Bernardino de Escoban, I have put in the present form for the preservation of the secret. For inasmuch as the chart to which he has alluded is not to be found, though other papers and charts there be, it may be necessary that a branch of our house may live in this country in obedience to the provision of the Trust and so must learn to speak the English as though it were the mother tongue. As I was but a youth when my father wrote, so many years have elapsed that death has wrought many changes and the hand that should have carried the message and given me the papers and the chart is no more, lying as is thought beside my father amongst the surges of the Skyres. So that only a brief note pointing to the contents of an oaken chest wherein I found them, though incomplete, was all that I had to guide me. The tongue that might have spoken some added words of import was silent for ever

“Francisco de Escoban.”

“23, October, 1599.”

“The narrative of my grandfather, together with my father’s note have I Englished faithfully and put in this secret form for the guidance of those who may follow me, and whose life must be passed in this rigorous clime untill the sacred Trust committed to us by Pope Sixtus the Fifth be fulfilled. When on the death of my elder brother, I being but the second son, I was sent to join my father in Aberdeyne, I made grave preparation for bearing worthily the burden laid upon us by the Trust and so schooled myself in the English that it is now as my mother tongue. Then when my father, having completed the building of his castle, set himself to the finding of the cave whereof the secret was lost, in which emprise he, like my grandfather lost his life amongst the

waters of the Skyres of Crudene. Ye that may^[121] follow me in the trust regard well this secret writing, made for the confusion of the curious but to the preservation of our secret. Bear ever in mind that not all that is shows on the surface of even simple words. The cipher of my Grandfather devised by Fr. Bacon now High Chancellor of England has many mouths, all of which may speak if there be aught to say.

“Bernardino de Escoban.”

“4, July, 1620.”

In addition to the cipher narrative I found on close examination that there was a separate cipher running through the marginal notes on the earlier of the printed pages. When translated it ran as follows:

“Cave mouthe northe of outer rock one degree and half North of East. Reef lies from shore point three and half degrees South of South East.”

[\[2\]](#)See Appendix [B](#).

[\[3\]](#)See Appendix [C](#).

[\[4\]](#)See Appendix [D](#).

[\[5\]](#)See Appendix [E](#).

[122]