ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND

ALLEN RAINE

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BY

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"A WELSH SINGER," "A WELSH WITCH,"
"TORN SAILS," ETC.

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Cwrt – (court) front garden.
penioha – kitchen.
penuchra – parlour
howyr bach – dear people.
pwr – poor.
Matti – pet name for Martha.
Gwen fach – Gwen dear.
hanti Gwen – aunt Gwen.
Dir anw'l –
Croten – a lass
Codes, los – girl.
b'l ohwr – certainly.
bachgeni – my lad
machgen i – my lad.
merch i – my daughter.
nos da chi – good night.
bach, fach – little, dear
whinkell – willow basket.
Stivin Storrom – Stephen Storm.
f'anwylid – sweetheart.
Mawredd anwl – Good God.
Can diolch – a hundred thanks.
Cawl – leek broth.
Calon fach – dear heart.
calon pawb – good gracious.

Ach-y-fi – } Exclamation of distaste.
Ar-i-vee }
Gwrdran (Gordran) – Oatmeal and milk. (Gogo)
Iago – James.

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

MASTER AND MAN

Doctor Daniel Griffiths, or Doctor Dan as he was generally called in his native town, rose late one morning, tired out with his long journey of the day before.

Deio, his servant and factotum, had already brought the gig round before his master came downstairs, and sat waiting at the door, stolidly looking across the bridge which connected the little town of Tregarreg with the steep hilly country on the opposite side of the River Lidan, which had wound its way in many curves through woods and broad meadows before it passed swiftly under the arches of the bridge.

It was a beautiful river, from its rise in the far away hills of another county, to its broad flow into the sea a few miles beyond Tregarreg bridge, and nowhere more beautiful than just before it reached those restraining arches, where it rushed headlong between its rocky sides by the walls of Hendyrafon, the old, many-gabled house, in which Doctor Dan was now hurrying through his late breakfast, not unmindful of the musical rush of the river as it swept under his windows.

Hendyrafon, or "the old river house," had been his home

from childhood; his parents had lived in it, his grandparents before them.

Though many parts of it were in a dilapidated condition, and only a few rooms in the front were habitable, still, with all its uneven gables, its crooked chimneys and its lopsided doorways, it was dear to the young man, when he had returned to it from the London hospital where he had received his diploma to kill or cure the inhabitants of his native town and the surrounding district.

Here he had settled down full of the bright anticipations of youth, to the great happiness of his parents, who, however, had not lived long to enjoy the rest and peace to which they had looked forward through all the anxieties and sacrifices necessary for the completion of their son's education. When our story opens the latter was "parish doctor," and there was scarcely an hour in the twenty-four when he and Deio might not be met in the roads and lanes of the neighbourhood.

Tall, erect and broad-shouldered, Doctor Dan's was a striking figure, whose strong, dark face one would turn to look at in a crowd. About forty years of age, he looked much younger. His close-cropped black hair and dark eyes, whose brightness lighted up a countenance that would otherwise have been somewhat sombre in hue and expression, were familiar objects in the little town, to every inhabitant of which he was as well known as the Town Clock. Silent and reticent in manner, he was nevertheless very popular, and a welcome visitor at every country house, farmstead and cottage. How many a weary heart in out-of-the-way lonely corners of that sparsely-populated neighbourhood had bounded with fresh hope at the sound of his firm footstep as it alighted from his swinging gig; how many a deathbed had been soothed and comforted by his manly sympathy and words of encouragement, it would be difficult to say, and he himself knew least of all.

It was fifteen years since he had passed through a trying

ordeal which had threatened to wreck his life and ruin his moral nature. He had formed a deep attachment to the daughter of an old friend of his father's, a retired sea captain living within a mile of Tregarreg, and Matti Lloyd had returned his affection with a fervour that promised to gild the old rooms of Hendyrafon with the sunshine of domestic happiness; but that light had set in storm and cloud.

Still he had clung to the old home, whose every wall and stair and rail had tender memories for him, and few had guessed how deeply the ploughshare of bitter sorrow had furrowed his heart; they only saw, at church, at fair or market, the same clear-cut features, and straight, unbending figure, until at last, as the years went on, they realised that Doctor Dan was not "what he used to be; so jolly he was! so ready to laugh and show those white teeth of his! and such a merry sparkle in his eye! and now," they said, "he's as silent as Deio, and cuts his words as short as if they cost money!"

His practice was by no means a lucrative one, as it lay for the most part amongst the farmers and shopkeepers of Tregarreg, who were all amazingly healthy, and, moreover, considered that money paid into the doctor's pockets was money thrown away, until the last illness came upon them, when, they all agreed, he was "a fine man to have at your bedside, as tender as a woman, so wise, and so calm!" And so, though they managed to *live* without his services, nobody within a radius of ten miles would wish to die without the presence of that strong, dark face.

The meagreness of the income which he derived from his profession troubled him not at all, for at heart he was a farmer, and that old stubble yard at the back of the house, with its barns and cow-sheds, which straggled down by the river to the meadows where his three cows grazed and his horses scampered about, were full of interest to him, and, he was wont to say, brought him more profit

than curing his neighbours. And no wonder! for quite one-third of his patients never dreamt of paying him anything. Many of them were inmates of the "Pwrhouse," a few dilapidated old tenements crowded together in a lane leading out of the main street, that did duty for workhouse, asylum and infirmary, for there the blind, the halt, the imbecile foregathered; there was no rent to pay, and Doctor Dan would minister to their ailments! So it was looked upon as a haven of refuge by the very poor and needy; in fact, in this den of squalor and poverty he found his most interesting patients. Certainly, among them were many curious types of humanity, their eccentricities unsoftened by contact with those of their fellow-creatures who led a life of more ease and refinement.

"You are shocking late, sir," said Betti Luke, his old servant and housekeeper, as he snatched a look at his paper over his coffee and toast. "Deio been waiting long time."

"True, Betti!" answered the doctor, rising, and hurrying to the front door, where he found Deio patiently awaiting him.

Perhaps in the first years of their connection as master and servant, Deio and he had varied the monotony of their long drives by chatting upon the various topics that cropped up in their daily work, but as the years passed on, they had both become more taciturn, and now there seemed to be a perfect understanding between them that obviated the necessity for many words.

"To Sarneithin?" inquired the man, while the master stepped into the gig.

"Ie," answered Doctor Dan, with a nod, and they began their drive in silence.

Fortunately there was a stiff bit of collar work for Samson as he started, for he was a horse of decidedly capricious temper, and always began his day's work as if he bore a standing grudge against the world in general,

champing at his bit, pawing the ground, and, if he got the chance, administering a kick of indignation to the patient Deio, who with many "Woo-os" and "Comops" buckled his harness and patted his sleek sides.

Reaching the top of the hill they took the high road leading along the breezy heathery downs to the coast-line, where at many a white farmhouse Doctor Dan alighted, and Deio waited patiently in the gig. Down below the rugged cliffs lay reaches of golden sand, with here and there a group of thatched cottages, in all of which Doctor Dan's was a familiar figure. But there was one secluded lonely shore towards which he never turned Samson's wilful head, and yet his skill was sorely needed in that long, low house, whose white-washed walls seemed almost buried in the green bank that rose so steeply behind it.

To-day, as every day, Deio and he drove rapidly by the top of the broad green hollow that sloped in grassy curves down to the beach below. The old house showed signs of many a struggle with the north-west winds, that seemed to make that broad slope both their playground and their field of battle. There were yellow streaks of new straw here and there on the roof, and even now Stivin Storrom, standing on a ladder, was binding down the eaves with fresh straw ropes and strong stakes.

His own cottage, which leaned confidingly on the "pine end" of Doloer, the larger house, was so hidden behind the high turf hedge, which curved round the "cwrt," that it generally escaped damage from wind or storm. It looked little bigger than a hen-house; but, if you passed round the corner of that high hedge, you would find there room for a hale and hearty old couple, who lived very comfortably in their tiny hut—"comfort" being a word of comparative meaning.

These two houses were the only human habitations on that lonely shore, for the gaunt, grey house that marked the sky-line above the slope was scarcely upon it, but touched

the confines of the more cultivated country that stretched away inland from the coast. Hafod y bryn, as it was called (when there was anyone to call it so), had been untenanted for many years, and its ivy-covered gables and broken casements, where the owls and bats found comfortable quarters, only accentuated the solitude of the moor which lay between it and the beach below. On each side of the shore the towering cliffs stood like sentinels silently watching the stormy bay; between them the open moor stretched smoothly upwards, giving the impression that it had once slipped *downwards* with the strong, glacial motion that had filled the broad valley with mud and *débris*, now covered with greensward, from which rose here and there huge boulders of granite. The same irresistible motion had probably also carried out the dangerous line of rocks which crossed the bay just beyond low-water mark, where those white breakers tossed up their foaming crests into the air.

The somewhat tame evenness of the slope disappeared on a closer acquaintance with it; it was beautiful in its own way, and Miriel Lloyd, whose small shoes had made the only mark upon the beach since the last tide had left it bare, would have stared indeed, with those wonderful grey eyes of hers, if she had heard a disparaging remark on her "beautiful slope." Doloer, that long, low, white house, was "home" to her, and bore in the sound of its name all the sweet and tender associations that haunt the Welsh word "gartre." If it was cold and storm-beaten, her young, fresh life did not feel it; if it was lonely, she was unconscious of it. To her, every flower and star was a friend, every bird and beast a brother or sister, and, in spite of her life of loneliness, her bright and sensitive nature found ample nourishment for a full development in the scenes and sounds around her.

The shore had not even a name of its own, but was generally known as "y traeth unig," or the lone shore.

The fishing boats and ships passed by at a safe distance; nobody ever landed there, the line of rocks crossing the beach just beyond low-water mark making it dangerous to do so; besides which, there was nothing to tempt anyone to land, no inn where the thirsty boatman could refresh himself with a "blue" of ale, no convenient place for mooring a boat, not even a road from the beach to the top of the moor.

The door at Doloer stood always open, for, buried within the thick walls of the porch, it was sheltered from the wind and rain. Generally, the shoes that had marked the sand clattered in and out and round about it. Within, there were two other inmates, one of whom was also often to be seen passing in and out from house to garden, from garden to shed, but always seeming to keep watch over something in the interior; a woman between thirty and forty, pale and worn, but still bearing traces of a beauty which had once been the cause of sorrow to many hearts, and of her own ruin. The bloom on her cheek had faded and there were lines of care round the mouth; the dazzling white teeth and the charm of expression alone remained.

Her frail and delicate body seemed quite unequal to the continual drudgery in which she was engaged, but she appeared to live upon some hidden spring of energy which helped her on her way. Her voice, though hollow and a little husky, was low and tender, and her lustrous eyes still shone with some of the light which, in her younger days, made them the chief attraction of a very charming face. Her hair, still black and abundant though streaked with grey, was hidden under a cap of linen; her dress, scrupulously neat and clean, was of the coarsest and plainest homespun. As she passed for the twentieth time from the garden to the house, she gathered a bunch of wallflowers which grew between the stones of the porch wall.

Under the large open chimney in the "penisha," and

in the cosiest corner, stood a round-backed oak chair, in which sat the object of Matti Lloyd's constant care and solicitude—another woman, her sister, perhaps a year or two older than herself, but without the worn and wasted look which gave such a pathetic interest to Matti's face.

Gwen Lloyd had been a beautiful woman fifteen years earlier, and she still retained her beauty in a remarkable degree considering that she was now no longer young. No wrinkles marred the fair smoothness of her face; her hair, though grey, was wavy and thick; her dress, of Welsh country fashion and make, betokened more care and attention to ornament and grace, though it could not be more spotlessly clean, than her sister's. A neckerchief of fine white muslin, edged with lace, was pinned over her neck, and her abundant hair, plaited in thick bands, was coiled like a crown at the top of her head. A cushion of bright patchwork was tied at the back of the chair where the head could recline easily, a footstool of straw stood before her on which rested her feet, neatly, and even daintily, shod; though her shoes were of country make they were bright and shining, and the bows of black ribbon on the insteps were tied with care and neatness.

"Smell them, Gwen fach," said Matti, holding the bunch of wallflowers to her face. But there was no interest in the beautiful eyes, no answering smile on the lips, as she somewhat impatiently pushed the flowers aside, and, leaning forward in her chair, gazed with vacant look upon some imaginary object, invisible to everyone but herself; for Gwen was distraught, the light of reason had long faded from her eyes, and she sat from day to day busily spinning with an invisible thread upon an imaginary spinning-wheel. With the thumb and finger of each hand alternately she drew the winding thread towards her, letting it run back again on its reel, all the while whispering words that, in their rapid flow, caught and tripped each other into an incoherent jumble. Occasion-

ally a single word made itself heard distinctly, and then Matti would shudder, and sometimes the tears would well up into her eyes. Sometimes, too, Gwen would croon to herself the refrain of an old sea song which, in her happier years, had been a favourite of hers :—

> "On the wings of the wind he is coming to me
> Over the salt sea foam,
> Out of the west where the wind blows free,
> My sailor is sailing home!"

Generally placid and unruffled, there were days when the spirit of unrest seemed to possess her; she tugged at her thread irritably, shed tears over the intricacies of her spinning, rising from her seat and roaming aimlessly about the cottage.

At such times Matti would stand in the doorway, and, shading her eyes with her hand, would look out over the open bay, exclaiming, "Howyr bach! Here is the *Hawk* sailing in, and Silvan Vaughan coming up the shore!" The invariable effect of these words was to calm and soothe Gwen's irritable nerves, to lay a spell of happiness upon the joyless existence, and she would sit to her spinning again with a smooth brow, adjusting the braids of her hair, arranging the lace kerchief on her neck and looking with a smile towards the open doorway. The long-waited-for never arrived, and in a short time Gwen forgot that she had expected him. But the charm remained, and the ruffled spirit was at peace again.

Matti had long ago settled with her conscience the question of deceiving her sister for her own good. "She is *not wise*," she would say, "and there is no mind to deceive." Besides, the saying of those few words was a bitter trial to Matti, at which she would turn a shade paler, and often press her hand over her heart; it was hateful to her, and therefore must be done unflinchingly and relentlessly.

Her niece Miriel had learned the simple trick too, though quite ignorant of its meaning, and whenever she saw signs of unrest in Gwen's face would run to the doorway, and, imitating her aunt's actions, would shade her eyes with her hand, and say, "Howyr bach! Here is the *Hawk* sailing in, and Silvan Vaughan coming up the shore!" with the usual result of quieting the restless woman.

To-day she was calm and unruffled, and the never-dying hope sprang up in Matti's heart, as she held towards her sister the bunch of wallflowers which she had gathered in the porch.

"Gilly flowers, Gwen fach!" she said. "Do you remember how they used to grow by the garden gate at Tygwyn?" but Gwen took no notice of the delicate fragrance, there was no responsive pleasure on the impassive face, and Matti, with a sorrowful droop on her lip, turned away with the desponding look that for fifteen years had followed every attempt to recall her sister's reasoning powers.

She placed the rich brown and gold blossoms in a blue mug on the dresser, and began her simple preparations for their frugal dinner. Hanging from the open chimney, the large crock of "cawl" simmered over the fire, and having spread a speckless cloth over the black oak table, and laid upon it three plates, three basins and three silver spoons, she fished out of the crock a piece of bacon, placed it on a dish, and on another, such vegetables as she could ladle out. A flat barley loaf graced the middle of the table, and having cut from it two long slices, and filled the basins with cawl, Matti's preparations were complete, except that on Gwen's plate she placed a slice from a dainty wheaten loaf. Then she went out to the doorway and peered down the grassy slope and over the golden sands, in search of somebody who evidently was not there, for she turned and looked up the great hillside, and, catching sight of a blue figure, called loudly, "Miriel!" lengthening out

the last syllable until it woke the echoes from hillside and valley. A call as loud and clear came from the hilltop, and down the slope, with streaming golden hair and fluttering skirts, Miriel ran with flying footsteps which brought her rapidly nearer home, and when Matti had had time to turn her sister's chair to the table the girl arrived breathless and panting, the grace of youth and health in every limb and feature, her grey eyes sparkling with happiness. The first sight of her gave an impression of slender supple strength, not an angle or awkward curve in her whole form, from the slim arms and fingers to the small feet.

She sat down to her dinner at once with the healthy appetite of a country girl; Gwen drinking her cawl in silence and making a good meal, though daintily and slowly.

"Oh, Nanti Matti!" said the girl, "aren't you glad? The swallows have come and are beginning to build."

"So soon, child? Surely no!"

"'Tis not soon; 'tis the right time. They told me so, and I heard them tell each other."

Nanti Matti looked serious.

"Nonsense," she said, "you are too old to say such things now, Miriel."

The girl laughed.

"Why, then?" she said, "for it is true. 'Tis the right time. I heard them twittering together at Hafod y bryn, and I understand what they say."

Matti smiled "Ts, ts, ts, she's a silly child, and I shall never cure her!"

Miriel continued her dinner in silence, noticing, but making no remark, when her aunt quietly returned her slice of bacon to the dish before she began her own dinner, which she made entirely of the barley bread and cawl, no scrape of butter, no crumb of cheese to flavour the coarse bread; in fact, Matti Lloyd's life was one of continual self-denial and self-effacement. Immolation of "self" had

become almost a passion with her; nothing was too dear for her to give up, no hardship too great for her to take upon herself; no ascetic ever denied or tortured himself more systematically than did she who still performed her simple daily duties with cheerfulness and calmness. Only sometimes, when after repeated efforts to recall her sister's reason to the scenes and events of real life, and to awaken the dormant faculties, when her efforts seemed on the point of success and a word or smile from Gwen would raise a fluttering hope in her heart, then when the vacant look and the sibilant words returned, Matti's courage would fail, and a fit of wild sobbing alone would relieve the cruel tension of fifteen years. It was so long as that since she and Gwen had been the beauties of the countryside, the admired and coveted prizes which many a young man's heart reached after. Down in the valley behind that rock-crowned hill they lived in the happy content of country peace and plenty. Their father, John Lloyd, of Tygwyn, had been a wealthy man, of higher birth and station than the ordinary surrounding farmers, as the old Tygwyn pedigree plainly demonstrated, much to his satisfaction, for he was proud of his old ancestry, and often reminded his daughters, when the young lads of the countryside pressed their suits, that they were come of a "better stock" than their neighbours. No happier family ever lived than that which passed its peaceful existence under the old roof of Tygwyn, until the terrible tragedy occurred which wrecked the reputation of the younger daughter and robbed the elder of her reason. It broke the gentle mother's heart, and John Lloyd himself so lost his interest in his worldly affairs, that in an incredibly short time his riches seemed to take to themselves the proverbial wings, and left him to die in poor and ruined circumstances. When his affairs were wound up, it was found that Tygwyn, the old homestead of his family for generations, must be sold to provide a small, very small, income for his two

daughters. It was fortunate for them that Doloer, the old rambling house by the sea, belonged to them, for here they found refuge and a shelter in which to hide the shame and sorrow that had made them the subject of gossip through the whole neighbourhood; here they were soon forgotten by the scantily-populated countryside, and here for fifteen years they had lived out their uneventful lives, cherishing the traditions and memories of their past prestige, and conversing habitually in English, often a literal translation of their native tongue eked out with many words and expressions from the same source. They clung to this custom, which had descended to them from some forgotten episode in the life of their ancestors, retaining it with pride as a distinguishing line between them and the surrounding peasantry.

Twelve years before our story opens an event of great interest had befallen them, of great interest to Matti that is, for nothing awoke Gwen's sleeping faculties, or disturbed her continual spinning at her invisible wheel; the dreamy eyes still watched the spindle, the impatient fingers still busied themselves with the tightening and loosening thread in spite of the advent of the little motherless child, who, by the death of their only brother and his wife, was thrown upon their hands for sustenance and love.

Matti had taken the child to her heart with the avidity of a love-starved woman, and even Gwen, though she took no interest in the playful ways of the little one, still, gradually allowed the warm hand to nestle in her own, the rosy lips to kiss her cheek, and by degrees little Miriel became her constant companion, vying with Matti in her unselfish devotion to the invalid.

CHAPTER II

HAFOD Y BRYN

"And where has she been this morning?" asked Matti, addressing the girl in the third person as is often done in Wales as a form of endearment. "To Hafod y bryn, as usual?"

"Yes, indeed," said the girl. "'Tis there the swallows are nesting and twittering. When Nanti Gwen is asleep I must go up there again, because poor Quitto is lying under the ivy very ill, dying, I think. Oh, Nanti Matti, that is a cruel thing, that we may love things dearly and yet we cannot bear their pain for them. If God would only let us, there's glad I would be!"

A tender smile was on Matti's lips and a light of love glistened in her eyes as she answered,—

"God will grant her wish de-an; but, 'tis time to take Nanti Gwen to rest." Miriel drew the listless arm through her own, and led the aimless footsteps across the "penisha" and through the open door into the long "penucha," which was nearly filled up by the old-fashioned fourpost bed, occupied at night by Matti and herself—further on again, through another open doorway and up two steps, to a quaint little bedroom where the brown rafters hung low, and the window, deep seated in the massive whitewashed wall, let in the afternoon sunlight. Gwen threw herself on her bed, and Miriel drew over her the coverlet of faded blue and yellow silk, made from the old silk dresses of bygone Lloyds of Tygwyn. She had scarcely laid her head on the

pillow before she was asleep, and here she would remain, white and still, until Matti or Miriel came in and called her to tea.

"For the sick dog," said Matti, handing Miriel a little jug of milk as she passed through the penisha. "Will she give it to him?"

"That will I, you may be sure," said the girl, and she passed out into the sunshine, leaving Matti in the dim light of the interior.

It was as it should be, she thought, as she busied herself with her household duties; the girl to the sunshine and the fresh sea breeze, and Gwen to rest and sleep, and for her the shade, the solitude, the aching heart, the bitter memories of the past! When all her work was done, the hearth swept, the fire replenished, the kettle hung to the chain under the chimney, she reached her knitting from the deep window-sill, and, sitting down by the lonely hearth, allowed her thoughts to roam in the old familiar paths of memory. She thought of her happy, careless childhood, so full of the fresh joys of youth, the young companions who shared her games and pleasures; she remembered the happy days of girlhood, when, petted and spoiled by their indulgent parents, she and Gwen had but to express a wish and it was gratified. Gone! all gone! The last days of those tender parents darkened by her madness and folly. She remembered, ah! how well! the strong, pure love that had gilded the early years of her girlhood. Where was that now? and, dropping her knitting on her lap, she pressed her hands over her eyes, the slow tears trickling through her fingers as she realised that that too was lost to her. Then she recalled the days of darkness, the indiscretions, the vanity, the follies which had wrecked her life.

Her needles clicked again, and her head bent low over her work, while bitter regrets and self-upbraidings racked her heart.

The afternoon wore on, until at last she heard Miriel's

step on the cobble stone in the porch, and, awaking from her dreams, she laid her knitting aside and met the girl with a cheerful smile.

"Well! has she come back? Surely it is not tea-time already? and how is the pwr dog?"

"Pwr Quitto! He has come from Llaneithin to die all alone at Hafod. 'Tis sad to die all alone."

"Yes; for a human being, but a dog—well, he doesn't feel it, I suppose."

Miriel sighed, and went pensively into her aunt's room, from which she soon returned leading Gwen's tall, wavering figure.

Matti held out both hands to lead her sister to the comfortable chair in the corner.

"Have you had a nice sleep, Gwen fach?" she asked.

There was no answer, but Matti would not be discouraged in her efforts to cheer.

She pushed the straw footstool under her feet, and shook up the bright patchwork cushion for her head, but Gwen refused them all, and began at once her invisible spinning, drawing the thread towards her with the usual string of whispered words.

The depressing influence of this continual straying of reason made no outward impression upon Matti, though inwardly it chafed at the roots of her being, and every day and every hour helped to loosen the thread which kept her still chained to life.

Although Miriel had grown up in this atmosphere of sorrow and sadness, her young bright spirit had strength and joy enough within itself to cast off the gloom which surrounded her.

The greater part of her life was spent in the open air, roaming the hillside or the shore, drinking in the sweet counteracting influences of Nature, and certainly she bid fair to come out victorious from her battle with depression and gloom.

She suffered acutely in sympathy with the animal creation around her, but had hitherto not awakened keenly to human suffering.

Nanti Gwen had always been to her the same pale, unresponsive statue, and although her helplessness had drawn out the love of the sensitive child, it had not hitherto pained her as it did Matti.

True, she was beginning to find out that some mysterious cloud of sorrow brooded over the atmosphere of Doloer, but she hid the dawning suspicion in the depths of her own heart, shrinking, though unconsciously, from wounding the tenderly-indulgent head of the household by curious questioning; for, in spite of the extreme simplicity and even meagreness of the household *ménage*, a certain air of refinement reigned in that low-browed house that had taught Miriel the reticence and consideration for others which is the most valuable effect of good breeding.

Matti was therefore not a little startled when one evening the girl suddenly said, "I have found out what words Nanti Gwen is always whispering. Last night when you were milking the goats she spoke them so plainly. They were—'Oh, what a sister!' I wonder what she meant?"

Matti's face blanched a little and her eyes had a pained look in them as she answered,—

"You are too curious, child; Gwen's words are too mixed up to make sense of them."

"But she did say that," persisted the girl; "and I think she said 'God help me,' too."

Matti looked sorrowfully at Gwen, who was taking her tea placidly with no apparent consciousness of the conversation. For a moment an impatient reproof had risen to Matti's lips, but, with the usual restraint and repression which she placed upon her feelings, she answered patiently, "Well, pray God! she may be restored some day! You will always pray for that, Miriel? and you will try your best to bring it about when I am gone?"

"Yes, indeed, and it's sure to come some day."

When the evening shadows were darkening the old "penisha," Matti sat at her knitting, and Gwen at her spinning, while Miriel on the three-legged stool on the the hearth nursed her chin in her palm and listened to the crooning of the wind in the big chimney.

"There's a storm coming, I think," she said at last. "The daffodils are swaying very much in the wind." They were silent again, and the old clock ticked in the corner, the red glow of the culm fire filled the room with its cheerful crimson light, the crescent moon looked in upon them through the panes of the deep-set window, and the old black cat purred on the spinning-wheel—the real one which stood against the wall.

The little household went early to bed, but, after a sleep of two or three hours, Miriel rose, and, having silently dressed herself, lifted the wooden latch and let herself out into the cold night air.

She made her way through the darkness, only fitfully lighted by an occasional glimpse of the moon, over whose face the clouds were driving rapidly; the wind sighed in the bushes, there was a sullen murmur of heavy swells on the sea behind her, but she heeded nothing as, drawing her cloak tightly around her, she sped onwards; up the open hillside to the old grey house at the top where Quitto still lay suffering.

"Oh, Quitto! anwyl, anwyl!" said the girl, flinging herself down on the ground beside the panting dog, "if only I could bear your pain for you, I would, I would!"

Quitto whined and tried to wag his bushy tail.

She laid her head close to his and passed her arm over him.

"We've been so happy together, Quitto, every day together! You understood me and I understood you. Oh, Quitto, anwyl, I will not leave you, I will stay with you!"

The dying dog even in his pain managed to lick the cheek that was so close to him.

The hours sped on, the night wind was cold, the gloom and darkness often complete, but the girl thought nothing of this, her whole being absorbed in pity and love for the creature who had been her friend and companion for years. She had never known what it was to have a human companion outside Doloer, had scarcely ever conversed with one of her own age. She had seen lads and lasses in the farms of the neighbourhood, but they had never shown any desire to make more than a passing remark, or to ask an inquisitive question about the "mad woman" at Doloer, and Miriel, with a reticent shyness, had shrunk into herself, and had returned contentedly to the society she found on the hillside and shore, the sheep, the dogs, her two goats, the larks, the thrushes, the seagulls, and numerous other "brothers and sisters." And now her oldest and best friend was dying alone and in pain, was it anything wonderful that her tender heart was torn with longing grief! and that she heeded not the darkness, the cold, nor the wind? At last in the dim grey of the morning Quitto showed signs of increasing difficulty in breathing, and Miriel passed her arm gently under his head, and looked into the fast-darkening eyes with words of pitying love. When at last he lay stiff and still before her, she burst into a torrent of tears. The mystery of Death was upon her, and the young fresh spirit shuddered and shrank from its sadness.

"I will dig his grave," she said, and hurried down the slope, returning shortly with a spade and mattock.

She was strong and healthy, and had soon dug a resting-place for her friend in the corner which he himself had chosen to die in. When it was deep enough and long enough, she lifted the heavy dog with difficulty, and, laying him tenderly down, stood a moment hesitating, then drew from her neck the muslin kerchief which she wore, and,

spreading it over him, began to shovel in the loose soil with many tears and loving words. When all was done and the sods laid over the new earth, she turned thoughtfully away, and half-way down the slope was greeted by another friend. "Tiger," the mill dog from over the moor, raced over the grass to meet her; bounding, bowing, barking, he jumped up to her face. "Not to-day, Tiger bach," she said sadly; "I cannot play to-day," and the dog, missing his usual warm greeting, turned away rather dejectedly. "Come to-morrow, Tiger," she called after him; "we must get used to sorrow thee know'st."

At breakfast she said nothing of the night's experience, for she had learnt that her great love of the animal creation was something of which other people disapproved, or at least treated with an indulgent smile of amusement.

The months sped on, bringing little outward change to the quiet lives at Doloer, only Matti grew paler and thinner, and ever the cruel repression and self-denial grew more rigorous though more secret. The passion of penitence and self-abasement grew stronger as she felt the loosening of the cords which bound her to earth; not a tender emotion but was schooled and clipped of its wings, not a taste for refinement and delicacy but was checked and controlled; the coarsest food, the roughest clothing she took as her share, and all with a smile of content on her lips and a lavish love and tenderness for everyone else's weakness, which made, in the sorrow-stricken home, a path of brightness for Miriel's young life and a cosy nest of comfort for Gwen.

CHAPTER III

A LONELY SHORE

A FEW days later on, Doctor Dan and Deio, after numerous divergences across fields, through shallow streams, and up lanes leading to cottage or hamlet, once more reached the broad high road running along the brow of the bare hills which bordered the sea coast. They had scarcely driven half a mile along its course, however, when a girl with wind-blown yellow hair called loudly to them as they drove rapidly past her. They heard the voice, but took no heed, thinking it the ordinary greeting of the countryside children, and were quickly nearing a curve in the road which would take them out of her sight entirely, when the girl, with a pucker on her white forehead, seemed to come to a sudden determination, for she quickly climbed the low bank that divided the road from the moor, and, running through the gorse and heather, reached the further point of the curve before the doctor and Deio. Here the bank was lower, and she had no difficulty in leaping over it at a bound, arriving on the road just a yard or two in front of Samson, who resented the interruption to his rapid trot by swerving violently aside, and all but upsetting the two occupants of the gig. There was a short, startled expletive from Doctor Dan as he sprang out of the trap, and, seizing the girl by the shoulder, he shook her, though not roughly.

"How dare you, child! Did you want to kill us?" and he shook her again, while Deio got out to pat and coax the angry, restive horse.

The girl's grey eyes looked fearlessly into his.

"I called and you wouldn't stop, so I ran across the field, but anw'l! I did not think Samson would start like that."

"Never do that again," said the doctor, shaking his whip at her.

As soon as he had loosened his grip of her blue gown she approached the insulted horse, and with words of endearment passed her arm round his neck. For a moment he put back his ears and drew up his lip, showing the formidable teeth, and Deio excitedly bade her desist.

"Back, girl!" cried the doctor, "he bites. Do you want to be hurt yourself?"

But Samson was already showing signs of amiability; he whinnied and arched his neck, while the girl, with perfect confidence, drew his head towards her and breathed into his nostrils. The effect was marvellous and Doctor Dan looked on surprised.

"He won't hurt me," said Miriel, for it was she; "we are old friends, and we've spent many an hour together on the hillside. You bought him from Essec Hughes of Llanpellan."

"Well, what do you want with me? Who is ill?"

"Nanti Matti," said Miriel, withdrawing her arm from Samson's neck. "She's very ill."

"Nanti Matti? What, Matti Lloyd of Doloer?"

The girl nodded; there were tears in her eyes. Deio climbed clumsily into the gig and the doctor followed.

"Which way?" he said.

"This way," said Miriel, pointing to the smooth turf between the furze bushes. "There's no road."

"No! I remember."

"No, no," said Deio, "that's no otts," and he turned the horse's head towards the low bank. This was nothing for Samson. He took it with a will, and the light gig jerked over the bank on to the moor beyond, where Miriel ran

before them, piloting them through the heather and between the furze bushes. They went down the slope noiselessly and steadily, for Samson knew his way well and seemed pleased once more to tread his native heath. Arriving at Doloer, the doctor alighted, Miriel holding the little gate of the cwrt open.

"You can drive on, Deio, to Llanpellan, Sarneithin and Dolwen; leave the medicine and say I will come to-morrow. There's not much the matter with any of them."

Deio nodded. There was a mile or two between each of these houses, and the nearest was two miles off, but that was nothing to Deio or Samson, both accustomed to the long and devious ways of a country practice. Doctor Dan followed the girl in through the porch, and Matti, waiting on the settle under the big chimney, trembled as she heard the firm footstep.

No cushion supported her weary head, no footstool rested the tired feet, no screen kept out the keen March wind which swept in at the open door.

Miriel had offered all three, but Matti had shaken her head with "No, de-an, there is no need."

The thick coils of her hair had escaped from the restraining cap; her lustrous eyes were surrounded by deep hollows; the dazzling white teeth were still there, and the hectic flush on the cheeks simulated the healthy roses that had once bloomed there. Her hands lay listlessly on her lap, her fingers picking at the threads of her coarse apron.

For a moment Doctor Dan stood transfixed; his sudden entrance into the subdued light of the penisha had perhaps blinded him. Matti's fluttering breath could be heard in the stillness while the doctor took both her hands in his. For another moment neither spoke, but gazed at each other in silence, and in silence he took the chair beside her, while, turning her head away, the tears welled over

in her eyes and coursed after each other slowly down her cheek.

"Fifteen years, Matti; 'tis a long time."

"Yes, a long time!" was all her answer, for all had been said between them years ago. The last word had been spoken, the last petal had been shred from as fair a flower of love as had ever bloomed in this cold world; for then Matti Lloyd had returned to her old home, to the parents whose hearts she had broken, to the sister whose reason had fled, to the faithful lover whom she had deserted. Penitent and crushed she had returned, her heart filled to overflowing with the desire of self-immolation at the shrine of repentance and duty, prepared for every wound that could be inflicted upon her, pressing close to her heart the barbed stings of insults and taunts, rejoicing in any degradation that might be heaped upon her, desirous only of bearing and enduring for the rest of her life. Above all things, Dan Griffiths's tender pity and forgiveness had touched her with a deep remorse. She knew well that her love for him was undying and strong as it had ever been, but she had put away from her his generous offer of continued friendship, and turned her face with resolute firmness towards the path of expiation and endurance.

"Yes, 'tis a long time; you are right," said the doctor, at last, when the first awkwardness of the meeting was over. "Every Friday, when I have seen the market-women come down the hill to town, I have wondered whether you would send for me, and, as you did not send, I hoped you were well; but there I fear I was mistaken," and he looked pityingly at the frail figure before him, and, putting on a professional air, he laid his fingers on the languid pulse.

The black cat purred on the hearth, the old clock ticked in the corner, while Doctor Dan silently read the signs of fast-approaching death in the woman whom he had loved

with all the strength of a first love, and who had repaid that love by deceit and desertion. It was long ago, the bitterness was dying out of his life, and only the tender memories returned at the sight of the dying woman, the shadow and wreck of her former self.

"Why didn't you send for me sooner?" he asked. "I would have come at any moment."

"Oh, yes, I know! You are kind and good as ever, Dan. But how could I, how would I dare, to send for the man I had injured so much? I would not have sent for you now, only I wanted to make it plain to you before I died how I came to do you such a cruel wrong."

"You explained it all to me fifteen years ago, Matti. I know that *the serpent* beguiled you, and I forgave you then, as I do now, fully and entirely."

"But listen, listen, Dan! I want to tell you everything."

"But you are talking too much, 'merch i; you will be tired."

At the word "'merch i" Matti hid her face in her hands. She had never expected to hear that word from him again.

"Dan! I thought when I saw you last that, in spite of all, you still loved me?"

"I did, Matti, or I could not have forgiven you."

"Well, well! I feared for myself that the great temptation of dwelling upon your faithful love might be turning me aside from the hard path that I had determined to walk in, and I wanted you to forget that I was still living, so that you might be free to find someone more worthy than me to fill your heart, and so I never made a sign nor sent for you, though God knows I have often been in sore need of help. Well, it was half in fun that I went on board the *Hawk* that night; it was bright moonlight, and there were herrings in the bay. 'Come out and see the herrings,' he said, 'they are flashing like silver in the

moonlight.' And I went, leaving Gwen in the parlour waiting for him, and knowing that you were away and would not be back till the next day. For six months he had courted me, Dan; deceiving you and Gwen, oh! so cruelly. I cannot think what made him fancy me, but I think Gwen was too good and wise for him, and I was wild and wicked and more ready for any folly; but oh! I little thought that night, when he helped me up the side of the *Hawk*, that I would never leave it again until I came back a year afterwards, my heart broken, my name disgraced, my honour gone! For long he had tried to entice me to sail away with him. He said we would fly over to Cork and be married there, and, out in the moonlight, with the herrings glittering round us and the soft wind singing in the cordage, I consented. Oh, Dan, I was mad! I was deserted by my good angel, or, perhaps, I thrust her from me. We could not land at Cork, for a sudden storm came on. Before morning the wind blew furiously and the ship sped on; and then I saw that already I had lost my good name, my character, all that is most dear to a woman; and long before we reached that far-off foreign land, where we sailed for a cargo of fruit, my sinful passion had died in ashes, for I saw him as he was—a weak and selfish man; and I saw too, Dan, that his real love was Gwen's and not mine, but that did not grieve me, except for her sake. He honoured her and despised me, and no wonder! I compared him with you, Dan, and I awoke and saw how wicked I had been, how false to you, how cruel to poor Gwen. When we returned to Spain, worn out with my tears and my anger, he offered to marry me, to buy me a home there, and to return there after every voyage; but I refused, I showed him the contempt I felt for him, and I bade him return to Gwen, whose heart his cruel conduct, and my unprincipled deceit, I knew must have broken. Oh! there's thankful I was one morning when I saw in the docks the little *Lark*

ready to sail for Bristol and for dear Caer-Madoc. I slipped on board, and the captain was kind to me and brought me home, and you know all the rest, Dan; my darling sister insane, my beloved mother dying of a broken heart, and my father, so proud of his old family and his good name, quite crushed under the disgrace I had brought upon him. What are fifteen years of penance compared with my dreadful sin? What is a life-long remorse to weigh in the balance against all the misery I caused? I have devoted my life to serve Gwen, but I have not been allowed to see the light of reason return to her eyes. I have lived within six miles of you, but have never sought to see you. I have a strange feeling that God will forgive me, but, at the same time, I feel that my punishment is not yet over—will never be over until Gwen's reason returns. I will be gone to the spirit-land, but I will know, oh! I will know. When my prayers have been answered, and when that time comes, Dan, you may hope, at least, that I am at peace and forgiven."

"Lass!" said Doctor Dan, a humid tenderness in his eyes and a strange huskiness in his voice. "'Tis weakness of body makes you so despondent. God is gracious to the penitent; and if I, a mortal man, can forgive, as I do, so completely, think you He is less merciful than a man?"

Again there was a long silence.

"Where is he, that devil?" said Doctor Dan at last. "Never returned to Hafod y bryn, has he?"

Matti shuddered.

"No, no. Would I be here, do you think, if he was so near? No, I could not breathe the same air with him. He is somewhere up in Merioneth, he and his two sons; his wife was dead, you know, before that old time, although he was so young. I don't want to hear or talk of him, my time is too short."

Her voice had grown weaker, and her breath more fluttering.

"No more, then, 'merch i," said Doctor Dan, gently.

"Only this, Dan; Jones, the lawyer, sends our money regularly by Stivin Storrom."

"Yes, yes, I know."

"But he never comes to look after us, and I wanted to see you once, to ask you to come here sometimes and see poor Gwen and Miriel."

"I will," he said, holding her hand in his. "Be easy about that. No harm shall come to them while I live. You can trust me?"

"Yes! I am quite easy about them now."

"Where's the little girl?" he asked; for Miriel was out among the daffodils, milking her goats.

"If you call at the door, she will hear you;" and standing on the cobble stones in the cwrt, he looked round for some sign of her, and called loudly, "Miriel! Miriel!"

"Here I am," said the girl, coming into the cwrt, with her milking pail resting on her hip, the two goats following close behind her.

"Off you go, Kit and Brythen!" and, laying down her pail, she shoo-o-d them away with her apron. "Tea for Nanti Matti? Yes, indeed, I'm sure she wants it, and the kettle is boiling," and "on hospitable thoughts intent" she was soon clattering her tea-cups, and cutting thin slices of bread and butter from the flat barley loaf.

It was a golden hour for Matti when Doctor Dan sat chatting beside her, as in the long past, happy days, even bringing her cup of tea, and setting it on the little round table at her elbow.

"It is time to wake Nanti Gwen," said Miriel, passing into the penisha, and leaving her visitor somewhat perturbed in mind; for what should he say to Gwen? The woman whom he had known as the beauty and the pride of the countryside! What would he feel? What would she feel? And as she entered the room, guided by Miriel, he rose embarrassed, and advanced a few steps to meet

her; but as the pale, marble face approached, the blue eyes vacant and dreamy, he stood aside and silently let her pass on to her chair by the fire.

"Dear God! Is it possible?" he said below his breath. "She was so lovely!" And Matti, overhearing him, said, "And now you see what I have made of her."

Miriel patted the cushion behind her head, and, placing a footstool under her feet, shifted the tea-table more conveniently near her, and brought from the cupboard a tiny wheaten loaf, and cut from it a few thin slices, which she placed on Gwen's plate, a few more she put on Doctor Dan's plate, and then sat down with pride at the little tea-tray.

"You must not mind Gwen," said Matti. "She does not notice you, she notices nothing. She is well in health, and knows nothing of her sorrow—that is my only comfort."

Doctor Dan was more shocked than he allowed himself to appear, and, moreover, he was dissatisfied at the evident petting of Gwen to the utter neglect of her sister.

"Where is your Aunt Matti's footstool?" he said rather severely to Miriel, who was busy at the tea-table, "and a cushion for her to sit upon, and another to rest her head on? You will get me all those when she has finished her tea."

"Oh! Nanti Matti, do you hear him? He says just what *I* say, and is sure to know best—that you ought to have all the little comforts that you heap upon Nanti Gwen—but she won't," she said, spreading out both her palms before the doctor. "Nothing but barley bread—no bacon for dinner, only cawl—no footstool, no cushion; nothing but cruelty and hardness for herself—and all the love and kindness for me and Nanti Gwen," and rising from the tea-table she flung her arms round the neck of the convicted Matti, saying, "Oh! you know. You know I am telling the truth. You are a hard, cruel woman to yourself. I don't know why—but you are!"

"Nonsense, 'merch i! Go and drink your tea, and pour out a fresh cup for Gwen."

When Doctor Dan rose to go, he held Matti's hands with a still graver look than when he entered.

"I understand what you have been doing, Matti. You have worn yourself out in the prime of life; you have ruined the splendid health which God gave you; you have punished yourself with unrelenting sternness. But whether you have done right or not, I will not dare to judge. Good-bye! I hear Deic and Samson outside. I will come again to-morrow afternoon, and bring you a restorative."

Matti was exhausted, and could only answer, "Good-bye, Dan, and God bless you!"

"Promise me to go to bed at once," said the doctor, as he left the house. And she did, and when the next day dawned, and Miriel woke with a sudden fright, as if someone had called her, she found Nanti Matti lying white and still beside her; more white and more still even than Gwen.

CHAPTER IV

AT REST AT LAST

On the next afternoon Doctor Dan came again, and the creaking of his gig as he alighted apprised Miriel of his arrival. She came running out of the little gate to meet him with a sorrow-stricken face.

"What's the matter?" said the doctor, sternly, with one foot on the gig step.

"Nanti Matti is dead," said the girl, bursting into a gust of tears, with her apron to her eyes.

Deio gave vent to something between a grunt and a groan and looked straight out to sea, carefully avoiding his master's eyes, who turned without a word and followed Miriel into the house.

In the chimney corner Gwen was sitting, dainty and fresh, busily spinning at her phantom wheel. If the room had been sad and depressing the day before, to-day it was doubly so. The chairs, the hearth, the darkened window, everything seemed to call for the loving being who had so long filled the place with brightness and tenderness for those around her.

"What will I do? What will I do?" said the lonely girl, leaning her arms upon the white-washed walls, and hiding her face on them. "Oh! Nanti, Nanti, Nanti!"

"Don't cry," said the doctor in a hard voice. "Tell me how it was;" and Miriel between her sobs tried to tell her story.

"She went to bed after you were gone, and then I put

Nanti Gwen to bed too, and shaded the window and folded away the blue silk quilt, just as *she* had taught me to do, and then she kissed me and said, 'Good-night, dear heart, twill be a fine day to-morrow, and she can gather daffodils.' And I have!" added Miriel, with a fresh burst of tears. "Then I went to sleep, and never awoke until somebody called me in the morning, and there she was, lying quite still at my side. I kissed her cheek, and it was so cold!"

"Who called you?"

"I don't know," said Miriel, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Nanti Matti perhaps, or mother, or some other kind spirit."

"Umph!" said the doctor, rising. "Where is she?"

Miriel opened the door of the bedroom, and there in the carved fourpost bed, one of the relics of Tygwyn, Mattie Lloyd lay cold and white, a smile as of placid content on her lips.

The luxuriant hair streaked with grey lay in thick coils on the pillow, one hand lay across her chest, in it a bunch of faded roses tied with an equally faded blue ribbon.

At her feet, and on every available space, were masses of daffodils, or, rather, the single pale Lent lilies which grew so abundantly over the slope in the early spring. Doctor Dan stood looking down with grave eyes and hard-pressed lips.

"Who put those faded flowers in her hand?" he asked.

"She did herself," said Miriel. "I found her just like that. She must have got out of bed to fetch them, for I found the drawer open. She often did get up in the night, and went out on the hillside or down on the shore."

Doctor Dan said nothing, but stooped to look at a slip of paper pinned on the blue ribbon. "Go and see if your Nanti Gwen wants anything," he said, closing the door gently as the girl obeyed him, and in a little while he

joined her in the penisha. "Tell me more, child," he said, looking down into the glowing culm fire.

"There is nothing more to tell," said Miriel. "Only Mali Storrom took the flowers away, and put a Bible in her hand, and screwed her hair tight up under her cap, but I took it off and put the flowers back again. Must I alter her?"

"Don't touch her," said the doctor. "Let her be buried like that."

At this moment Stivin Storrom and Mali came in, "Thunder and Lightning" as Miriel called them when she was in a more playful mood than to-day. Stivin's burly form filled up the doorway as he entered. A quantity of rusty red hair formed quite a protecting headgear of itself; indeed, he seldom wore any other. His face was as red as his hair, and his voice no words can describe; hoarse and rough to the last degree, loud as if he were shouting in one of the storms from which he took his name. As soon as the storm wind began to raise the waters of the bay into angry waves, Stivin Storrom was in his element, on the alert to save life or to haul in the wreckages which so often strewed the edges of the bay. Never a boat went out to a ship in distress but Stivin Storrom was in her. Never a night so dark nor a wind so fierce that Stivin was not ready to turn out of bed and rush into the very eye of the storm; like the stormy petrel, he seemed at home in the fury of the elements, and the roar of his voice even the strong north wind could not drown.

Mali, on the contrary, was pale and thin, keen-witted and sharp-tongued, devoted to her Mistresses Matti and Gwen, whom she had served in the old days at Tygwyn, having married from there and settled with Stivin Storrom in their tiny hut leaning on the side of Doloer, and great had been her delight when the "dear ladiss" took refuge in the empty house beside her.

"Why didn't you tell me Matti Lloyd was ill?" said Doctor

Dan, looking sternly at the shock-headed man. "Every week you came to Tregarreg to fetch their money, and neither you nor Jones, the lawyer, ever breathed a word of her illness."

"She wouldn't let me," rumbled Stivin, in the depths of his chest. It was an attempt to soften his voice in the presence of death. He was never known to have made such an attempt before. "She wouldn't let me. 'Never you tell, Stivin, anyone at Tregarreg that I am ill,' she used to say. 'What! not the doctor?' says I, because I knew how it had been between you and her long ago. 'No, not even the doctor,' she was saying, 'nor anybody'; and, of course, I had to obey the mistress."

"No 'of course' in it at all," said Mali, shortly and sharply, "and if thee hadn't been a stupid dunderhead thee'd have told the doctor long ago."

"Why didn't thee take a journey to Tregarreg and tell him thyself, then?" roared Stivin, giving up the attempt to modulate his tones.

"Highsht—sh—sh—sh!" said Mali, laying hold of his shoulders and unceremoniously pushing him out into the sunshine. He made no resistance, for the courage and the voice which defied the fiercest storms were subdued in the presence of the sharp-tongued Mali.

When they had gone the doctor looked thoughtfully at the girl who, having dried her eyes, was patting Gwen's cushions and otherwise attending to her comforts.

What a life lies before this child, he thought. What a saddening, depressing atmosphere is around her. Poor thing! Poor thing! "'Tis Friday to-day, the funeral will be on Monday," he said aloud. "Have you any black clothes to wear?"

"No," said Miriel, "I won't go to the funeral. I will stay with Nanti Gwen. I cannot leave her. Nanti Matti would like me to stay."

"Then, Monday, two o'clock, in Glanberi churchyard. I

will see to it all; I and Mali Storrom. See that she is buried just as she is, her hair like that, and the roses in her hand. Do you hear, child?" for Miriel's apron was over her face again.

"Yes," she whispered. Somehow she did not mind the doctor's hard, dry voice.

"I will come on Monday," he said, turning back at the door; "but will not return here from the churchyard. Next week I will come and see you."

It was not without great reluctance that Mali Storrom conceded the point of the Bible and cap when placing Matti Lloyd in her coffin. "Dir anw'l! 'Tis a shame," she said. "My sweet mistress to be buried like a heathen with her hair all flying about and a bunch of old flowers in her hand!" The blue ribbon that tied them, and the scrap of paper pinned to them, especially shocked her, though, perhaps, had she been able to read the few words that the latter bore, in faded brown writing, she would have been less indignant, for they would have recalled to her the happy days at Tygwyn, when she and Stivin, then young and romantic, had smiled sympathetically when Dan Griffiths and her young mistress had passed them in the gloaming, too intent upon their lovers' talk to notice the other pair of lovers hiding in the brake. It would have recalled to her the loving messages she had carried, and the stolen interviews which she had connived at in the old time past, but she could not read, so Miriel alone knew what those faded words expressed—"For Matti f'anwylid! from her true lover, Dan Griffiths."

Yes, when the funeral had left the house, the muffled tread of the bearers and the rumble of the carts and gigs had died away, she had sat by the fire, Nanti Gwen beside her crooning and spinning as usual, and had thought and wondered and understood, for she was not so much a child as she appeared, and the sorrowful circumstances surrounding her young life had given a somewhat thoughtful colour-

ing to her mind, though they had been quite unable to quench her buoyant spirits. Chief of all, the impulse and sentiment which formed and moulded her life was the innate self-sacrifice, which she had inherited or learnt unconsciously from the being who had filled the place of mother to her. Sitting there in her favourite attitude, nursing her chin in her palm and gazing into the turf fire, a deep wave of pity surged through her heart as she realised that Doctor Dan had loved so much, and yet, in her memory, had never been near the object of his love until the hand of death was already upon her.

"Nanti Matti anw'l!" she said aloud. "What was the meaning of it? But you never told me, dear, so I will not ask; but I will do everything you would like me to do, if you were here;" and, rising, she set her face firmly to enter the room which for the last few days she had avoided as far as possible, with the natural shrinking of youth from the sight of death and decay. There was the empty bed; there were the daffodils in golden profusion, the dimmed light from the curtained window and the sickly atmosphere which so soon surrounds the dead. She drew up the blind and opened the window, and standing at the bottom of the bed looked firmly at its empty flatness.

"Nanti Matti anwyl!" she said, "your place is not here any longer, nor in the kitchen nor in the garden will I ever see you; but here!" and pressing her hands on her bosom she repeated—"It is *here* you will be kept warm for ever. Speak to me if you can, for I will always be listening," and she felt no longer so keen a sense of separation as she cleared away the daffodils and rearranged the room, but a sense of close communion with the loving being who had shielded her childhood and wrapped her life in tenderness until she had slipped into the "Beyond," which to Miriel was never far away.

Matti Lloyd's had been a "large funeral," an honour much appreciated it Wales; for although the sisters had

for years been buried in voluntary seclusion and had long been "by the world forgot," the news of her death had recalled to many minds her sad history and the honoured position which the old Tygwyn family had held in the district, so that cars and gigs and carts in great numbers had gathered on the road above the moor, Doctor Dan's alone making its way over the green turf to the garden gate, where all the company who came on foot had collected.

In a country neighbourhood there are no such things as private affairs, for in the sparsity of subjects of interest, every event, even to the minutest detail, is chronicled, so that there was not one of that sombre throng who was not fully aware of the doctor's connection with the dead woman's past; but not the movement of a muscle, nor a sign of perturbation, enlightened them concerning his inward feelings as he passed into the house and came out again into the morning sunshine, the long, black hat-band his only sign of mourning.

At the graveside he stood apparently unmoved, and Deio, waiting for him at the lych gate, with Samson impatiently pawing his disapprobation, had turned back the apron of the gig without a word, his master stepping in and driving off in silence.

They had driven quite a mile before Deio made his first remark.

"Well, she's gone, pwr thing, and a good thing, master! She's been fifteen years dying, whatever!"

The doctor whipped up his horse; Samson leaped forward resenting the unwonted lash, and perhaps it was the curbing of his temper that engaged Doctor Dan's attention so much as to prevent his answering Deio's remark.

And so Matti Lloyd passes off the stage of our tale, and if we have not entered very minutely into the details of her past life, her sin and her sorrow, it is of no consequence, for she has gone with all her weight of trouble,

her bitter shame and penitence, to the wider mercy of that higher life, where we can safely leave her.

The first days of loneliness pressed heavily on Miriel's spirits. At every hour and every turn in her simple household duties, she felt keenly the absence of the friend who had hitherto filled and rounded her young life; but a healthy mind and a vigorous frame soon helped her to throw off the abiding sense of depression and loss. The chief spring of her happiness was love, the impulse to help, to shelter; and in her peculiar surroundings she found sufficient scope for the exercise of these principles. When in a few days the small sum of money left in the corner of the old bureau had come to an end, worldly and material questions arose in her mind, and she looked blankly round for an answer to their pressing pertinence.

Mali Storrom was called in for consultation. "What will I do, Mali fach, there is no more money? None in the house and only one loaf in the cupboard."

"'Merch fach i!" said Mali, "what will you do? Stop you! I will bring you a barley loaf to-morrow when I bake; but that will not do for Gwen."

"No, no; and a chicken for her I must have. Oh, what will I do?" and she looked more puzzled and distressed than Mali had ever seen her before.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the latter, suddenly brightening, "we'll send Stivin to Jones, the lawyer's, as if nothing had happened. Perhaps he'll hand him the money without noticing that Matti is dead!"

"That's nonsense," said Miriel. "Of course he will notice that Nanti Matti is dead, because wasn't he here at the funeral? It isn't much I would want certainly, but a little I must have," and she sighed as, for the first time in her life, the necessity for money made itself felt.

"Well there's nothing else to be done," said Mali. "And I'll try my plan, whatever. Be bound he'll pay the money without saying a word."

"Well, yes," said Miriel, with a pucker between her eyes. "Perhaps, as you say, he will give me the money that he used to send to dear Nanti Matti."

And next day, when Stivin returned from the market he entered the house as usual, and deposited with an air of great importance the small weekly sum which he had been accustomed to bring to Matti.

"There now!" said Miriel. "Well, indeed! I was afraid perhaps there would be no more money, but Mali is very clever."

"Oh! she's cute enough," said her husband, "and I did just as she told me—went straight into the office and didn't say nothing about Matti's death, and he said just the same as usual, 'You've come for the ladiss' money,' and he handed the little bag to me, and I put it in my pocket, and here it is."

"Well done, Stivin! What would I do without you and Mali, indeed?"

"Well! You'd have to go to market yourself; and 'tis about time you should begin to go there, I think. You're getting a fine slip of a girl," and he blustered out like a strong gust of wind, blowing and snorting like a porpoise, until even Gwen turned her head a little from her spinning, and looked after him.

So ways and means no longer disconcerted Miriel, but she was not quite satisfied with the ease with which Stivin had overcome her difficulties, and had some scruples about spending the money, fearing lest she ought first to remind the shrewd lawyer that Nanti Matti was dead. One day early in the following week, as she worked in the afternoon sun in the little sheltered garden, where the air was full of the scent of the lilac, and the humming of the bees, a click of the garden gate startled her, for on the soft turf she had not heard the wheels of Doctor Dan's gig as he came down the green slope. She flung away her tools, and ran to the cwrt to meet him, holding up an admonishing finger.

"Hush-sh-sh-sh!" was her first greeting, "Nanti Gwen is asleep; we must talk low and soft. There's glad I am to see you, because indeed I am feeling it strange to be here by myself, and many things are coming into my mind, and sometimes I don't know what will I do; and now here you are and I can talk about things," and she pushed the rush chair towards him.

"What is it, child?" said the doctor, gravely, for the sight of that empty house oppressed him; the rough stone floors, the white-washed walls, the thick oak rafters, the solemn clock in the corner, whose aggressive ticking seemed to thrust upon the humanity surrounding it, the continual impression of time's fleetness. "What things are entering your mind, child?" he asked again, and with a little less hardness in his voice, as he noted the slender childish figure, the clear creamy face with its grey eyes and crown of golden hair.

"Poor child! poor child!" was running through his mind. "What a life of misery will be hers!" but the tone of Miriel's voice was not suggestive of misery, as she laid before him the plans and resources so all important to her. Once or twice he stooped to stir the embers, to hide the smile of amusement which her words brought to his lips.

"Well, first you see, I must take Nanti Matti's place now, and do exactly what she would like me to do."

"Of course," said the doctor

"And there are a great many cares belonging to a house. There's Nanti Gwen, and the fowls, and the garden wanting to be set, and the daffodils all coming up in the leek bed where they oughtn't to be!"

"No doubt, no doubt, all very important!" and he smiled.

Miriel opened her grey eyes a little, astonished that the hard face could relax.

"But I think you are equal to the task of managing

this—" he was on the point of saying "this establishment," but checked himself with a little fear lest the girl might feel the sarcasm of the word.

Doctor Dan had no experience of "children" or their ways, and, moreover, had grown to feel a little resentful towards anything connected with the joys of home life, from which he felt himself completely cut off.

As he drove down the slope to Doloer that afternoon, it was a feeling of duty alone which led him to the house. It had been Matti's home, and within its white-washed walls were two beings whom she had loved and left to his tender mercy. For Gwen he felt the pitying interest of an old friendship, but the girl—the child—as he called her, was a troublesome encumbrance of which he would fain have been rid, did not his promise to Matti forbid it. What should he do with these two helpless beings? He feared that his self-imposed charge of them would entail a departure from the old groove into which his bachelor life had fallen, and the thought was distasteful to him. But though these were his inmost feelings, there was no hesitation in his mind as to the duty that lay before him. With regard to Gwen, his inclination ran in line with his duty, for had not both she and he been stricken by the same blow? And Matti's words, "when Gwen's reason returns, then you may feel I am happy and forgiven," returned to his mind with so much force that he determined to leave no stone unturned in the path of her restoration to the light of reason. It was not therefore a sympathetic or indulgent ear that he turned to Miriel's small troubles, and as she saw him look a little impatient, she hesitated, until Doctor Dan continued the subject.

"You will want money," he said, "but Mr Jones will continue to give you the usual weekly sum. Does she know how to manage money a little?"

This last question, asked in the third person, was intended as a little concession to the foolishly spoiling manner used

in speaking to children, and Miriel resented it at once From her aunt it came naturally, and had the charm of tenderness, but from Doctor Dan! It chafed and hurt her.

"Stivin Storrom has brought me the money as usual," she said, drawing herself up a little. "It is in Nanti Matti's drawer, and I will spend it as she did, and that will be sure to be right," and a little flush of offended pride coloured the generally pale face, adding to it the only charm that was wanting.

"True, 'merch i!" said the doctor, softening a little. "I have no doubt you will be all right. When you are puzzled about anything you can ask me. I will come often to see you, as I promised your Aunt Matti. But Gwen! when will she come in?"

"Now," said Miriel, "it is time;" and shaking up the silk pillow, and placing the footstool in readiness, she passed in through the heavy oak doorway.

"A wise little thing, no doubt," thought Doctor Dan. "I hope she won't give me much trouble. I will do my best for her whatever," and as Miriel returned, the tall, pale woman leaning heavily on her arm, he felt a wave of pity sweep over him for the elder woman, whom he remembered in the hey-day of youth and happiness. He rose in a kind of respectful attitude before such sorrow, the wreck of so fair a ship that had begun its voyage in the sunshine and calm, and had so soon been stranded upon the rocks of adversity. She seemed to take no notice of him, but arranged herself silently in her chair, placing her prettily-shod feet on the footstool which Miriel pushed towards her.

"A fine day, Gwen!" and the beautiful eyes glanced at him for a moment.

"Yes!" she answered in a far-away tone, and, leaning forward, she began to spin, and draw towards her the invisible thread which occupied her attention so continually.

"Strange!" said the doctor, turning towards Miriel. "Is she always thus?"

"Yes, always. Spinning when the sun is shining; spinning when the rain is falling; and spinning when the storms are roaring round the house."

"Suppose we move her work away?" he said, placing his hand upon the spot where the phantom wheel would stand. But he was not prepared for the effect which his action had upon Gwen. She became flurried and excited; the tears rose to her eyes and she wrung her hands in evident distress.

"Oh, don't!" said Miriel. "'Tis so seldom the tears are in her eyes."

"But I don't think it will hurt her," said the doctor. "Anything to move that stony calm!"

Gwen began to spin again, but rose excitedly from her chair, Doctor Dan trying in vain to soothe her.

"Stay!" said Miriel, approaching the little window and shading her eyes with her hand. "Why, here's the *Hawk!*" she said, "sailing into the bay, and here's Silvan Vaughan coming up the sands!" The effect was instantaneous. Gwen smiled and sat down, adjusted the braids of her hair, smoothed her apron, and began to spin again with a happy look of content.

"What do you mean by that?" said Doctor Dan, grasping the girl's shoulder almost roughly.

"I don't know," said Miriel, "but it always soothes her. Nanti Matti always said it, although I think she hated Silvan Vaughan—whoever he was. She used to turn white, whatever, white to the very lips; but she had to say it sometimes before Nanti Gwen would grow calm."

"Your Nanti Matti would wish you to forget that name, child."

"If it does Nanti Gwen good?"

The doctor's face took upon it the hard look which had somewhat softened during the last quarter of an hour.

"Well, no!" he said slowly. "If it does her good, say it when you please," and he rose and looked for his hat.

"Oh, stop! Stop and have tea. See! the kettle is boiling, and I have a fresh wheaten loaf made. 'Tis my first baking," she said, holding the crisp loaf towards him; "but 'tis very good, I think."

"No doubt," said the doctor; "but I have no time to stop. Good-bye! Be a good girl and take care of your aunt," and he left the house and rejoined the patient Deio, feeling that he had overcome the first step in a disagreeable duty.

CHAPTER V

PINCUSHIONS

On the market-day following his visit to Doloer, Doctor Dan passed through the crowded street of Tregarreg; where pigs and drovers ran foul of each other, and country farmers much impeded his progress by taking the opportunity of consulting him upon their ailments.

"'Tis my back, you see, is shockin' bad this month past," said Davy Jones, "and I was thinking, ser—"

"Yes, yes! I'll be driving by your house to-morrow, and I'll call in." And Davy would turn to his pigs feeling already better, while the doctor would manage to get a little further on his way.

At last he reached the narrow passage that led to the Pwrhouse, and made his way to one of the most dilapidated houses, only to find the door closed and the house empty.

"They are gone to the market, ser," said a red-haired woman who was making culm balls on her doorstep.

"Why, of course," said the doctor; "I forgot—come and see you to-morrow, Biddy, I can't stop now," and off again to the main street, where, at the corner of the market-place, he found Peggi Doll, the pincushion-maker.

It was in the darkest and most dismal of the Pwrhouse tenements that Peggi Doll lived with her husband, King Dai.

Nobody knew how Dai Morgan had gained his royal title, and nobody thought about it, for many years had

elapsed since, as a young man, he had returned to Tregarreg with a comrade from the war in which they had fought and both been wounded. His comrade had called him King Dai, and the name had stuck to him, why or wherefore nobody knew, and nobody cared, for His Majesty was silent and reserved, and, with his shilling a day to fall back upon, was independent of his neighbours, and even rich for the Pwrhouse.

He had lived alone for several years before he married Peggi Doll, the most ill-favoured, ill-tempered woman in the town. After her marriage she had become completely crippled by rheumatism, which by no means improved her temper. She wreaked her irritability upon her long-suffering husband, and made him a peg on which to hang the blame of every mischance that fell to her lot. She had grown yearly more crooked and more crabbed, and King Dai more stolid and silent. His tall form, the broad shoulders bending a little, seemed made for the curious burden which they so often bore, his white face and marble features showing no sign of any varying emotion.

As the years passed on it was evident that the wound of long ago had sapped his vital energy, and that paralysis was gradually turning that pale, silent figure into stone. He wove his straw mats incessantly in the chimney corner, and, when spoken to, would gaze unconsciously at the speaker for some time before he answered, while his wife, in the opposite corner of the hearth, crouched between the brilliant rags from which she made pincushions to sell in the market, and, when our story opens, Peggi Doll had become a little shrivelled cripple, who seemed to live only for invective and spleen. She walked on all fours, her veined and knotted hands clutching a little square stool of black oak, her inseparable companion; for on this she sat in her own chimney corner, or by its help crawled across the floor, using it as a kind of clog for her hands,

for, as the cripple used only the toes of her clutched-up feet in her peculiar progress, her hands took the place of an animal's forefeet.

As she sat upon her stool, surrounded by bits of cloth of every colour and hue, she formed a picture so curious and fantastic, that to see her once was never to forget her.

Across her shoulders she wore a square of scarlet flannel, and at the back of her head a beaver hat of the ordinary chimney-pot shape worn by men, its narrow brim quite eclipsed by the voluminous frills of her cap.

Sitting in the corner surrounded by her rags, as she bent over her gaudy bits of stuff, her chin resting upon her chest, it was evident that no other position was possible to her. Her black, beady eyes gleamed fiercely up in their endeavour to gain a straight view of their antagonist, for everyone was looked upon as a foe by Peggi Doll.

Certainly she bore no goodwill to any living creature, and in that little cramped bosom were locked the secrets of many lives, secrets which she preserved carefully until upon some provocation, fancied or real, she hurled them forth, and covered her adversary with confusion and discomfiture.

How she gained her knowledge was an unsolved mystery, but there were few dark passages in the lives of the Tregarreg people or their ancestors which were not known to her, consequently she was generally feared and avoided.

On market-days she had for many years occupied the same corner in the market-place, where she was an object of curiosity as well as terror to the street children, and one of compassion to their elders.

Regularly every Friday she was hoisted up to her husband's broad shoulders; here in her usual cramped position she was safe, for her little claw-like hands clutched tightly at his coat collar, while under her crooked knees King Dai passed his thick, strong walking-

stick, and, with his elbows hooked round it, he thus supported the full weight of her body.

In his right hand he carried her little square stool, while from his left, hung by their suspending tapes, a shower of brilliant pincushions, the product of her needle during the week; hearts and crescents, triangles and squares, scarlet, yellow, blue and green. These she sold at a penny a piece in the market-place, where, upon her arrival, she and her husband were invariably greeted with the laughter and jeers of the children, attentions which King Dai took no more notice of than a man of stone would have done, but which Peggi Doll bore in mind and repaid as the opportunity offered.

When little Ann Jones, who had laughed and jeered, and even tweaked at her shoes as she was borne to her corner, afterwards approached her demurely, and, timidly holding her penny at arm's length, asked for a pincushion, Peggi Doll would take the penny meekly enough, but in handing the pincushion would clutch at the little hand, and administer a sound cuff to the culprit, who would run away with a scream, half of fear and half of fun. Indeed, the excitement was relished by the children, and caused Peggi Doll to drive a brisk trade in pincushions.

King Dai stood all day in another corner of the market-place after he had deposited his little crooked wife on the opposite side of the square, a few straw mats which he had made for sale hanging from his neck and arms.

Everyone knew their price, and they were generally bought up before the market was over, though King Dai never spoke or offered his wares for sale, but stood like a marble statue, apparently caring little whether he disposed of them or not.

When evening came he approached his wife again, and once more hoisting her on his shoulders, carried her back to their dismal abode in the Pwrhouse lane, and as they trudged through the busy street, even those to whom they

were familiar objects looked after them with a smile of amusement or pity.

When Doctor Dan made his way to the market-place, Peggi Doll's figure, crouched in the corner and surrounded by her brilliant wares, was the first object to greet his eye, for the afternoon sun shone full upon her and picked out her scarlet mantle of flannel.

"Hast a pincushion for me, Peggi Doll? A pretty one now; this blue satin one with its silver pins will do!"

"Not a heart-shaped one this time, I suppose?" said Peggi, her keen black eyes peering up at him as well as her bent neck permitted.

"Oh! any shape. But what dost mean? I never bought a pincushion before of thee?"

"No?" croaked Peggi. "I thought thee did, sixteen years ago. Happen this will bring better luck," and she laughed a shrill, rasping laugh peculiarly her own.

"Ah, well!" said Doctor Dan, unmoved, "thee hast a good memory. Give me another, that yellow and green; I may as well give the child one too."

"Oh! there's a child in the business," thought Peggi, though she made no answer, further than to hand him the pincushions.

"I see Dai has nearly sold all his mats," he said pleasantly. "I'll call in to see you both to-morrow."

"As you please," said Peggi.

As he neared Hendyrafon, Doctor Dan fell into a brown study. "The little witch is right," he thought; "I remember the pincushion I bought for Matti."

He remembered too how she had hung it to her waistband, and said, with a mischievous smile, "Will I hurt you, Dan, when I stick my pins in it? as the witches say they do." Yes, he remembered it all, but there was no sign of it in his face or in his voice as he roused Betti Luke with a call for his dinner.

She was his only house servant, and as she had been at

Hendyrafon from his earliest childhood, it never entered his mind that it would be possible to remove her, although she was sometimes wilful and interfering. Her curiosity knew no bounds, and she considered a secret withheld from her, or a drawer or cupboard locked, a mortal affront; but her real affection for "the young master," which shone through even her most troublesome ways, her unselfishness and constant care of him and his household; all had endeared her to the man, who, having for many years withdrawn himself from the companionship of his old friends, had neither inclination nor opportunity for making new. So, when she brought in his simple dinner, he entertained her and himself with an account of Peggi Doll's eccentric ways.

"Oh, mishteer bach," she said, "don't you stop to talk to her, or she'll say something to make you miserable; I always take a good round to avoid her, or she'll ask me was it my grandfather or my great uncle was hanged for sheep-stealing? and once she asked me, 'had I any pieces of the cotton gown my mother was married in?' So take my advice, 'machgeni, and keep on the other side of the street."

Her master laughed, but agreed that Peggi Doll's nature had certainly more vinegar than honey in its composition, and he exhibited the two pincushions which he had bought of her.

"And yet," he said thoughtfully, "there must be some appreciation of the beautiful in her or she could not make these pretty things. 'Tis one for poor Gwen Lloyd," he said, "and one for the child."

"How old is the child?" asked Betti.

"Well," said the doctor, "she's really eighteen, I'm always forgetting."

"Bring her in some day, mishteer; I would like to see her, poor thing!"

"Well, perhaps," he said, "if she'll come; but I fancy

she has a will of her own, like you," and, leaving Betti chuckling, he went out to his gig which Deio had just brought out.

As we have said before, there was but little audible communion between Deio and his master, so they had reached the top of the moor which sloped down to Doloer, before they had spoken more than a word or two, on the badness of the roads and on Samson's "freshness." As they reached the top of the slope, a clear young voice came up on the sea wind, and, looking down, they saw it was Miriel roaming up the side of the moor in search of her goats, for it was milking time.

She carried her milking-pail under her arm, and woke the echoes with her song.

"Ts, ts!" said Deio, with a backward jerk of his head; "there's soon children forget! and old people too, they say! 'tis middle-aged people who are feeling the most!" after which philosophical remark he relapsed into his usual silence. But Deio's taciturnity did not deceive Doctor Dan; he knew that behind that weather-beaten face, and under that commonplace exterior, dwelt as warm a heart and as keen a mind as ever lived in a raw, untaught Celt, and that where he loved, as he did his master, he was more sensitive and sympathetic than many a man of refinement and education. True, his ignorance often led him to false or mistaken deductions, but not a shade of feeling affected his master that he was not quick to share and reciprocate.

"'Tis Gwen will be the heaviest care to you," he said, as they drew up at the little garden gate; "the girl is growing up and she will marry, but poor Gwen will always be the same."

"We don't know that," said the doctor, stopping with one foot on the step of his gig. "We are as ignorant of the future as Samson, or those goats; I am not without hope that she will recover."

Deio looked after his master as he entered the cwrt, and, with another jerk of his head, remarked, "Ts! ts!"

Miriel had evidently not noticed the gig as it crossed the soft turf, for she was still absent when the doctor entered the house, Gwen alone occupying the hearth.

"Good day, Miss Lloyd," he said, as much as possible adopting the hearty, light-hearted tones of long ago. "And where's Matti?"

For a moment she turned her still beautiful eyes upon him as if startled, and answered, "I don't know," before she turned again to her spinning.

"I have brought you a pincushion," continued the doctor, and he dangled the little ball of blue satin before her, hanging it over her fingers as she drew the thread towards her.

She let it hang for a moment, and then slipping it on to her waistband went on with her spinning, while Doctor Dan leant back in his chair and watched her thoughtfully.

When Miriel entered carrying her frothing pail he was still sitting silently observant.

Rousing himself, he turned his attention to the girl. Since it was his fate to be encumbered with her, he might as well, he thought, find out of what stuff she was made.

"I saw Samson and Deio at the gate, and there's glad I was," said Miriel; "'tis very nice to talk sometimes. I am talking a lot to Kit and Brythen, and to the fowls, and the bees, oh, a lot! for fear I will forget how to speak!" and she laughed and filled the old house with merry music.

"No fear of that, I fancy," said Doctor Dan.

"Well, indeed, I don't know. Oh, there's a pretty pincushion with Nanti Gwen; 'twas you gave it her?" and she smoothed the blue satin with a caressing touch. "There's kind you are to us!"

"Oh, 'tis only a penny, child," said the doctor, awkwardly. "Here's one for you, too," and he held it towards her.

"For me? Well, indeed, 'tis pretty. Will I hang it here?" and she hung it on a nail on the whitewashed wall. "Yellow and green, 'tis the colour of the daffodils."

"Well, 'tis; but hang it on your apron string and use it."

"Like this? yes! Perhaps you wouldn't like me not to use it. You will stop to have tea to-day? Oh, say yes, indeed, indeed!"

"Well, yes, if you like." And while she was busy with her preparations he had time to note that she was not so much a child as he had at first taken her to be.

"How old are you, Miriel?" he asked.

"There's odd," said the girl, her face kindling with pleasure and animation. "I am eighteen to-day, and you brought me a present. 'Tis the first present I ever had, except from Nanti Matti, of course." The last words were spoken in a low, almost reverent, voice. She bent her head over the wheaten loaf from which she was cutting the thin slices of bread and butter, and when at last she turned to place it on the table Doctor Dan saw a tear on the long lashes, though there was a smile on her lips.

"Will I give Nanti Gwen her tea first, as usual?" asked the girl.

"Well, of course, ladies first," said the doctor, and he smiled, one of those rare smiles that changed his face so completely, and, seconding Miriel's attentions, he held the plate for Gwen to help herself, which she did with a pleased smile as rare as the doctor's.

"Oh, here's nice it is," said Miriel, sitting down to do the honours. "Well, tell me, indeed, if I am not behaving properly, because Nanti Matti was often saying she was afraid I would forget I was a lady."

"You are behaving very nicely," said Doctor Dan, with an inward smile. "Did your Nanti Matti teach you to read?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "I can read and write. Nanti Matti was making me learn my books every night in the

winter. Look at them up there by the clock, but ach-y-fi!" she added, with a little *moué* of distaste, "I am not liking them—not much whatever—only one I like, and that is a story."

"What is it called?"

"Indeed, I don't know. It hasn't a cover, and no beginning and no ending, but it's beautiful, whatever. Next winter I will attend to my books again, the same exactly as if Nanti Matti was here." But to the doctor it was very evident that this employment would not be a labour of love.

When tea was over, and Miriel had pressed "just another cup" over and over again upon her visitor, and had made what she considered the proper inquiries as to whether his tea was to his liking, etc., etc., he rose, and, approaching the little bookshelf by the clock, took down one after another the dog-eared books which had done duty in Miriel's education—geography, grammar, spelling-book and Magnal's questions. There was a *Pilgrim's Progress* and an old Shakespeare, a few Welsh books and the much-treasured story. The doctor opened its ragged and musty leaves, but failed to decipher the time-stained title.

"Will I tell you the story?" said Miriel, observing that the doctor did not seem much impressed by his cursory peep into her favourite book, and, seating herself on the three-legged stool on the hearth, she nursed her knee and seemed ready to launch at once into the spirit of the romance, but she was interrupted by a loud "hello!" from the gate, for Deio had returned and was tired of watching the long white breakers that followed each other up the sandy beach.

"And how do you fill up your time, child? for you can't be always attending to Nanti Gwen and your household?"

"Oh, no; you see there is always Hafod, and I am never tired of that. The rooms are bare, and the windows are broken, there are only owls and bats there, but I am filling it with people, out of my own head, you know, and I am spend-

ing much of my time there"; but she stopped and hesitated, for a strange change had come over her visitor's face —the black brows were knitted, the lips pressed hard together.

"You spend much of your time at Hafod y bryn?" he said at last, looking gravely at the girl. "What would your Nanti Matti say to that?"

"She knew, and she was willing."

"What do you want in an empty house? But what am I saying? 'Tis well for you that it is empty, and if the real people who own that house were there I would forbid your entering it; but, I suppose, as you are only a child, you may do as you please."

"But I am not a child," said Miriel, "I am eighteen to-day; and why would you forbid me? I could not live without Hafod."

"Well, well, go on with your dreams, child; I won't awaken you." And he rose rather abruptly and went towards the door, looking back, however, to say,—

"You are very lonely, Miriel, and I don't want to be a bugbear to you, but real living friends will be better for you than the ghosts of Hafod." "Poor child," he thought, "I must not come between her and her simple pleasures if possible," and with the words, "I could not live without Hafod," ringing uncomfortably in his ears he passed out through the porch.

Miriel looked after him a little disconcerted; the tea had been so delightful. Even Nanti Gwen had smiled, and now a little shadow had fallen between her and her new friend. This was not to be borne, so rushing after him she hastily gathered a bunch of red and white roses, and, reaching the little gate just as Doctor Dan was stepping into his gig, she held them towards him. "Oh, take these, please, indeed, because I am sorry that I was not willing to give up Hafod, and oh, let me bring out some tea for Deio—I won't be a minute;" and the doctor, seeing

the eager look in the child girl's eyes, acceded to her request at once.

"Go on then, little woman," he said, "and make haste."

When she returned, bearing Deio's tea on a little tray, she looked wistfully in the doctor's face and said,—

"Will I stop going to Hafod y bryn then? I am willing."

"No, no, no," answered Doctor Dan, gathering up his reins. "Go where you please, Miriel; I am willing, too," and when the gig had driven up the slope she returned to the house comforted.

CHAPTER VI

DREAM FACES

It was scarcely to be wondered at that Miriel should have rebelled against the prohibition which threatened to deprive her of the pleasure she derived from her visits to the old house which stood up, grey and frowning, against the sky line. Every hour that she could spare from her household duties was spent in roaming through its empty rooms, or over the lonely shore.

She wandered through its bare passages with a happy smile, and peopled its empty rooms with imaginary beings, feeling even more drawn to the place since Quitto had chosen it to die in. In the chimney corner she pictured the head of the family, an old grey-haired harpist, sitting by the blazing turf fire, and drawing from his harp such strains as had never fallen on human ears. In and out of the living room passed forms who had become familiar to her by continual dwelling upon them, the busy housewife, the sons and daughters who did her bidding, the cattle in the sheds, the horses in the fields; but chief in interest to her was one, a girl of her own age, endowed with every charm of outward appearance and inward grace, whom she called Ann. She even went so far sometimes as to kindle a fire in one of the old cold grates, and drawing a log beside it she would hold converse with this creature of her own imagination. And if this conduct appears too childish and unreasonable for a girl of eighteen, remember that Miriel had grown up in an atmosphere of trouble and unrest, from

which her young heart was forced to escape, by creating for itself a world of love and romance. Matti had sometimes chided the girl for her infatuation for the old house, wondering what she found so attractive in a place that for her had nothing but disturbing associations; but when she saw the tears rise to the eyes and the colour to the cheeks, with the fear of being forbidden to enter it, she would call to mind that it was at least a harmless pleasure, and she ceased to make any objection to the girl's strange fancy. So Miriel continued to haunt the place, to talk to Ann, to listen to the old man's harp, and to fill the air with her own songs and plaintive Welsh hymns. These had been more frequent than the songs of late, since Nanti Matti's death.

On the day succeeding Doctor Dan's last visit, she had scarcely installed Mali Storrom in the rush chair beside Nanti Gwen, as caretaker and entertainer, before she was running up the slope to Hafod, singing as she went. It was a grey, gloomy day, and the ivy which had overgrown the walls swayed in heavy clumps in the wind that whistled round the place.

A party of rooks rose from the dark branches, cawing defiance as she entered, her usual fancies crowding thick upon her. She would light a fire! She would sit on her log and tell her phantom friend all that Doctor Dan had said, and how nearly she had been robbed of her visits to Hafod; but entering the living room, what was her astonment to hear decided and very real sounds of grating and tapping! Looking round, she saw at the deep-set window a man who worked with chisel and mallet and filled the old house with echoes. Miriel stood still for a moment in utter surprise. She had never seen a human being in the place before, except the shepherd from Llancithin, who sometimes came there in search of a stray cow or sheep.

"What are you doing?" she asked, when there was a moment's pause in the tapping.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the man, startled. "What am I doing? Glazing the window, b't shwr."

"What for?" asked Miriel again.

"What for? To keep the wind out. Who are you, then?"

"I am Miriel Lloyd, Doloer."

"Perhaps, indeed! Poor Gwen Lloyd's niece?"

"Yes," said Miriel, with a nod. "But what are you putting glass in the windows for?"

She dreaded to hear his answer; anyway, it would mean so much to her.

"Why? Because there's people coming to live here. They're coming next week. There's young people, two sons and a niece, I think. So you'll have company."

But Miriel was already turning away. She must have time and quiet to think before she could realise the impending change, and she went into the barn, where the only light came in a blue shaft through the finger hole under the latch. Here she opened the upper half of the clumsy door, and letting in the daylight turned to look round at the familiar sight of the brown beams, the broken plough in one corner, the heap of dried branches in the other, as we *do* look round with newly-awakened eyes as it were, at a sudden change of circumstances, and already to Miriel the place seemed altered. What did it mean? Other people to walk through the stone passages! A stranger to let the light in on the old barn! And who? she wondered —what would they be like? Two boys!—she had never consorted with them, no boy had ever come within the circle of her acquaintance. And the girl? Would it be Ann? the friend and companion who had been so real to her. And Quitto lying outside under the wall! No one would know he was there, no one would think of him! and, unable to grasp the full meaning of the news she had heard, she ran breathlessly down the slope, anxious to share her exciting information with somebody. She stopped at

the shanty occupied by Stivin and Mali; the former was sitting at his lathe surrounded by a heap of wooden bowls and platters.

"Stivin bach! What d'ye think?" she said, standing at the doorway with a pale face and wide-open eyes. "Oh, what *do* you think? Somebody's coming to live in Hafod y bryn!"

"Somebody—coming—to live at Hafod!"

"Yes, indeed, then! A man is there now putting glass into the windows," and she ran on to her own house door, leaving Stivin to assimilate the new idea by means of repeating the same words—"To live at Hafod y bryn! Somebody coming to live there! A man is putting glass into the windows!"

It was a tremendous event, and he could only scratch his red head in the contemplation of it and lay aside his work.

"Mali!" called Miriel, as she entered the doorway to find Gwen spinning as usual and Mali knitting beside her. "Mali, I have wonderful news for thee. Somebody's coming to live at Hafod!"

"What's the lo's fach talking about? To live at Hafod y bryn? Who then? What's his name?"

"Oh! I don't know, but he has two boys and a niece, and a man is mending the windows for them. Next week they are coming. But how can I live without Hafod?"

"Well, in my deed, I think 'twill be a good thing for you, child; there will be company for you. They will want bowls and platters whatever, and baskets too, be bound!"

She gathered her knitting together and went home to tell Stivin what he already knew, while Miriel turned to her household duties with a flushed face and sparkling eyes. The fowls must be fed and the goats milked whatever happened, but it seemed quite strange that the waves broke as regularly as usual on the beach, and the bees hummed as

placidly as ever in the garden. She prepared the evening meal and laid it neatly on the table in the chimney corner, but was too excited to eat much herself, and after the sun had set and she had drawn the quilt over Nanti Gwen sleeping peacefully, as she always did till morning, she went out into the cool grey twilight, to roam over the broad, flat sands, to look again and again at the old walls above the moor, and think over the wonderful event that was about to happen.

So unvaried and monotonous had her existence been hitherto, that a far less momentous event would have raised a vortex in the placid lake of her life.

However, she had still a week in which to dream and weave her own fancies, and on the next day she once more turned her face to the moor, both Stivin and Mali urging her to go and seek for further signs of the expected arrivals.

Hafod y bryn was one of those primitive dwellings a few of which still linger on from the past, where, as you enter the house door, you are confronted by a row of cows and oxen, for one side of the passage is open to the "boidy" or cow-house, only separated from it by a strong wooden rail, behind which the cows stand each tied to her post.

On the other side is the kitchen or living room, and opening out of that, the guest-room, or the "preachers'-room," as it was called, in allusion to the old-fashioned hospitality always eagerly pressed upon any minister of religion who might happen to visit the neighbourhood.

Miriel looked into the dim, low cow-shed and tried to realise that soon the soft eyes and fragrant breath of real living cows would fill the empty space.

Suddenly she was startled by a sigh, which certainly came from the living-room, and turning in to the doorway on the right, she saw, standing under the open chimney, a tall figure, who looked at her in surprise. A gaunt, grey man with stooping shoulders and hollow eyes.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miriel, "I didn't know anyone was here," and she stopped, uncertain what to do or say next.

"Yes," said the stranger, "I have come on before, to see what is wanted to make the place fit to live in. And who are you?"

As usual the girl's reply came readily, "I am Miriel Lloyd, Doloer."

The grey man started, and looked curiously at her. "Doloer? You don't live there alone, do you? But surely your aunt is dead?"

"Yes, yes. That is dear Nanti Matti; Nanti Gwen is alive, and I am taking care of her."

"Gwen alive! I thought she was dead years ago," and something like a groan escaped his lips; but he checked himself, and continued, "Poor thing! poor thing, and how is she? It was true what I heard? that she had lost her reason."

"Yes, indeed," said Miriel, shaking her head sadly, "and she is the same to-day. Always spinning, but no real wheel before her, and singing low sometimes she is, that old song, 'On the wings of the wind.'"

Another groan, unmistakable this time, and the stranger turned to the little window, looking long down over the slope to the brown thatch of Doloer. Miriel heard, but was silent; she had not known much happiness in her young life, except that which emanated from her own sunny nature, and was not therefore much surprised to find that still another human being had something to sigh for.

"'Twill be very nice here when 'tis cleaned and the tables and chairs have come," she said at last, and then she asked a most irrelevant question, "Can you play the harp?" She had looked the grey man over, and come to the conclusion that he would do for the chimney corner if only he could produce the tender strains of her dreams.

"Caton pawb! no," said the man, turning round to look at her, "what d'ye mean?" and Muriel, blushing, hastened to retrieve her false step.

"Oh! 'tis only I would like to hear a harp. Will I help you to clean the house out?"

"No, no; some strong woman must come and do that."

"Mali Storrom will come if you like," she said.

"Mali Storrom and Stivin! Are they here too?"

"Yes, indeed, close to Doloer. See! their little shed is quite near us. Sometimes in the night I don't know whether 'tis Stivin is snoring or the pigs," and she laughed, her eyes sparkling and the blood mantling in her cheeks, as it always did when she was merry; but the grey man did not smile.

"No," he said, "I will not ask Mali Storrom to come. Better a woman from yonder village over the wood."

"I have never been beyond the wood," said Miriel. "I would be afraid to go so far, because, you see, I am not used to the trees and the fields and the villages; they are looking very pretty from here, but on the shore and on the slope I am feeling safe."

By this it will be seen that Miriel was not slow to seize the first opportunity for conversation.

The sun was drawing towards the west, Kit and Brython, who had strayed over the moor, were gradually drawing nearer home, the shadow of the tree mallows on the garden hedge had reached the window at Doloer. "'Tis time to go," she said. "Mali Storrom will be sure to ask me what is your name."

"Oh, never mind that," said the grey man; "you will learn that soon enough."

"Good-bye, then," said the girl, reluctantly bringing her first conversation with a stranger to a close.

"After all," she thought, as she ran down over the heather, "it will be nice to *hear* the people answering me."

"Well?" said Mali, dropping her knitting.

"Well, the man is there!" answered Miriel. "A tall man with rather grey hair, and grey eyes and a long grey coat and a slouched hat; his shoulders are bending a little, pwr fellow! He is sighing sometimes between his talking. I am sure he is a nice man, but he can't play the harp!"

"Play the harp?" said Mali, with a stare.

"No, no, of course not," said the girl, again hastening to hide her mistake; "but he is looking something like a harpist."

"I never saw one," said Mali, "except Dai Pentre in the tavern at Tregarreg."

"He wants someone to clean the house for him," said Miriel. "I said, 'Mali Storrom,' but he said, 'No, no, better a woman from over the wood.'"

"A better woman from over the wood indeed? The bold blackguard! Let him go over the wood himself! and stay there! Who is he, I'd like to know, to make so little of me?"

Stivin, hearing the loud tones, guessed from experience what they betokened, and came in to see that "the lo's fach" did not get the worst of the fray. Mali, he knew, was well able to take care of herself.

"Oh! she's off!" he said, chuckling.

"Yes, she's off," said Mali, turning upon him sharply, "and you be off too," and she unceremoniously pushed him out through the doorway.

"Never mind her, 'merch i!" he called back, chuckling at his own discomfiture. "Turn your back to the wave and it will pass over you harmless."

"Booby!" said Mali, taking up her knitting, and returning to the subject that interested them all so much.

"Mark my words, 'merch i! 'tis Silvan Vaughan himself, though where he got his grey hair and his stooping shoulders from I can't think; but 'tis no wonder, too, for

time no doubt had weighed heavily upon him, with all his sins coming to his mind. Ach y fi!"

Miriel longed to ask "What did he do?" but, dreading to hear something derogatory to her new acquaintance, controlled her curiosity, and turned with never-flagging interest to the discussion of the approaching event.

CHAPTER VII

"BETHEL" GHOSTS

It was sunset, and in the long, low parlour at Hendyrafon, Doctor Dan had sat for full half an hour, silently gazing down the river which flowed from east to west under the walls of the old house, softly gliding over the deep pools, whispering, trickling and bubbling over the shallows, dashing against the black, mossy rocks that opposed its course, till the spray and the wash of it caught the sunset glow and glinted like sparks of fire. Outside the window beside which he mused, ran a long balcony, from which a flight of stone steps led down to the river, for what purpose nobody could tell, for no boat could have passed over the swirling pool at their feet, or, if it did, could ever have crossed the rapids that rushed through the gorge beyond; but there they were, their intention buried in the oblivion into which the past of Hendyrafon faded. As he sat at the broad, low lattice window and watched the turbulent river as it flowed away into the sunset, he allowed his thoughts to wander into the past, losing himself in the rush of the waters and calling to mind the things that might have been and those that had been, but had faded out of life as the years passed on.

"What's he doing up there by himself, looking out through the window and thinking—thinking?" said Betti Luke, as she passed in and out of the kitchen with the preparations for his simple supper. "Ach y fi! 'tis the worst thing one can do is to think,—why, if I was to begin

to do that, I would get mad; if 'twas only to think of the lindsey gown I bought last Fair Haf,* and paid half-a-crown a yard for it, and 'tis losing its colour shocking; and the fowls I thought to sell for three shillings a couple all getting the gapes and dying! People have no business to think, or they'll be fit for nothing;" so she laid the plates and the knives on the table with an extra clatter, which had the desired effect of rousing her master from his reverie.

"Caton pawb! what's the matter?" he said, looking round."

"What's the matter with you, 'machgeni?" said Betti, "sitting there like an image and not saying 'bo' to anyone. I'm afraid you are thinking, and that's a bad thing."

"You're about right, Betti," he said, with one of those rare smiles which, however, Betti saw oftener than anyone else. "'Tis wiser, I believe, to live as you do, without a thought except for the work of the day."

"Oh, stop you," said Betti, "I am not like the 'beast that perisheth.' On Sundays," and she waved a knife in in the air, "I am thinking a lot for the good of my soul; about my chapel, of my hymns and the 'Pwnc' that we are learning, 'tis the twenty-fifth of Hebrews next Sunday and there's long it is."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, "I hear you at it from morning to night on Sundays; you must know it by this time."

"Yes, listen you now;" and while the doctor ate his supper she began to recite the chapter she had indicated in a high-pitched monotone, never varying the tone except in the second syllable of every sentence.

"Oh, for mercy's sake, stop!" said the doctor, and Betti pulled herself up suddenly.

"There's no stopping till you come to an end of the 'Pwnc,'" she said, "and I will finish it now, 'machgeni, because it may do you good; I'm afraid 'tisn't much of

* Summer Fair.

the Scripture you're hearing, because you're not going to church so often as you might do, and there's regular you used to go long ago; so listen you to these verses;" and she began again in the same curious monotone.

"Hush, woman, or you'll drive me mad," said the doctor.

"Well," said Betti, halting, "if you'll promise to come to chapel next Sunday night and hear the rest I'll stop." She had long tried to beguile him into the chapel which was so dear to her, and had lately felt that her pleadings must be seconded by some more decided endeavours, and here was an unlooked-for opportunity.

"Will you come, 'machgeni? Remember how you used to go with your mother on Sunday evenings, because 'twas to chapel she was going like me, though you and your father went to church. Now listen," and she began again, "'Neglect not, therefore, the gathering of yourselves together.'"

"Hush, hush," said the doctor. "I will come to Bethel to-morrow evening and hear the rest."

"Not a word more then," said Betti, delighted with her success. "'Tis just above the clock I will be standing, and you will hear my voice quite plain from the 'big seat,' because of course they'll put you there."

"Will they?" said Doctor Dan, "not if I know it, Betti; but I hear your voice often enough when you are not standing by the clock. Go now, I am going to read;" and Betti cleared away the supper and left the room, turning back however to add, "Promise not to think now."

"Not a thought, I'll be as dead as a door nail to my own thoughts for the next hour, for I'm going to be carried away by a magic wand;" and he threw himself back in his chair and buried himself in the enchanting pages of *Ivanhoe*.

He kept his promise to Betti, of which he was reminded as he passed through the street the next evening, when he saw the long windows at Bethel illumined from within,

the two doors open, and the people streaming in from the roadway. It was years since he had entered the chapel in which his mother had worshipped.

"By Jove!" he said, "I must keep my promise to Betti or I'll hear more of that voice to-night;" and he entered the chapel with a knot of worshippers and reached a quiet corner unobserved.

Here, in the shadow of the gallery, he could indulge in that exercise which Betti so strongly deprecated, for as he sat there a flood of old memories crowded in upon him, the volume of sound, the lights, the throng of worshippers, above all, the singing of the old Welsh hymns, carried him back to past times, and to many differing scenes connected with the chapel in the old days that had entirely gone out of his life. He scarcely heard the loud-voiced preacher, nor the reverent if ill-expressed prayers, so carried away was he by the associations of the place.

Casting his eyes round the crowded building, he conjured up the past, and seemed to see his mother, placid and pale, in her accustomed seat, while in the gallery sat the two Tygwyn sisters, one of whom was the loadstar after which his soul longed. He saw it all and forgot the heated atmosphere, the pressing throng, the glaring lamps, and a great wonder fell upon him at the complete change which had taken place in him since those old days.

What was this hopeless void which surrounded him? what this aimless, hard routine into which his life had fallen? And remembering Miriel's face, so full of hope and joy, a fresh throb of interest awoke also in his own soul.

He was recalled to the scene around him by the end of the service and the commencement of the "Pwnc," in which all the members of the Sunday School took part, young and old, all shuffling up to the front of the gallery and preparing first to recite the long chapter they had learnt by heart in one continuous monotone, and after-

wards to answer the questions upon it which the preacher propounded from the pulpit.

Doctor Dan smiled as he heard Betti's voice distinctly raised above the others for his special edification, but was thankful when the large congregation at last rose and filed out through the doorways into the clear, star-lit air.

He was not the only stranger who attended the service that evening at Bethel.

At the further end of the chapel, in a dark corner under the gallery, sat another man whose thoughts were also far from the scenes around him, and, strange to say, they had followed the same path as Doctor Dan's in their retrospections. A tall, thin figure, with hair of iron grey, and shoulders bent a little; though dressed in the garb of a farmer he still appeared to belong to a different class, his nervous, long fingers and hands looking too delicate for farm work.

His grey eyes roamed over the chapel seeking and missing old, familiar forms, and substituting for the living faces that crowded round him, those of the dead or vanished who had once filled their places.

"Is there no one that I know?" he asked himself as he looked round. "Yes! there is King Dai standing in the same spot as he did fifteen years ago, and indeed there is his crabbed wife, Peggi Doll, sitting on her stool. There is old Shon y felin too, and Tim Scrivenwr where I am lodging, and no one else can I see but strangers," and he sighed, heaving his stooping shoulders and pushing his thin fingers through his scant hair. He glanced up at the gallery, and before his mental vision rose two fair faces who looked at him with reproachful eyes, and with a groan he bent his head, leaning his elbow on his knee.

The preacher noticed him, and congratulated himself on having touched the stranger's conscience by his fiery denunciations, and forthwith launched into a fresh and

vivid description of the bottomless pit, with which he seemed strangely familiar. But it was all unheard by Silvan Vaughan, for he it was who sat there and trod the same paths of memory as Doctor Dan, but with this difference, that with the reminiscences of the latter came no sense of sin and injury impossible to atone for. At last it was over, and he joined with a sense of relief the crowd who made their way out into the street.

The doors were narrow, and the close-packed congregation pressed upon each other as they emerged into the night air, so that Silvan Vaughan was not much surprised when a man hustled him rather vigorously as he passed, and, turning round with a hasty apology, revealed to him the face of Doctor Dan. It was a good thing that for the time the stranger was supported by the crowd around him, for the sight of the doctor's face seemed to have unnerved him strangely, and had there been anyone to notice it, they would have observed how irregular and halting were his steps as he walked up the street. Peggi Doll and King Dai were close behind him, her wooden stool tapping the ground as she leaped along the road, and it was Silvan Vaughan's turn to "beg pardon" a few minutes afterwards, when coming to a sudden standstill the little stool came down upon his heels.

"Oh! it's you, Silvan Vaughan," she croaked, "though I would never know you, there's changed you are;" but the tall man did not hear her, for he had slipped to the ground with a groan and was quickly surrounded by a crowd of sympathisers.

"Pwr fellow bach! who is he?"

"Tim Scrivenwr's lodger," said another, and the unconscious man was soon carried into his lodgings, while a boy was despatched for the doctor.

"Doctor Jones, mind you," said somebody, "because he's a member at Bethel." But this did not suit Peggi Doll, and as the boy was starting in hot haste she tripped

him up with her stool, and when he gathered himself together again fixed her keen eye upon him and said,—

"There's Doctor Dan just passed, run, boy, and fetch him; he will come quicker than Doctor Jones," and the boy, frightened by the gleam of her black eye, did as he was bid, and in a few moments Doctor Dan himself entered the cottage.

"'Tis a fit he's got," said Tim Scrivenwr, every ailment being put down to "fits" or "flammashwn."

The doctor approached the bed upon which the man lay, white and sunken, and for a few moments there was silence in the room while he applied the necessary restoratives.

"'Tis the heart," he said. "Who is he?" but almost before he had asked the question, certainly before he had been answered, a dawning suspicion crossed his mind, and, fixing his eyes upon the stranger, he recognised the form and features of Silvan Vaughan, the bosom friend of his youth, the traitor who had wrecked his life, and through his whole body surged a hot flush of indignation and hatred.

As life returned to the inanimate face their eyes met in a long, silent gaze, of entreaty on the one side and hard resentment on the other. Slowly the eyes of the stranger sank before the doctor's stern expression, and he turned his head wearily away.

"He will do now," said Doctor Dan. "I will send something for him;" and turning from the bedside he made his way to the door, where a knot of sympathisers stood waiting.

"A fit, sir?"

"Yes, yes, if you like, that will do; 'tis his heart," and he passed out into the darkness unheeding, perhaps not hearing, what Tim Scrivenwr heard himself but indistinctly—"Dan," called the invalid, and stretched one thin hand towards the doctor's retreating figure, but he had passed

into the street. The little room was empty save for his landlady's bulky figure.

Later on, the usual paper-wrapped bottle arrived from the doctor's, and Silvan Vaughan, having much recovered, unwrapped it himself eagerly with a look of disappointment.

"Nothing but this?" he said.

"Nothing," said Jinny.

He scarcely knew what he had expected, and with a long-drawn "Ah!" of resignation leant back upon his pillow. Next morning he asked permission to occupy his lodgings for another day.

"I am not feeling quite well enough to ride on to Hafod y bryn to-day," he explained. "Flower will be all right in the 'Crown' stable, and to-morrow the carts will be passing and I will go with them."

"Well, b'tshwr!" said Jinny, "as long as you like, and welcome. 'Tis 3d. a night, and 9d. for your food every day, and the longer the better for me."

Tim Scrivenwr was delighted. There would be an eye-witness to the importance of his avocation, for it was very unsatisfactory to toil over a letter, to adorn it with flourishes of the pen, and flowers of rhetoric, and then to consign it to a prosaic, unappreciative letter-box. The chief aim of his life was to convince the world of his complete mastery over the English language, and he took every opportunity of expressing himself in that tongue, to the great annoyance of his less learned neighbours. On a large card over the chimney-piece was emblazoned the text, "Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he who taketh a city."

"That's it," he had said, with a wave of his hand, upon his lodger's first entrance the night before.

"That's my text; fits every part of my life! 'Tis the standard under which I fight," and his fiery blue eyes sparkled, his red cheeks burnt, and his grey hair bristled as if with aggressive self-assertion. Tim did fight valiantly

with his irascible temper, but the battle bid fair to go on for his lifetime, for in every contest he was vanquished at last; but was ready with indomitable courage to fight again.

"See," he said, when Silvan Vaughan, returning from a visit to his horse at the "Crown" Inn, found his host sitting at the kitchen table behind the shop, surrounded by scattered sheets of paper, pens, ink and stamps. He invariably bore a quill pen behind his ear. "See," he said, "how busy I am! how many letters I have to write. In my deed! 'tis wonderful how ignorant the Tregarreg people are; all coming to me, and only a penny a letter they pay me, and not thinking I got letters to write for myself. Tan-i-marw! I'll charge them twopence," and he brought his fist down with a bang on the table.

"'Tis hard upon you," said the lodger. "Will I write one or two for you while I am here?"

"Write one or two for me!" said Tim, scornfully; "what do you know about the people? Here's one I have wrote for Sarah Pantgwyn; you read it." And he handed the letter to him with much pride.*

"Mr Jones,

"Dear Sir," it began,—"I am deep grieved to have to inform you that your tenant Sarah Williams Pantgwyn, is can't pay the rent up to date this time, she is begging of you to have mercy upon her and she will pay you all, when she have had a tay party to make up the deficit. Honoured Sir, she, have had an accident, and have broke her leg, so now Sarah, pwr thing, have only got one leg supporting her body; she is an old mead and so she got no husband to work for her. She have reared a fine son in her time, but in the 'Works' he's living, and got a wife & three smole sildren; so not can send her no money nor nothing. Dear Sir, hoping you will take these items into considera-

* Tim's letters are *verbatim* copies of the originals.

tion and forgive her not pay the rent this time.—Yours humble servant, TIMOTHY THOMAS (Scrivenwr)."

"There!" he said, as Silvan Vaughan came to the end. "What d'ye think of that? English—mind you! and look at the writing; 'tis like copper-plate."

"Very good indeed," said the lodger.

"Well, here's one I am writing for myself, and mind you I have hard work to keep my temper when I'm writing to those devils.

"MESSRS HEAVER & FLING,
Bristol,

"GENTLEMENS,—I am very sorry to have to inform you that the sope I order from you this six weeks back have never arrive; and I now, 'tis your great business is the cose of you to forget to send it, but, dear gentlemen, I have been a good customer to you, and I beg on you to send me the goods I order at once, becos my customers want the sope shocking. With my humble respex.—I am, Gentlemen, Your humble servant, TIMOTHY THOMAS.

"*P.S.*—Why not send me the sope, drat you! I pay as well as nobody from all times."

"There!" he said again, with a satisfied air.

"'Tis a very good letter, no doubt," said his lodger; "but I'm thinking you forgot the text when you wrote the postscript."

"Text or no text!" shouted Tim. "They are a pack of thieves, and haven't sent me the sop!" and, completely overcome by his fiery temper, he burst into a torrent of abuse that astonished as much as it amused his quiet lodger. He was still more surprised when, on rising next morning and entering the kitchen, he found Tim Scrivenwr standing in front of his text in rapt contemplation.

"There it is!" he cried, waving his pen; "will suit every man at every time—'Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city.' 'Twas I was beaten last night," he said, turning to his lodger, "but, stop a bit! I'll have at that temper again, drat it!"

CHAPTER VIII

NEW FRIENDS

MIRIEL's excitement, as she saw on the sky-line the arrival of the furniture at Hafod y bryn, prevented her attending to her household duties with her usual precision, for it was hard to keep the porridge from burning and watch the proceedings at the farm at the same time. Her own dinner, therefore, was not a success, though Nanti Gwen's slice of bacon and broad beans were not neglected.

But what did it matter, when plainly against the background of grey wall she saw the whole family of the newly-arrived pass backwards and forwards?

A dozen times that day she called upon Mali and Stivin to share her curiosity.

"Oh, Mali, look, look! there's a girl, just my size, driving the cows into Parc-lidan, and see the horses going into the stable—oh! anw'l! 'twill be strange indeed."

"Yes—and there's the old man and his son carrying the churn in. The woman from over the wood is a lazy huzzy. What for is she carrying the small things in and letting her master carry the big ones? Will I go and offer to help them?"

"Yes, do, Mali fach; they will never get straight without thy help."

"Well, indeed, p'r'aps not," said Mali. "I can offer whatever, though *'tis* Silvan Vaughan."

Miriel looked troubled as Mali ran up the slope. "Though

it *is* Silvan Vaughan," she repeated to herself. "I don't know what he has done, pwr fellow, but, indeed, Stivin bach, 'tis a pity for him whatever, so sad he is looking and so ill. Oh, I can't think why is Doctor Dan so hard against him."

"Well, 'merch i," said Stivin, "we don't know what has happened in the past between them both, and the past and the present 'tis impossible to separate them sometimes. This we know, that once they were friends and now they are bitter enemies."

Miriel sighed as she turned into the house. She was beginning to learn that a widening circle of acquaintance must inevitably bring unrest to a sympathetic nature.

She waited impatiently for evening. When quite late in the gloaming Mali returned, bursting with the importance of having real news to tell, and not only the floating rumours which had hitherto been the only variation in their monotonous life; she drew the back of her hand over her mouth in preparation for a long yarn, wiped her steaming brow with her check apron, and, settling herself down on a chair, began, while Stivin and Miriel stood listening.

"'Tis Silvan Vaughan, and no mistake! though dir anw'l! he's altered, *he is* altered; but the same soft voice he's got and the same pleasant ways with him; but when the others are laughing, he is only smiling, caton pawb! there's odd! how one's sins find one out. Doctor Dan can very well forgive him, because for certain the Almighty is dealing with him. Good furniture he's got though, oak chest and oak table, and the chairs and corner cupboard all oak, as black as peat, and the churn and dairy things well scrubbed, fair play to them, before they came here, so no thanks to 'that woman from over the wood.' Nell is her name, if you please. Uwd and milk they had for dinner—I made it myself; and beautiful tea in the evening and white bread and butter—splendid! from the baker's at Tregarreg."

"Oh, never mind the tea," said Miriel; "tell us about the girl."

"Oh, she's a fine, strapping girl, in my deed she is, and as sharp as a needle; in and out of the rooms. 'Betta' is her name, and it is Betta here and Betta there. I don't know what they'd do without her; and the son, Iago his name is, ach y fi! What for are they calling him Iago? 'tis an ugly name."

"Iago," mused Miriel. "I like it; it was the name of my uncle who died—yes, I like Iago."

"Well, he's an odd man, whatever," continued Mali; "silent he is as his father, not talking much, but doing something all the time; and funny too, making us laugh very often, but not laughing himself. I was trying not to laugh, because I thought if the master was serious the maid ought to be, but, caton pawb! that Nell didn't care; she was cackling like a goose all the time, and that's my thought, that Iago was laughing at her to himself.

"'Tis very kind of thee, Mali, to come and help us,' said the master; and he paid me a shilling, though I told him 'tis ninepence we are getting here. 'And will you come again to-morrow?' says he. 'Well,' says I, 'you won't want two of us?' 'No,' he says, 'the other woman won't be wanted to-morrow.' So there! Be bound he saw how slow she was—the cackling goose. And to-morrow I'll be up early, and I'll have them straight and comfortable before night."

Although Mali continued for the rest of the evening to meander round the same subject of conversation, Miriel found there was no more tangible information to be gained from her, and had perforce to be satisfied with the little she could sift from Mali's conjectures.

When, towards evening, her curiosity had been strained to the utmost, a call from the top of the hill relieved the tension, and she stood gazing up with wide-open, expectant eyes.

Again came the call "Miriel!" floating down on the soft evening air. Still she stood hesitating, until she saw, running down the moor, the grey figure of a young man who hurried towards Doloer.

"Is it me you want?" she called, as he approached.

"Are you Miriel?" he said, arriving at where she stood waiting.

"Yes," she answered.

"Will you come, then, and help us a bit? 'Tis the big coffer we have been fighting with the last hour, and not an inch will he move; one leg of him has got in a hole in the boards, and here we are! four men and women beaten by a stupid old coffer; 'tis someone to slide the roller under it we want when we are lifting it in."

"Oh! I'll come," said Miriel. "Stivin will watch Nanti Gwen."

"Yes, yes; or I'll go myself," said Stivin, for he had much resented not being called into closer touch with the excitement of the arrival; but Miriel, fleet of foot, was already speeding up the hill, while the youth, a little tired perhaps with his fight with the coffer, followed more slowly, a smile in his eyes as he saw the speed with which Miriel made her way up the slope.

"Jar i! she's a good runner," he said; "and there's a pretty girl she is!"

Meanwhile Miriel had reached the old living-room so familiar to her, already wearing a look of domesticity if not of comfort. On the broad, open hearth a fire of wood flamed and crackled; beside it Silvan Vaughan, resting awhile from his labours, smoked a short clay pipe, the blue wreaths of smoke from which curled up the chimney. Two cupboard beds of oak stood on one side of the room, their polished panels almost reaching the whole length of the wall. On the other side the small, deep-set window, facing the west, let in a stream of golden sunset light, the shining dresser, on which Mali and Nell had ranged a full comple-

ment of jugs and plates, stretched across one end of the room, and through the open doorway, at which Miriel stood, came the lowing of the cows, standing in a row behind the rail of the passage, and a little restless at their new posts. Betta's round eyes grew larger as she gazed at the newcomer, though a smile of greeting curved her lips, which were full and red as two cherries and vied with the ripe, warm glow of her cheeks.

"'Tis the lo's fach from Doloer," said Silvan Vaughan, rising; "you were asking about Betta, 'merch i, here she is, and here's my son Iago; and the whole lot of us, with Mali into the bargain, can't move this old coffer into its right place."

"'Tisn't straight, I see," said Miriel; and Mali, coming in from the yard, they once more set their shoulders to the work, and, lifting the end, Miriel was able to slide into the hole in the boards a stone with which Iago provided her.

"That's right, one more heave, and there he's in his place," said Iago, "and may he fall into shivers before he has ever to be moved again."

"Most like he will, and most like 'twill be the same with me," said Silvan Vaughan, or "Vone yr Hafod," as he would henceforth be called. There was a good deal of laughter and merry talk amongst the young people as they set the heavy, lumbering articles of furniture in their places. The dairy utensils, and the few things which were carried up to the "lloft" where Betta would sleep came last.

"It will be nice to sleep here," said Miriel, "with the woods and the fields and the valley stretching out before you, and the sun will be rising there in the morning; 'tis the sea *we* see, and the waves and the rocks, and the sun going down behind it in the evening."

Betta shrugged her shoulders. "'Tis a lonesome place up here, whatever, ach y fi! I will cut that ivy, 'tis sweeping against the window like a big bird's wings."

"Don't cut much, Betta; the crows are building full in

it, and I am so fond of them, and an owl is in that hole with her little ones. Oh! I would miss her shocking!"

"Do you like to hear the owls and see the bats flying about, then?"

"Yes, indeed. You see, I have never had any companion in my life, so I have been making friends with the birds and the dogs and every living thing."

"There's strange!" said Betta. "Indeed, I won't drive them away if you are not willing; but now you will have me, perhaps you will be friends with me?"

"Yes, indeed. There's glad I am," said Miriel, and she debated within herself whether she should tell Betta of her day dreams and how she had pictured her, finally deciding, however, not to confide to another the romantic secrets which had hitherto given her so much pleasure.

"After all," she thought, "Betta was better, perhaps, for everyday constant intercourse. Her quick and restless ways all reminded Miriel of the birds that flitted about the gorse and heather, and the complete difference between the newcomer and the girl of her dreams, was rather bewildering at first, but before long her energetic and matter-of-fact ways took Miriel's heart by storm, and filled a gap in her existence which she had hitherto felt without realising; her presence banishing forever the creature of her imagination whom she had called "Ann."

Gradually, too, she dropped the habits of solitary musings which had peopled her lonely life with pleasant, though imaginary, companions, and she fell naturally into the more satisfactory intercourse with material and mundane beings.

'Twas a happy day for her when Silvan Vaughan came to Hafod y bryn, and when at last sunset called her home to Nanti Gwen, Betta accompanied her a little way down the slope.

"Will you come to Doloer sometimes?" she said.

"Oh! anw'l! yes, I'm afraid 'tis too often I'll be coming;

where else will I go? There was a village near us in North Wales, but Uncle Sil was never happy there, he was always hankering after this old place, though in my deed I can't think why; but I was glad to come too, because I knew 'twas near the sea."

"Why didn't your uncle come sooner, then?" asked Miriel.

"I don't know; but one day when a letter came and told him that somebody was dead, or gone away or something, he made up his mind to come. Are the ships coming in here sometimes?"

"Oh, no," said Miriel, "they couldn't come over those white breakers; do you see those black rocks here and there between them? there's a line of them there, and no ships could cross them, they would be dashed to pieces."

"Dir anw'l!" said Betta, with a look of disappointment.

"But they are passing out there on the bay and coming in to Porthlidan, 'tis about a mile and a half down there to the left."

"'Tis all strange to me now," said Betta; "but there's Iago calling me," and she ran up the hill, while Miriel turned down to Doloer. During the ensuing fortnight the small events which accompany a flitting gradually settled down to the usual peace and quietness that wrapped moor and shore in their soft mantle, and Miriel was getting accustomed to the presence of the newcomers so near to her; it was all very pleasant, it filled her life with new thoughts and interests, but Doctor Dan had not been near Doloer for a fortnight, and she had grown to look for his visits as for those of a friend or relation, and many a wistful look she cast towards the brow of the hill, but he did not come again until the summer was a month older and the hay was ripening fast; *that* was over the brow of the slope, where the broad green fields stretched away by wood and valley to the blue hills in the distance eastwards; there the whetting of the scythe and the cooing of the wood

pigeons and the tufts of sorrel growing red in the ditches, showed that hay harvest was near; but over the slope where Doloer lay, there was no sign of it, for the sea and the shore were alike in summer or winter. Only, on the slope, the daffodils had faded, the cowslips and orchids had followed them, and these, too, had given place to the golden marsh marigold and the bogbean, changes evident only to the eyes that lovingly note the courses of the seasons. These eyes Miriel had, and for her, in consequence, there was no such thing as a dull hour, nor that heavy weariness which rusts away the spirits of those whose sight is blinded to the ways of nature.

Henceforth the conditions of life at Doloer changed completely. No day passed without a visit from either Betta or Iago; the latter especially came upon any pretext, and stayed to look at Miriel with eyes in which a dawning love showed plainly to all, except the girl herself. She, perfectly unconscious, went on her way serene and happy, delighted with the companionship of the youth and maiden who had so suddenly entered into the sphere of her existence.

"Vone yr Hafod" never came, and Miriel chafed a little at the stern though unexpressed prohibition which she felt Doctor Dan imposed upon the newcomer. Silvan Vone interested her, the first sight of him, standing alone in the bare, unfurnished kitchen at Hafod y bryn, had impressed her with a tender pity for the man who sighed when others smiled and was sad when others were merry.

Doctor Dan was the only man of her acquaintance except, indeed, Stivin Storrom, who certainly was not of a lachrymose nature. Doctor Dan she could not imagine harbouring a weak sorrow or uttering a sigh. This man was different somehow; a weight of sorrow was upon him, and Miriel longed to comfort him, but she dared not, would not, extend to him the call to enter Doloer which she had pressed upon Iago and Betta. Often in the grey twilight

she would see a greyer figure pass over the sands and disappear amongst the shadows of the rocks, alone, with head bent, as if in deep thought.

Betta and Miriel, too, haunted the shore; in fact, at every spare moment the girls drew towards each other, Gwen's long sleeps giving Miriel many an hour of freedom. With arms thrown over waist and shoulder, they paced the shelly sands in the moonlight or starlight, for Betta's work on the farm kept her busily engaged until sunset. Iago sometimes joined them, laughingly thrusting himself between them, and endeavouring to join them again by slipping an arm round the waist of each. Betta made no demur, but Miriel shyly withdrew, blushing a rosy pink, unnoticeable in the moonlight.

Iago was by no means demonstrative. A repulse sobered him at once, and it was then Miriel's turn by all sorts of merry talk, and pretty devices, to restore him to good spirits.

One night, when neither Betta nor Iago could come to the shore, Miriel roamed alone at the edge of the waves. The wind had changed! blowing softly down the slope, and passing out to sea laden with suggestions of inland life, which perhaps the sea-maidens listened to with the same delight and interest with which Miriel listened to the stories that the sea-wind bore upon its wings.

From over the hill came the smell of the newly-mown hay, the monotonous call of the corncrake, the barking of the farm dogs, to whom the full moon seemed objectionable, the tinkle of a sheep bell far away in some sheltered fold, and the bleating of Miriel's goats, who had lost each other on the slope.

The spray of the waterfall from the mill stream, which fell over the cliffs above her, wetted her face, and out from the spray and the shadow came Vone yr Hafod himself.

"You are out late, 'merch i," he said, for knowing of old

that Miriel was not born of peasant blood, neither he nor his household addressed her with the familiar "thee" and "thou."

"Yes, indeed, but the moon is so bright, 'tis like day."

"Not afraid to wander about here amongst the dark rocks and ghostly shadows?"

"Oh, no! what'll I be afraid of? To me it so like my own home; the rocks are my furniture, the cliffs are my walls, the waterfall and those waving ferns are my pictures, and the sea and sands are my floors."

"Well, indeed, you have a large house whatever, and 'tis a happy, merry spirit that is living in that house; but to me the place is mournful and lonely. See you there now, the difference between the young and old?"

"Is it like that when you grow old? I am sorry, sorry in my heart, and I wish I could take your sadness upon me for a little bit, and put my happiness into you. There's a pity we can't do that sometimes."

"I believe, child, you would do it if you could."

"That would I. Iago and Betta are coming to sit by the fire with us sometimes, and 'tis nice there when the fire is flaming up in the evening, and Stivin Storrom is coming in and telling us stories of long ago, and of storm and shipwreck."

"Yes, 'merch i, 'tis very nice for you that have not lived long in the world."

"Eighteen years is long enough to see much trouble in," said Miriel.

"And what troubles have you seen?" asked Vone, as they turned and retraced their footsteps across the beach.

"Well, 'twas sorrow to lose Nanti Matti, and 'twas very bitter to see how cruel she was—to herself," continued Miriel. "Oh, cruel and hard she was! the coarsest food, the roughest clothes, never a pleasure for herself, but all for me and Nanti Gwen; and for her—the tears and the hard living, and the lonely walks by herself on the shore, in the

night when the stars were shining. And Nanti Gwen is a constant sorrow, for I know that once she was bright and happy."

"And did Matti walk about this shore often and alone?" said Silvan Vone. "I told you, child, that the place was full of ghosts."

His voice was tremulous and husky, and so low that Miriel suddenly realised her words were gall and bitterness to her companion. Why, why could she not ask the forlorn man to come into the warmth and shelter of the Doloer hearth. And when, after reaching home and having seen him take his solitary way up the slope, she sat alone by the fire, she evolved in her mind a plan which, if she could carry it out, would leave her free to welcome Silvan Vone at Doloer.

She would go to Tregarreg, she would brave the dangers of the town, and finding Doctor Dan would gain his permission to befriend the master of Hafod y bryn.

CHAPTER IX

A WOMAN'S WILL

NEXT day, however, brought the swinging gig once more to the little gate, and from the top of the slope Vone yr Hafod watched the doctor enter the porch.

"Oh! well, indeed!" exclaimed Miriel, pleasure flashing over her face and in her grey eyes.

Doctor Dan saw the bright look of greeting, and the warmth of a long-absent feeling touched him with its wing. A human heart to bound at his approach, a happy voice to welcome him, were things that the lonely man had schooled himself to do without for years, and his own heart opened with a responsive bound to the unaccustomed sensation.

"Yes, here I am, child!" he said, "and, at all events, I see you are not afraid of me. I hope you have been a good girl," he added, with a smile that belied his stern voice. "Remember, I am the master now, and I must have a well-ordered household;" and he drew his chair to the hearth, where a few sticks burnt for cheerfulness.

"I am not afraid of you, master," said Miriel, laughing. "I don't think I am afraid of anything—except thunder and lightning, I am shocking afraid of them!"

"Such a wise little woman! and afraid of thunder and lightning!"

"Yes, indeed," said the girl. "I was born in a thunder-storm, they say, and my mother died in the fright of it; perhaps that is why I am so afraid."

"Perhaps," said Doctor Dan, rightly interpreting the strained look in the dilated pupils of the eyes as one of real and not affected fear.

She was standing under the "lwfwr" chimney, a little nervously tying and untying the ribbon at her throat.

"What is it, Miriel?" he asked. "I know you want to say something."

"Only this, that I am wanting to do everything to please you, because—because—you were Nanti Matti's friend."

"And not yours also?"

"Yes, I hope indeed—but—I think you are forgetting that I am not a child any longer. I am eighteen, you see, and some things I must have my own way about, because I have got my own thoughts about many things."

"So it seems," said Doctor Dan, both amused and fascinated by the mixture of dignity and simplicity in her speech, and not blind to the mantling colour and sparkling eyes. "But you are mistaken, Miriel! I am quite alive to the fact that you are no longer a child, but a woman, and a—" he had almost said "a beautiful woman," but checked himself, and substituted "a wilful one."

Miriel nodded.

"And what rebellious thoughts are in your mind? Do you want to leave Doloer and come and live in the town? or do you want to gather the apples before they are ripe? or perhaps change the leek bed into a flower border?"

Miriel laughed, the happy, ringing laugh that seemed to fill the house with brightness.

"No, indeed—not any of these foolish things; but, 'tis to ask Vone yr Hafod to come in here when he likes, because 'tis making my heart ache to see him so lonely out there by the waves when the fire is bright in here in the evening, and—" but at this moment they were interrupted by a step in the porch, followed immediately by the entrance of a sturdy brown figure in a homespun suit of

country-made clothes. His open countenance, paler and more thoughtful than that of the ordinary farm lad, was brightened by a pair of lustrous dark eyes which smiled more often than the sober, clear-cut lips.

"Miriel!" he called as he entered, "have you seen our 'Megen' about the slope? She has strayed from the field, and I have hunted for her almost as far as Porthlidan," then catching sight of Doctor Dan, he stammered and coloured, while Miriel, also a little confused, blushed as she answered his inquiries.

"I haven't seen her, indeed, but she's most likely gone over the hill to the Sarneithin cows."

"Perhaps; I will go that way," and he turned rather hurriedly towards the door, with a nod of acknowledgment towards Doctor Dan, meant in country fashion as a sort of apology for his rather abrupt entrance.

Doctor Dan, however, only knit his dark brows and looked inquiringly towards Miriel.

"That is Iago 'r Hafod," she explained, as the young man's voice reached them from the slope, calling, "Trwdi fach! trwdi!" till his voice died away in the distance.

She saw at a glance that something had displeased her visitor.

"Oh! Iago 'r Hafod!" he said, "and does he often come bouncing in here like that?"

"Well, yes," said Miriel, "he's coming very often, and what harm is he doing? 'Tis very nice for him to come; and Betta, oh! Betta, I love so much! I would break my heart without her now."

Doctor Dan rose and looked out through the window to the shore and sea, pondering deeply before he answered. He seemed strangely disturbed, and, without alluding further to the young man's hurried visit, resumed the conversation that had been so suddenly interrupted.

"You were speaking about his father before he came in—"

"Yes. Will you be angry if I ask him to come into Doloer sometimes?"

"Miriel, you have reminded me that you are a woman, if I wanted reminding, and I will answer you as a woman—No, I will not be angry, I have no right to be, for I do not see how you can do otherwise, since you allow his son to come in and out when he pleases; but I wish to God he had never returned to this neighbourhood, I wish you had never seen him, or his family!" and Miriel thought she detected a tremble in his voice.

"Well, then, I will never ask him," she said; "but I *have* spoken to him about it, and now if he comes some day, what will I do? I cannot thrust him out again."

"No," said the doctor, "you cannot. Let him come, we cannot fight against fate—but, Miriel! once again I bid you beware of Silvan Vaughan! I cannot stay longer this morning, I have to drive six miles further up the bay."

Miriel's face fell.

"Oh, there's sorry I am! Will you come again soon?"

"Well, you have plenty of friends now, you are not likely to forget how to talk, as you feared some time ago, but if I can I will come again before long."

She stood at the porch some time, shading her eyes from the sun and looking after him as he drove away with doubt and uneasiness filling his mind. "What," he thought, "was this strange fate that ever thrust Silvan Vaughan across his path?" This secluded household left in his charge, why did the shadow of his enemy loom so heavily near it? What would be his wisest path? He saw that to separate Miriel by force from her new companions would be impossible, for he had a strong suspicion that in her sunny temperament there lurked a strength of will which he would find hard to combat, and for this he did not blame her; a limp, weak character would have been a heavier charge upon him. A woman's will was proverbial; what, then, would be his wisest course? To add to his

disquietude, there rose before his mental vision the image of Miriel as she had stood hesitating and nervous under the heavy chimney, but withal firm with all the dignity of her eighteen years. "What will I do, then?" Nay! he could not find it in his heart to thwart her. A woman! yes, he knew it, he required no reminding. They had reached a steep ascent, and, throwing the reins to Deio, he alighted and walked up the hill, chafing under his unspoken thoughts, and feeling that exercise in the fresh sea air might calm his spirit. On the side of the dry and dusty road a patch of white clover smiled up at the sun, and, stooping, he gathered a few of the pale, waxen flowers, looking at them long and with a smile of admiration. "Like Miriel!" he said. "Indeed, yes! The creamy white, the rosy shade of dawn at the base! and growing here unnoticed and unknown. And its perfume so sweet, so delicate. Yes, Miriel, little white clover! you have slipped into womanhood while I thought you were a child," and, placing the pale blossoms in his button-hole, he came up with Deio as he reached the top of the hill.

"It's the first time I see you do that this long time," said Deio, surprised out of his usual stolidity.

"Do what?" said his master, reddening a little.

"Put a flower in your coat; but 'tis pity you got no better!"

"'Tis a long time since I saw such a sweet flower," said Doctor Dan, preparing to get into the gig; but before he could do so a gateway close beside him opened, and out of it came Silvan Vaughan. The two men stood face to face under the broad noonday sun, and for a moment both were embarrassed. Vone yr Hafod was the first to break the silence, as he saw Doctor Dan prepare to pass on without speaking.

"Stop a moment," he said, with a catch in his breath; "stop a moment, man, for mercy's sake! I have longed, though I have dreaded, to speak to you for many years,

but they have passed on and I have never seen you except for that moment at Tim Scrivenwr's."

"What do you want of me?" asked the doctor, a shadow as of a thunder-cloud falling on his face. "What conversation can there be between you and me?"

"What do I want?" said Silvan Vaughan. "Not your forgiveness, Dan—not that—I cannot expect that, and I do not."

"That's well," said the doctor. "Let me pass on, then there can be nothing more between you and me."

"Yes, there is, and I will not lose this chance, for well I know that I am not long for this world. You know it, too, so listen for a moment with the pity that you would accord a dying man. I only want to tell you, Dan, of my bitter repentance. I want you to know that every hour of my life has been a burden to me for the last fifteen years; that I would give all I possess—more, my very life—to undo the evil that I have done, but that is impossible!"

"Yes," said the doctor, and that was all he did say.

"Do you believe that I am truly repentant, Dan?"

"No doubt you are. I don't see how you could be otherwise."

"Then I am satisfied. I cannot expect anything more—but one thing—give me permission to enter that house," and he pointed down towards Doloer. "You know, or let me tell you now, that in spite of all my misdeeds Gwen Lloyd was the only woman I ever truly loved. What madness attracted me to Matti I cannot tell. Does God ever abandon us to the possession of an evil spirit?"

"Don't talk about evil spirits," said Doctor Dan, impatiently. "Your own evil passions were enough. And what do you mean by asking my permission to enter that house? I am not your guardian, nor theirs who live there; but, for the sake of a promise to the dead, I will keep watch over them and, if needs be, I will tell that innocent girl the whole story of your villainy and treachery."

"So be it, then," said Silvan Vaughan; "'twill be part of my punishment. But I cannot see the necessity for sullying her young mind by telling her such a story. God knows! I would not injure her. I only want to see Gwen, to hear her voice once more. I know her reason has fled, but still I long to see her. My boy is often in and out of the house, but I am determined not to go without your consent. Dan! I see by your face that you are relentless and hard as adamant, but remember the day will come when you, too, will want forgiveness."

"That is my own affair," said Doctor Dan. "I will not tell a lie and say I forgive you, Silvan Vaughan, for I do not—cannot yet. Go to Doloer when you please, and see the ruin you have worked. I will make no objection, but remember I have promised to keep watch over those two friendless women, and I will keep my promise. Have you anything more to ask me?"

"Nothing," said Silvan Vaughan, while the doctor stepped into his gig and drove up the hill, stopping at the summit to give Samson a rest and to take a look back at the view, as usual.

He was surprised to see no sign of his late companion. What could have become of him? He could not have reached Doloer, for he did not look like running, thought the doctor, as he called to mind how white his face had become while he was talking and how blue his lips.

"Well, let him go to the devil! and the devil will get his own," he said, as he whipped up Samson, and Deio turned round in surprise and looked at his master.

"What is that on the ground behind yon furze bush?" he exclaimed. "Dei anw'l, 'tis a man!"

"A man?" said the doctor, looking round and seeing what before had escaped his notice—a grey figure lying prone upon the grass. In a moment the medical instinct banished all other feelings.

"Bring the gig down," he called to Deio, while he ran down the green sward.

Yes, true enough. It was Silvan Vaughan lying there, with closed eyes and blue lips, his pale face brushed by the grasses that waved in the wind.

"Is he dead?" asked Deio, alighting and stooping over the prostrate form.

The doctor felt his heart. "No," he answered, a little pity stirring within him for his fallen enemy. "Give me that flask of brandy," and pouring a little between the blue lips the man revived, opening his eyes and fixing them with a dull stare upon the doctor, who chafed his hands and raised his head from the ground. Gradually the heart beat more regularly, the pulse grew stronger and a faint colour tinged the ashen cheeks.

"He'll do now," said the doctor, "but we cannot leave him here"; and together they lifted him into the gig, where Deio supported him while Doctor Dan led the horse by the bridle towards Hafod y bryn.

At the doorway he was met by Iago, and Betta came running in from the clos.

"Oh! N'wnewl Sil, what is it?" she cried.

Iago said nothing, but helped Deio to lift out the listless figure. To neither of them were these seizures familiar.

"Father anw'l!" said Iago, as he helped the dragging footsteps over the doorstep, and Doctor Dan winced at the tender words, the home love, which greeted this perfidious friend, who had made his life desolate and barren.

"It is a faint," he said, turning to the young man, as together they laid Silvan Vaughan upon one of the cupboard beds. "He's reviving now, and to-morrow he will be all right," and with a few parting directions he turned to the doorway and got into his gig, leaving Betta bending over the invalid with sympathising words and touches.

"You will come again to-morrow, I hope?" said Iago,

following him into the clos. "I have never seen my father like this; not so bad whatever."

"He had a bad attack at Tregarreg," said the doctor flipping the flies off the horse's ears and considering. "I don't think there will be any necessity for me to come again, but should there be, send up to Sarneithin—I shall be there every day for some time"; and he drove away, while Iago, returning to the box bed, wondered what should make the doctor so abrupt and unsympathetic. "Is that the way he is at all sick beds, I wonder? Tan i marw! I would close the panels before he should stand at mine." And then he went to attend to his father's wants, to smooth the pillows, to chafe the hands, to speak the words of cheer and love which are more than medicine to the sick and sorrowful.

In a few days Silvan Vaughan was about again, and astonished Miriel one day by entering the porch at Doloer; he did not cross the threshold, but stood a moment in the sunshine, his shadow falling upon the floor and apprising her of his presence.

"Oh, Vone! is it you?" she said, a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I asked Doctor Dan's leave to come and see you, 'merch i, and he granted it, so now I hope you will be willing too."

"Yes, indeed, and glad."

Once more a wave of pity rose in Miriel's heart for the shrinking, humble tones of the man who counted so many more years than she did.

"Come in," she said, "and sit here under the chimney. That is Nanti Gwen's chair, you must not sit on that."

"No, no, this bench will do," said her visitor. "Go you on with your work, I will not disturb you; only, as I told Dan Griffiths, I would like to see your aunt once more. I know from Iago that she is sleeping every afternoon; but she will come in here by-and-by?"

"When I fetch her to tea."

"We were friends once."

"Yes, I think, indeed."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because 'tis your name that quiets her always when she is restless. Nanti Matti used to go to the door at those times, and pretend to look out to sea, and always the same words she would say—'Oh, here's the *Hawk* sailing into the bay, and here's Silvan Vaughan coming up the shore.' Then Nanti Gwen would grow calm at once, but Nanti Matti used to turn pale. I don't know what happened long ago between you all, but I know there was trouble and sorrow; but now, now when we are living so peaceful here, I wish you could all forget the past and be happy in the present."

Silvan Vone had risen, and, turning to the window, he looked long over the sea before he sat down again; he did not allude further to Miriel's words, but continued to sit musing in the chimney corner, making an occasional remark as the girl passed backwards and forwards at her work, until the afternoon waned and the tea hour was approaching.

"Will you stop and have tea with us?" she said, for hospitality was a natural though new delight to her. "I am going to fetch Nanti Gwen; it is time."

"No, no, 'merch i" said Vone; "but one thing I would like. Let me stand behind this settle and see her, I can slip out from here without her seeing me;" and he placed himself behind the settle, while Miriel passed in through the thick black door with its quaint thumb latch.

Presently he heard the light, firm step of the girl returning, and with it a slower step, though not heavier, and out through the old oak doorway came Gwen Lloyd, her graceful, willowy figure bending a little as she leant on Miriel's arm. Her black dress was relieved only by a kerchief of lace tied at the throat and ruffles of the same old lace hung over her delicate white hands. Her hair,

abundant and wavy, was coiled above her white forehead by Miriel's deft fingers, and she made a strange and beautiful picture as she approached through the old doorway.

A shudder ran through Silvan Vone's frame as he watched her passing him, led gently by Miriel to her chair, in which she seated herself silently, her blue eyes fixed dreamily on the vacant space before her. Almost immediately she commenced her invisible work, drawing the thread towards her, letting it slip again through her white fingers, and whispering in a flow of rapid and incoherent words. It was a moment of anguish to the watcher who stood there, almost as pale as Gwen herself; the memories of the past rushed into his mind, the bitter fruition of his cruel perfidy weighed down his heart, and, feeling that he dared not prolong the endurance, he slipped quietly out, and walked away towards the shore, where through the little window Miriel saw him long pacing backwards and forwards at the edge of the tide. After this he was a frequent visitor to Doloer, and in the afternoon when the household work was done, and a soft silence brooded over the old house, broken only by the ticking of the clock or the clucking of the fowls in the cwrt, she learnt to wait for the company of the sad and silent man, who seemed to find some strange solace on her quiet hearth.

The evenings often brought him again to Doloer, accompanied by Betta and Iago, and when the moon rose, her light and that of the leaping flames from the peat and logs on the hearth alone illuminating the room, Stivin and Mali often joined the group, though keeping modestly a little in the background. At such times the former was in his element, and king of the company; for that red head of his was crammed full of old tales and legends, stories of shipwreck, of haunted houses, of ghosts and murders. He poured them all forth to entertain the little party gathered under the lwfwr chimney, where Iago's dark eyes followed Miriel's every movement with interest.

"I saw Doctor Dan to-day," he said one night as he whittled a spoon he was carving.

"Where?" asked Miriel, a little strained look coming over her face.

"At Porthlidan he was. In my deed! I think he looked blacker than usual when he saw me, though I don't know why. He is a fine man and no mistake! and that dark face of his makes one think of the warriors of old who fought so bravely in Cwmrhyfel. I came home that way after seeing him and thought I could hear the clash of the swords and the shouts of the chieftains, and what was it but the sea wind and the sound of the waves coming up through the narrow pass where the river runs down."

"Well, indeed, Iago! You are a bard, I think," said Miriel.

"Yes, didn't you know that?" said Betta. "He is writing verses often, and sending them to the *Teithiwr*—yes, indeed, and they are beautiful. That's what he is wanting at Porthlidan so often, is to send a letter or expecting one from the *Teithiwr*."

"Hold thy peace, Betta! Wasn't it to fetch red wool for thee I went to-day?"

"Iago a bard!" said Miriel, with round, open eyes. "I thought they were always old and grey."

"Have patience, lass!" said Iago, "and I will be that, whatever!"

"Oh! tell me some of his rhymes. Iago, say then some of your verses!" but he could not be persuaded to comply with her request.

"Some day, perhaps," was all he would promise.

"That was pretty well last week in the *Teithiwr*," said his father.

"Did you see it then, father? I didn't think you would be caring for the poetry page."

"I sometimes scan it over," said his father, in a tone of indifference, though, if the truth were told, he was proud

of his son's literary effusions, and always searched for them in the weekly paper.

"Oh! now I remember a little of it," said Betta, while Iago tried in vain to silence her.

"'Tis like this:—

> "'Oh! bird of the silken wing!
> Oh, thou of the silver tongue!
> Wilt open thy golden beak and sing
> A rhyme that my heart has strung.'"

Miriel clasped her hands. "'Tis beatuiful, go on!"

"I can't remember more," said Betta. "He is saying next, that her eyes are grey like the sky before the sunrise, that her face is pink like the rose, and her hair is gold as the bloom of the broom—so the bird finds out, 'tis the dawn he is meaning, and his answer is something like this:—

> "'No, I will not carry your message to her,
> Because I love her myself;
> And I sing to her out of my golden beak,
> And I tell her my own heart's love!'"

"Well, indeed!" was all Miriel's reply; but when the group had broken up for the night, and she was left alone on the hearth, she fell into a fit of musing, from which she awoke at last with a sigh and the words,—

"Iago is full of beautiful thoughts and good, whatever!"

CHAPTER X

THE FAIR

SUMMER had come in all her regal beauty, and was reigning supreme over the green world lying content and lazy under sun and moon, for behold! here was the fruition of all her endeavours. The fields were full of ripening crops, the hedges decked with garlands of flowers; on the banks the grasshopper chirped, in the pools the frogs croaked, and in the bushes the birds vied with each other in filling the luscious air with melody. On the slope of the moor, where the primroses and orchids had held their own for a time, the cowslips had bloomed and danced their little lives out in the sunshine, and now the soft green sward had been given over to the daisies and buttercups which thickly starred its hollows and hillocks. Amongst them, Kit and Brythen roamed all day, often straying, however, to the Hafod fields, out of sheer mischief, Miriel declared, for when she had tethered them there once, they had bleated through "the long white day." When the shadows began to lengthen, they turned their horns towards Doloer, and browsed their way homewards, until Miriel appeared carrying her stool and milking-pail, when they would race towards her and make a feint of butting, until called to order by a tap of the stool. Always she sang as she milked her goats, "Llwyn On" or "Merch Megan," and often Iago, hearing her voice, would run down, joining his bass to the tune, and watching the milk frothing into the pail. Betta was too busy to come

till later, for a man and a maid-servant had been hired for the farm, and her superintendence seemed more required than ever.

"'Tis Fair Haf * to-morrow, Miriel," said Iago, nervously plucking at the buttercups.

"Yes! I saw in the almanac," answered the girl, without breaking the rhythm of the milking. "But what is that to me, Iago bach? I have never been to a fair, never even so far as the country beyond the top there; I don't know more about the world than Kit or Brythen."

"Well! come with us to-morrow! Betta and I are going. Come, lass! I care not to go without you!"

"There," said Miriel, rising, "'tis a good bowlful whatever. Me! come to the fair! Oh! there's nonsense! Tell Betta to bring me a fairing!"

She was beginning to find out her power over the bard, and to enjoy it with a mischievous wilfulness.

"Nay, come, Miriel," he besought.

"What for, then? What will Nanti Gwen do without me?"

"Mali and Stivin are not going, they will take care of her."

"But I am not grand enough to go to the fair. My straw hat is burnt with the sun, and my jacket is three years old. The girls will laugh at me."

"Miriel," said Iago, "whatever you wear, you will be the fairest lass in the fair."

"Twt! twt!" said Miriel, blushing, but not resenting the compliment.

Iago's homage was not without its charms for her, for although the admiration of the sterner sex was a thing entirely new and strange to her, still, with a woman's nature, she took to it as a duck takes to the water, and the result of Betta's and Iago's entreaties, added to Mali's and Stivin's promises of care and watchfulness,

* Summer Fair.

was that, next day, the car drove out of the Hafod clos filled with a happy trio: Betta with her sparkling black eyes and cherry lips, Iago with his thoughtful face, and Miriel full of excitement at the unwonted delights that awaited her; over them, a cloudless sky.

The mowers stood up to look at them as they passed down through the leafy lanes, where the cuckoos called to each other, where the white stellaria and the blue veronica starred the hedge sides. The wild June roses stretched their trailing branches towards them, the elder flowers fell over them in showers, and to those blithe and happy hearts life seemed a chalice full of richest joy. It was good to live! with the fresh sea wind behind them, the soft country air around them laden with the perfumes of summer, to say nothing of the prospect of the fair, which, to one at least, was full of the charm of novelty.

"Oh! there's beautiful the country is," said Miriel. "Wel wyr! I thought I would never like anything so well as the shore and the sea, but here it is like my dreams."

"Yes!" said Betta. "It is beautiful for a little while, but for always 'tis the sea I like."

"Thee, too, Betta?" said Iago. "Well! 'tis a good thing as thee'st come to live at Hafod; but see, Miriel, there in the blue of the valley, a little cloud of smoke and the white of the houses! that is Tregarreg."

"Tregarreg! indeed, is it that? and there's low down in the valley it seems."

"Yes, 'tis a steep hill down to the town, but Nero is a safe horse and I have a strong wrist." He was proud of his driving, and to-day he was proud of the whole turn-out. He had sat up till twelve the previous night shining up the harness and burnishing the brass buckles and chains, and certainly, as they turned into the yard of the "Crown" Inn, few people would have failed to notice the sleek black horse, with its brilliant harness and its load of youth

and beauty. As they crossed the bridge under which the broad Lidan fretted and fumed, Miriel longed to ask where Doctor Dan lived, but a strange shyness made her very reticent regarding her guardian, in the presence of the Vones that is, for a subtle instinct made her aware that some unkindly episode in their past lives still threw its shadow between them, so she was silent as she and Betta followed Iago's broad elbows through the crowded fair, past the booths, "the shows," the brass band that announced the attractions of the circus. The good-humoured hustling, the merry laughter, and the loud jokes of the country lads enveloped Miriel in a cloud of delight. All day she and her companions roamed the fair, until in the afternoon Betta and Iago, having some farm implement to buy, left her at the corner of the market-place, bidding her meet them at the "Crown" by eight in the evening.

"Four long hours! but they will be short to me, for I never saw such wonders; go you to buy the churn, I will be quite happy," and, left alone, she began to look around her with interest. Here were a knot of girls whose swains were inviting them into the "Swan" parlour, at the open windows of which sat other couples of amorous rustics, enjoying their gingerbread and ale. The loud laughter and the coarse jokes rather frightened her, so she turned away to a quieter corner, where, sitting amongst her pincushions, she came upon Peggi Doll. Miriel stopped to examine the brilliant array, and stood some time looking at them, in reality gazing in astonishment at their curious, crabbed little vendor. What a dreadful, pitiful object! she thought, and wondered did the town hold many such malformations! She had unconsciously taken up and replaced two or three pincushions, and was startled when a croaking voice addressed her.

"Enough sorting!" said the old woman. "If you want one, take one; if not, move further away, you are keeping the sun from me."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," said Miriel; "I will have these two," and she timidly paid the price into the little claw that was held out for it, and not only for the money, for Peggi Doll clutched at the girl's hand, and, drawing her a little nearer, peered into her face as well as her crooked neck permitted her to do.

"Who are you?" she said. "I saw you coming in behind Vone yr Hafod's black horse."

"Yes; I am Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer, and 'twas Vone yr Hafod's son and his niece were driving," said the girl, drawing her hand away from the old woman's clutch.

"What? Matti Lloyd's niece in company with Silvan Vaughan's son!" and she laughed, the harsh, grating laugh that was new to Miriel, and very unpleasant. "Well, indeed! You will go the same way as your aunt, perhaps; 'tis well to have a good example to follow," and again came the harsh, discordant laugh which irritated Miriel; this time it also roused her anger, and, drawing herself up with a flush of pride, she said,—

"If I can follow my aunt, and reach where she has gone, I will be a happy woman," and she turned away indignantly, with an undefined dread of hearing she knew not what from this deformed cripple. Walking hurriedly away, and still hearing Peggi Doll's malicious laugh, she was startled by a hand laid on her shoulder.

"Miriel," said a voice of peculiarly pleasant inflection, and she turned round to see Doctor Dan looking at her with a smile of surprise lighting up his dark face. "Where have you come from, child?"

"Oh, master! there's glad I am to see you! I have come to the fair with Iago and Betta, and I was thinking it was all as beautiful as a dream till I saw that old witch in the corner over there. Oh! 'tis pity to see her."

"Yes, little vixen!" said the doctor; "and she is as crooked within as without, I think. What did she say?" he asked, with a little uneasiness.

"Oh! I bought two pincushions and she bid me move on."

"Well," said the doctor, relieved, "have you seen enough of the fair?"

"Yes, for to-day; but, indeed, I will be wanting to come again, I think."

"Well, come with me and I will show you something different." And she resigned herself to his guidance with a feeling of happy confidence.

"First we will go to the 'Crown,'" he said, "and leave word for your friends to call for you when they pass; and now, this way." And they turned away from the busy crowd, and, passing through a rickety gateway, found themselves treading the soft velvet turf of a green knoll, whose steep sides sloped down to the river's edge, the silver Lidan, which wound its course around the ruins of an old castle that crowned the knoll, its frowning walls top-heavy with the clumps of ivy that had grown there undisturbed for many a century.

"Oh! 'tis the old castle that I have heard about," said Miriel. "Is it very old? Who built it, then? Who were the people that lived in it?"

"Oh! stop a bit," said the doctor, "one question at a time! It is very old, no one knows exactly when it was first built; it has come to ruins and been rebuilt several times, but was a ruin like this in the time of my grandfather's grandfather, before that some parts were inhabited; two pretty sisters lived in it, for whose sake many an ode was written and many a challenge was sent; but, above all, Miriel, what I wanted to show you was the river. From this high mound we can see how it curves three times around these castle walls."

"Yes, indeed," said Miriel, "as if it loved its meadows and was unwilling to pass on."

"Well, yes, perhaps, but I am no bard; it does pass on, however, as I will show you by-and-by from Hendyrafon."

"Oh! will we go there?" asked the girl. "I was wanting to know where it was, but I didn't like to ask."

"Why not?" said the doctor, standing still and looking straight into her grey eyes. "Why not, child?"

"I don't know," said Miriel, a hot blush rising to her face.

"Yes, you must know! Why not, Miriel?" he asked again, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the girl's; hers gradually lowered before his searching gaze.

"Well, I think because I am afraid that something is making you hate the people at Hafod y bryn, and something is hanging between them and you, and so—"

"Poor little girl!" said the doctor, "and so you kept your simple question to yourself, and your curiosity went unsatisfied, and all because of a dark blot with which you have nothing to do. It shall not be so any longer, child; I will not be the one to cast a shadow on your young life. Come, let us forget the past from this evening! When you have looked long enough at that old ruin, and at that winding river, we will go back through the fair."

"Well, I am ready," said Miriel. "But, indeed, if I lived at Tregarreg, 'tis many an hour I would spend with these old walls. Oh! there's soft the grass is; there's dark the ivy is; and the sound of the river all the time in your ears—'tis beautiful!"

"Yes, that fall over the weir adds music to the scene. 'Tis to me like the sound of the sea to you, Miriel, it has ever been in my ears, I was born in it, and I hope I may die in it."

They had reached the hustling, noisy throng once more, not quite so tightly packed as it had been, for the shadows were lengthening and the sun was nearing the edge of those trees in the west. The gingerbread-women were packing up their wares; the lads, with their pockets empty, and the lasses with their handkerchiefs full of fairings, began their way towards the country roads; the booths and

"standings" were being dismantled, and the whole scene was one whose glories were fading away with the end of the day and whose hours were numbered.

But to Miriel everything was new and everything was wonderful. Her exclamations of delight amused and interested her companion so much, that those who had formerly remarked upon the change in Doctor Dan need no longer have done so.

"There's merry he used to be! Such a sparkle in his eye, and his white teeth so ready to show!" This description might well have suited him still as he piloted his charge through the busy fair.

"Betti!" he called, as he led the way through the dark, uneven passage into the long, low room, which was parlour and study combined, and Betti Luke came bustling out from some crooked kitchen or pantry, her wooden shoes clattering noisily on the stone floor. When she saw Miriel she slipped them off her feet, not out of respect for the visitor, whom she took for a patient, but just to show "that she knew manners" and what was due to her service at Hendyrafon.

"'Tis not a patient, Betti," explained the doctor, "but a visitor we've got this evening. 'Tis Miriel Lloyd, from Doloer."

"Wel b'tshwr!" said Betti; "come in, 'merch i, I am glad to see you, dir anw'l, I knew your—"

"Chut! chut!" said the doctor, "we have just decided, Miriel and I, to forget the past, so none of your 'I remembers' to-night, Betti, but get you the tea ready while Miriel sits down in my armchair and rests a bit. Now, your best loaf, some fresh butter and cream, and something sweet for the child."

Here Miriel burst out laughing; such a laugh as had not been heard within those walls for many a long year.

"The child, indeed!" said the girl; "where's my pina-

fore then, and my doll to play with?" Doctor Dan laughed too, though he scarcely knew why.

"Well, I will eat the sweets," he whispered; "'twas an excuse, because I like them myself."

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Miriel, with a suddenly serious expression. "'Tis because I am so ignorant that you are thinking me a child. Nanti Matti tried to teach me many things, but she failed, and I am still very, very ignorant."

"Ignorant?" said the doctor, while he cleared away his books and papers from the table. "Well, I don't know; but she taught you one thing, at all events, Miriel, and that is *to think*, and that is worth more than knowledge itself."

"Clovares in your coat?" said Miriel, suddenly observing them.

"Yes, I love their fair creamy blossoms more than any other flowers. You cannot guess why, Miriel!"

"No, indeed; will you tell me?"

"M-m-m no," said the doctor, "I think not."

"Some day, perhaps?"

A hot flush spread over his face, as he hesitated and sought for an answer, but finding none, he repeated her words—"Some day, perhaps," and Miriel, attributing his disturbed manner to some old memories connected with Matti, said no more, but changed the subject.

"Oh! here's a dear old room!" said the girl, looking round at the bookshelves, the quaint old grate and the broad, latticed window.

"Yes, 'tis home to me. And now, look out!" and he turned his chair towards the window. Before it the Lidan was flowing rapidly towards the west, its tumbling, tossing waters catching the crimson and gold of the sunset on its foam and spray, as it rushed through the narrow gorge under the window; then it lisped and trickled through the pebbles of a tiny strand, over which the spreading sycamores in the hedge of the long garden at Hendyrafon hung their

sheltering boughs. Two or three coracles used for the salmon fishing were moored upon the little strand; overhead in the pale evening sky a company of rooks were flapping lazily down to the dark elms which marked the bend of the river.

"Oh! 'tis beautiful," said Miriel again; "'tis no wonder that you are not coming often to Doloer. 'Tis lonely there sometimes, but, indeed, not often now; Betta is often coming to see me, and we are singing together in the evenings, and Stivin Storrom is telling stories to us."

"Yes, indeed," said the doctor; "it must make a difference to you." He spoke slowly and as if the words pained him. "And Iago?" he said, "the young bard; I have read some of his poems in the *Teithiwr*. They are very good."

"Yes," said the girl, a tell-tale blush suffusing her face, as she called to mind that his last effusion had been addressed to "The Maid of the Grey and Gold."

Doctor Dan saw the blush, and drew his own conclusions, but he was determined that at any price he would not mar the girl's happiness this evening, so he said nothing; but when Betti brought in the tea and spread the cloth, the tea cakes, the jam, and all the little dainties of a country town, he pointed to the tray, and made Miriel preside at it, her face to the broad window through which the golden light streamed in upon her yellow hair.

"Will I make the tea, indeed?" she said, looking nervously from the tea things to the doctor's face.

"Well, yes, of course, 'tis a treat for me to have someone to pour my tea out;" and the meal proceeded with pleasant talk and laughter, Doctor Dan insisting upon the "child" tasting each of the little delicacies which Betti had provided, and for whose appreciation she now stood waiting.

"Well, I never saw so many nice things," said Miriel. "Well, indeed! I never tasted such cakes! There's clever Betti is—did you make them?"

"Yes, 'merch i," said Betti, smoothing her apron with pride, and she hovered about until satisfied that Miriel was making a good meal. When they were left alone again, the glow of the sunset lighting up the tea-table, Miriel's merry laugh filling the room with its music, Doctor Dan, forgetting that fifteen years lay between him and his youth, laughed and talked so much that Betti came in, and, standing in the doorway with arms akimbo, said, "Wel din, indeed! 'tis nice to hear the master laughing; in my deed, I think the lo's fach had better stop with us."

"Caton pawb! Betti, she'd break her heart in this old house, and her friends are coming to fetch her by-and-by."

"Vone yr Hafod's children?" said Betti, with a little disapproval in her voice. "Ach y fi!"

Miriel flushed up in annoyance at the disparagement of her friends. "They are very nice people, whatever," she said, "and Betta is my friend. Oh! and here they are, there's sorry I am!"

"Are you truly?" Doctor Dan asked, looking straight into those grey eyes which some instinct told him could not deceive.

"Yes," she said, returning his gaze fearlessly. "I would like to stay much longer."

Iago had alighted and was standing at the door of the crooked passage. Doctor Dan held out his hand, and, surprised, he knew not why, the young man gave him his own.

"I know Miriel wants you to see the river through my parlour window; come in and look at it."

"Well, indeed," said Miriel, "that was in my thoughts exactly. How did you know, Doctor Dan?"

"Oh! I am a wizard," he said, laughing, while Iago stood gazing at the broad flow of the river.

"'Tis a picture indeed, sir," he said; "with that old casement for a frame! and thank you for letting me see it."

"Well, I thought 'twas a sight for a bard."

"Oh, Betta is calling," said Miriel, "and Nero is tossing his head." She lingered a moment however at the window while Iago led the way out through the passage, and her host stood by silently, also looking out at the sunset.

"Well, I suppose I must let you go," he said, and Miriel thought there was reluctance in his voice. The thought brought a happy flush to her face, but she only said, "I am sorry to go," as she placed her hand in his.

"Good-bye, then," he said. "Come again soon and make tea for me in the parlour, and we will order the sun to go down just the same as to-day;" and with Miriel's happy laugh ringing in his ears, he was left standing at the old door of Hendyrafon, while Nero jingled his chains and rattled over the bridge and up the steep hill to the moors above the town. When the jingle of the car had died away he turned with a sober mien to the old parlour again, where Betti was clearing away the remains of the meal.

"There's a purty little girl she is, master! very like what Miss Gwen was when she was young, only her eyes were grey and Gwen's were blue, and there's a merry laugh she's got. Now listen you to me, master. If I was in your place, and was taking charge of a girl like that, for the sake of a promise to the dead, 'tis here in my own house I'd have her, under my very eye, where no harm could reach her. She would be like a child of your own, for I have given up all hope now that you will ever marry—so listen you—bring Gwen Lloyd and her to live here, the lo's fach will help me in managing the house, and with all the light work, and Gwen can have the little parlour upstairs to herself, 'tis looking over the garden, and the roses climbing round the window, and I am sure she would like it, and the lo's fach—"

"Oh, taw, Betti! hold thy tongue, and leave me now to my book."

"Oh, I'll leave you now," said Betti, not at all hurt by her master's brusque ways, for she was well used to his abrupt dismissals, and, indeed, her rambling talk often required them; but before she closed the door she added, "I leave you to your old books, 'machgeni, but think you of my words too!" and he did think of her words, which perhaps accounted for the continual breaks in his reading, during which he let his book fall on his knee and his eyes follow the course of the river, now changing into a stream of copper with dark, leaden shadows under the rocks and trees. Again and again he took up his book, and endeavoured to enter into the spirit of the romance which had hitherto never failed to engross him, but this evening *The Wizard of the North* had lost his power over him, for again and again a light laugh rang in his ears, and the image of a girl, grey-eyed and golden-haired, would rise between him and his page, and then he would drop his book and dream, while the turmoil of the gorge and the lisping of the river on the little strand filled his ears with its music. "She would be like a child to you"—these were Betti's words, and Betti, with all her garrulity and ignorance, was considered a woman of sense. Perhaps it would be well for him to bring the child and her helpless charge more closely within the scope of his supervision, she would brighten his hearth, and God knows it was lonely enough sometimes. Why not adopt the child? for Betti was right, had he not done with all thought of love and marriage full fifteen years ago," and then he read again, and then he dropped his book again. Miriel would be a gainer by the change, for he would surround her life with happiness, the young life that had hitherto fared so barely in this world's joys and pleasures; and he would watch her with a father's jealous care: and then, rising, he strode up and down the long, low room, and, catching sight of himself reflected in the mirror panel of the bookcase, he stopped and studied his own image, until at last, bursting

into a laugh, he said, "No! by Jove! I have been a failure in Betti's eyes as a young man, and I'm afraid I don't look like a father!" and then he fell to wondering why Time had dealt so leniently with his appearance; the black hair was still untinged with grey, the face unfurrowed by the plough of age, the eyes still bright, and the even teeth as white as ever. "No," he said, "Time has left his marks upon my spirit, I suppose, for certainly there are few upon the outward man," and when Betti next appeared he greeted her with,—

"Well, Betti, I've been taking your advice, and trying to feel like a father, but, in my deed, woman, 'tis impossible! Do I look old enough to take a lassie like that to live with us?"

"Oh! as for looks," said Betti, "there isn't a young man in Tregarreg that's fit to hold a candle to you, and b'tshwr! the lo's fach is not such a child as we think her, and we would soon be having the young men here, coming courting to her. Now there's that young crwt was driving her to-day, be bound he has his eye upon her, and he's a smart fellow too, if he *is* Silvan Vone's son," and she rambled on until her master in self-defence took up his "old book" again, and pretended to be buried in the interest of its pages. Betti reluctantly withdrew, consoling herself with the reflection that Deio might be consulted on the subject.

Left alone, Doctor Dan soon relapsed into a brown study. Again a pair of grey eyes, a clear, ringing laugh came into his mind, and allowing himself to dwell upon the pleasant memory, a crowd of pent-up feelings took possession of him. He was no sentimentalist, and therefore did not reproach himself with inconstancy to the past when he realised that Miriel had become very dear to him. Unconsciously, "the child," as he persisted in calling her, had slipped into his heart, which had so long closed its door against every suggestion of love, and now, feeling that

once more a woman walked in and out of its empty chambers, and held sway there, whether he would or no, his first feeling was one of contempt for his own weakness. "Not even a woman," he mused, sitting there in the gloaming, his eyes fixed upon the fast-flowing river, "not even a woman, but a girl, a 'child,' as I have thought her. Well! God help me! and if I am a fool, let me see that no one knows it except you, Dan Griffiths!" It was late when at last he rose, and throwing away the book, whose page he had not turned for an hour, went out to smoke his last pipe on the bridge, still watching the river, now gleaming like silver in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XI

BETTA'S SECRET

"It will be late to call by Doloer to-night," said Doctor Dan, as he drove up the hill to the moors a few days after the fair.

"Well, the sun will be down, b'tshwr, but the moon will be up," answered Deio, "and Samson knows his way dark or light."

He and Betti Luke had threshed out the subject of her proposal, that Miriel should be adopted by their master, over their suppers for the last three nights, but he had not fallen in with the idea as easily as she had hoped, although he agreed that the presence of the "lo's fach" seemed to brighten "Misteer" up wonderfully, and make him more like what he used to be. Still, he had shaken his head, and with a shrewd nod had said several times, "I am not so sure of it, whatever; such things take a good deal of considering, mind thee, Betti."

So when the doctor said, "We will call by Doloer," Deio's answer was strictly guarded.

From farm to farm, and from village to hamlet, they drove all day; to where the old man dying raised his head from the pillow with a look of eager greeting, as he heard the doctor's firm tread on the threshold, or where the delicate mother was meekly giving up the hard struggle of existence, smiling with gratified amusement as the baby clutched the doctor's finger in its little crumpled palm.

Everywhere, hearts were cheered by his presence, and his departure caused wistful regret. "When will you come again, sir?" was asked and answered a dozen times in the day. "He is looking so dark," said one woman, "'tis wonder the children like him!" and so it was, as he seldom made any advances towards them.

As Deio had predicted, the sun had set and the moon had risen before they drove down the soft slope to Doloer. As they approached the house the scent of the flowers in the garden reached them, and with it came a sound of music on the air.

"What is that?" asked Deio, surprised.

"Something new for Doloer!" answered his master, as he alighted.

Passing in through the garden gate, a rich, full tide of harmony fell upon his ears, and his footsteps were not heard within as he entered the cwrt.

A shaft of light streamed through the window as he passed, and, attracted by it, he stopped to look in at the scene of domestic comfort which it revealed. A few peats blazed on the hearth, though it was summer, and in their light sat Silvan Vaughan, looking into the fire lost in deep thought; while at the table Iago stood, with his tonic sol-fa book open before him, Miriel and Betta standing one on each side of him, and cranning their necks over the music which they were singing. In the background Stivin and Mali sat listening, while the three fresh young voices blended in pleasant harmony.

"There's a tune for you!" said Stivin, admiringly, but so loudly that Mali as usual nudged him with a glance towards the closed door behind which lay Gwen's bedroom.

"Jar i," he added, "'tis like the angels' singing that my mother heard once on Brynawel moor. 'Twas a quiet afternoon, the sun shining very hot, and the air all quivering in a tremble like, no sound on land or sea but a beautiful, soft music somewhere all around her. As sure as I'm

here 'tis true! because I've heard my mother tell it many times."

Outside in the moonlight a shadow had fallen over Doctor Dan's face. There was no one to notice it, so he had somewhat relaxed his usual control over his features as a wave of bitter feeling swept over him.

By nature he was peculiarly alive to all impressions of home happiness, and with all his stoicism there were times when his loneliness pressed heavily upon him. To-night, standing there alone, he seemed to awake suddenly to a realisation of it, and he rued the day when Miriel had been left in his charge. Woman or child, what was she to him? Or, rather, what was he to her? Nothing more than Deio or Samson. She was gentle and kind to them all, what more did he want? How calm and peaceful were the lives of these three young people! How full of the joys of home was that little circle, how completely content; and should he dare to introduce any disturbing element into their placid lives? and break in upon the harmonies that spoke of close intimacy and frequent intercourse by forbidding their intercourse? No, his promise to Matti did not compel him to avenge her wrongs upon the young and innocent. Let the dead past bury its dead, and let Providence take care of the future. So long as no harm came to Miriel! For himself! well, he was accustomed to loneliness. He looked a moment longer at the cheerful group within, and turning silently away retraced his steps towards the gig.

Deio had watched him as he stood listening at the window, but made no remark as they drove up the slope. When they had reached the top his master said in a careless tone, which, however, did not deceive the astute Deio, "I thought perhaps the child would be happier living with us at Hendyrafon, but when I saw how contented they all were together I changed my mind."

"Well, I think the Almighty can manage things

without us interfering. Be bound He has His plans about it."

Doctor Dan did not answer, but, taking advantage of Deio's usual stop at the top of the hill for Samson's benefit, he turned to look downwards over the slope which they had just ascended; and what a sight was there to gladden the eyes of the happy; and to cast over the hearts of the sad an indescribable tinge of wistful longing! A silvery sheen lay over the grass, the full moon tipping the gorse and broom with light, Doloer's brown thatch lying low towards the shore, whose yellow sands showed colour in the moonlight, behind them that line of ragged rocks where the foaming breakers gleamed white. Over all a sky which still retained a tinge of the afterglow over the sea, while the moon rode high over the slope.

"A brâf night," said Deio.

"Yes," said the doctor, "and as fine a view as the world can show. Drive on;" and Samson, forecasting Tregarreg and his comfortable stable, started bravely.

All unconscious of the silent visitor who had stood so lately at the window, Miriel presently bade her friends good-night, standing still at the garden gate to feast her eyes upon the lovely scene. Iago lingered too. "'Tis pity to go in," he said. "See how yellow the sands are! Come, lass, to the end of the shore."

"Another time," said Miriel, half consenting but reluctant still. "To-night 'tis late, and Nanti Gwen may wake and want me. No, not to-night, Iago;" and he turned away with so much gloom that Miriel burst into a merry laugh at his sombre face, but he fell into a fit of "the blues" which lasted several days, much to her amusement at first, but afterwards to her anxiety, for Iago's pleasant face and handsome figure had won a certain place in her heart. She had become used to the silent tokens of his love, she even valued them and desired no change in him.

One day in the following week she heard a call from the

top of the moor, and, seeing him waving a letter in the breeze, ran up the hill to Hafod, where she found the whole family in great excitement.

"A letter from Phil," said his father, and the hand with which he held it towards her trembled a little.

"A letter from Phil," echoed Iago. "Indeed, 'tis a happy end to our hopes."

"Oh, stop you!" said Silvan Vaughan, "he's not safe home! 'There's many a wreck 'twixt the shore and the deck.'"

"Twt, twt!" said Iago. "A fig for your doubts and your fears, father. Upon some bright fine morning soon we'll see the *Seagull* passing by and sailing in to Porthladin."

Betta said nothing, but the rich glow on her cheeks deepened, the sparkling light in her eye brightened, and, though she managed to hide her joy from the two men, Miriel, with a woman's keen insight, saw it all; and when the evening came and they roamed together by the tide, she taxed her friend with it.

"Oh, hush!" said Betta. "Anw'l, anw'l! Don't let the winds or waves hear you, Miriel! Oh, N'wnewl Sil would never forgive me; he would turn me out of Hafod if he knew how it was between me and Phil. He thinks he's going to marry a rich girl in Liverpool—his cousin she is; but 'tis *me* Phil loves, Miriel, me, *me!* poor Carbetta Jones! Now I have told you my secret!—but we are friends, you won't tell on me?"

"Why, of course," said Miriel, "we are friends and that's enough. But, Betta, surely some day your uncle will find it out. Won't you tell him yourself and try to make him willing?"

"Never," said Betta, "unless Phil will tell him. He would never be willing; I tell you his heart is set on Phil marrying his rich cousin."

"And is he so very grand, then? Is he more handsome than Iago?"

"Wait till you see him, 'merch i! Tall he is and straight, and his hair gold-brown like the autumn leaves, and eyes so blue, and his smile, Miriel, 'twould draw the bird from its nest. Iago, indeed! he is not fit to hold a candle to Phil. But, mind you, Iago is a good, honest fellow; we could trust him with our lives—and he's loving you so much, so much!"

"Oh, nonsense about that," said Miriel, blushing hotly and tossing her head with an assumption of indifference. "I am not wanting a sweetheart, Betta, I am too busy to think of such things."

"Listen to her, then," said Betta, appealing to the scene around her, "the prettiest girl on the shores of the bay saying she's too busy to have a sweetheart. Ach y fi! 'twould be very dull without one, that's what I am thinking whatever," and she fell to writing "Philip Vaughan" with her finger on the sand.

"Come and have supper with me?" said Miriel, as they turned homewards together.

"No, no, I must go home and prepare the supper. When Phil comes home there's suppers we'll be having. Nothing N'wnewl Sil can buy in Tregarreg will be too good for Phil."

From this time forward at Hafod y bryn every hope, every pleasure seemed to culminate in this delightful prospect: the hay would be gathered, the corn harvest would have come, the apples would be ripe when Phil came home; the 'Steddfod would be near, the crabs and lobsters would be plentiful when Phil came home; and Miriel almost learnt, like her friends, to connect every event with the same pleasant prospect.

She had grown more thoughtful lately, and Betta sometimes rallied her on her fits of abstraction. "Busy or not busy, I believe you are thinking about Iago," she would say.

"Well, think what you like, but I am not, I tell you!"

was Miriel's angry reply. "As if there was nothing but Iago to think about in the world, indeed!"

"Who, then?"

"Who, then! Say 'What, then?' and I'll tell you, perhaps."

"Well, well, if it's nobody, he is not worth quarrelling about, you and me."

"Quarrelling! no, indeed, we must never quarrel, Betta; I have no companion in the world but you;" and they were "friends" again before Betta turned homewards, with a little pity for the girl who had no sweetheart. Miriel, too, went home to Doloer a little ashamed of her hasty answer to Betta.

Her visit to Tregarreg had opened out new scenes to her, and had brought fresh thoughts and feelings into her life. She had not been disappointed in her glimpse of "the world." The fair, with its amusements, its music, its laughter, was all that her dreams had pictured, but that crooked creature, Peggi Doll! Were there many such in the world? And she shuddered as she recalled the rasping laugh and the sneering tone in which she had spoken of Matti Lloyd, of Nanti Matti, who had ever been her ideal of all that was sweet and good. "I don't know what she meant, and I don't want to know," she said to herself; and, having a strong will, she resolutely turned her thoughts away from the unpleasant memory of Peggi Doll, and let them dwell upon a scene that was altogether pleasant. Those frowning castle walls round which the river wound so peacefully, the kind, dark face that seemed to lighten when she laughed, and to return so soon to its more sober expression. To the unsophisticated country girl it seemed as if a king had walked with her round those grey ruins, and then had taken her with him to his home, and shown her the scene of beauty which often gladdened his own eyes. She recalled it all, impressing the picture upon her memory so vividly, that it remained

an ever-recurring spot of brightness, to which she resorted whenever such little annoyances as Betta's words frayed her spirit. At such times it was pleasant to turn in thought to the quaint old room at Hendyrafon, with its dark oak beams and broad, latticed window, outside the golden flow of the river, inside the dainty meal. Doctor Dan's grave voice falling into cheerful tones, through which a laugh, a joke, often glanced, enlivening the conversation and making the time pass, how much too quickly by! Yes, that was an hour altogether delightful, one to be returned to in thought continually. But it had its shadow—the memory of the man who had made the time glide by so pleasantly left standing there alone, as she with Iago and Betta had driven away over the bridge.

He would return to that old room *alone*, no voice but Betti Luke's to break the silence of the deepening twilight, no one to light his lamp, to bring his book, to sit at his feet and ask him about it. Oh! how could Nanti Matti have missed so much happiness? So, with all these thoughts in her mind, it was no wonder that the fair face took a more pensive look sometimes and the childish manners grew more womanly. Even Iago noticed it as he stood beside her milking-stool one evening.

"Your face is growing more like the sunset than the dawn, Miriel," he said.

"Well, I am growing older, lad."

"You haven't reached the evening of life yet, whatever. No, 'tis as if you were holding fast the beauty of the day that is past."

"The day that is past! Well, indeed! Your bardism is making you too serious sometimes, Iago. There's another day coming to-morrow, full of flowers and sunshine, white waves and blue sky; and I am looking forward to it, for all the day that is past. There for you!"

Iago laughed. "Well, you didn't let me finish. I had got a pretty bard-word to add, but now you sha'n't hear it."

"Yes, tell it me."

"Well, 'twas about the beauty of the day that was coming, and your beauty, Miriel—and then I was going to ask you to try and like me. If you would only take my heart and give me yours, every day would be full of beauty for me—and for you, Miriel, for I would spend my life to make you happy."

"Iago, Iago! there's unhappy you are making me. Besides, 'tis all nonsense that you are speaking to me, I am too busy to think of such things."

"*That* is all nonsense."

"Well, look at Nanti Gwen and your father, 'tis caring for them and making their path smooth we ought to be, you and I, Iago, and not thinking about such things."

"Such things! That is nonsense too. Tell me plainly, do you care for me a little, then?"

"A little," said Miriel, rising and looking down into her pail. "Well, then, very much, perhaps. How do I know that if another asked me I would not like him better?"

"That's it," said Iago; "that's what I fear so much. Phil is coming, and—oh, Miriel, promise me before he comes—"

"Oh, I promise you that," said Miriel, remembering Betta's confidences. "I promise you I will never like Phil as much as I like you."

"Promise to marry me, then."

"Marry you! marry you or anyone else! No, indeed, I will not. I tell you, lad, 'tis nonsense. When I am ten years older, perhaps, I will begin to think of marrying."

"Ten years! Well, in ten years I will still love you. Yes, in twenty, in a hundred; but 'tis long to wait."

"Yes, in my deed, that would be long to wait."

Her merry laugh rang out to the sunset, and as she lifted her pail to her hip she added mischievously, "Oh,

there's serious and 'bardic' you are looking, lad! You are not half so handsome without that merry look in your eyes."

But Iago would not smile, on the contrary he sighed as he turned and walked silently beside her down the slope.

"There's glad your father is that Phil is coming home," she said as they reached the little gate, with an attempt to restore their talk to its usual calmness.

"Yes, I think they are all singing Gwen's song in their hearts there night and day:—

> "'On the wings of the wind he is coming to me
> Over the salt sea foam.'"

And he hummed the refrain with an air of nonchalance as he passed on towards the shore.

Miriel too sighed as she entered the porch. "Ach y fi!" she said to herself, "there's foolish he is. Marry, indeed! a boy like that!"

When she entered the house she found Gwen restless and fretful, tugging at her thread and whispering, and it required all her patience and tact to restore her to amiability. Should she resort to her usual ruse and announce the arrival of the *Hawk* in the bay? No, she would try to stave off that last resource, for a sudden inspiration had come to her in connection with that means of soothing Gwen, and she would wait until she had laid her plans before Silvan Vaughan.

Next day while Gwen was sleeping she made her way up the slope to Hafod, where she found the master sitting in the chimney corner smoking his afternoon pipe.

"I have come to ask you something," she said, fanning herself with her hat as she took the stool which he pushed towards her. "'Tis about Nanti Gwen. Will you help me? I have thought of a plan to make her better."

"To make her better? 'merch fach i! I would do anything

to make her better. I would feel 'twas a sign of God's forgiveness to me, child. But in His hand are the issues of our lives. What can I do to help you?"

"Well, listen, then; 'tis this I've been thinking. When she is restless and unhappy, the words that will always soothe her are these—Nanti Matti used to say them when ever Nanti Gwen could not be calmed; she would look through the window and pretend she saw a ship sailing in. 'Here's the *Hawk* sailing in,' she would say, 'and here's Silvan Vaughan coming up the shore.' I know now it was you she meant, but I don't know the reason that Nanti Matti always hated to say those words, I don't want to know. It was something that passed long ago—Oh, I see I am paining you sore by talking about it, but I am thinking that perhaps you could take the sting from that pain by helping me now."

"No, nothing can do that; but what can I do, 'merch-i?"

"Nanti Gwen is very restless to-day; if she is the same to-morrow, I will try the old words, and will you come in just when she is expecting you? just like, I think, you must have been coming long ago before she got like this."

"But she has never seen me yet since she has been like this. What will she say? What if she should know me! How could I bear her eyes upon me?"

"Drink this," said Miriel, pouring out a mug of water. "Oh, I am cruel to make you ill, but 'tis because something is telling me that we can do her good, you and I together. There's happy news 'twould be for Doctor Dan!"

"Yes, 'merch i. I will do what you please. If it breaks this old heart what will that matter?"

"It won't," said Miriel. "Let me try, 'tis God is urging me on. I will fly a white cloth at the window—will you come from wherever you are?"

"I will come. To-morrow, to-night—any time when you call me I will come. God grant your plan may be blessed."

"I must run back," said Miriel; "she may awake, for she is not sleeping sound to-day."

And true enough, before the afternoon had waned, the fretful cry drew Miriel to her Aunt's bedside.

"Come, then," she said cheerfully, "I will help you to rise. 'Twill soon be tea time," and running hastily back to the living-room, she hung the signal through the window, and when, soon after, she led Gwen to her usual seat under the big chimney, the little flag was fluttering in the breeze.

Gwen at once began her spinning, but the invisible thread seemed more entangled than usual, she tugged at it, and, with a flush of excitement in her cheeks, bent over the intricacies of her work.

It was not long before Miriel saw that Vone yr Hafod had noticed her signal, and was coming slowly down the slope. Gwen fretted audibly, until at last the girl, holding one hand over her eyes as though she stood outside in the sunshine, said, "Why, here's the *Hawk* sailing into the bay! and here's Silvan Vaughan coming up the shore!" In a moment the magic words had worked their spell, and soothed the troubled spirit, and Gwen composed herself in her chair, pulling out the bows of her hair, smoothing her black silk apron and smiling contentedly, while Miriel grew hot and cold by turns.

In a few moments footsteps in the porch apprised her of Silvan Vaughan's arrival, and she saw him enter carrying a sheaf of green rushes.

He stooped more than usual, his face was pale, and his lips twitched nervously as he drew near the hearth, where Gwen had not yet observed him.

"Good day, lass!" he said, taking a chair beside her. "I have brought the rushes for a hat I am going to make. You promised to teach me the plait."

Gwen looked up startled, her hands dropped on her lap, a pale pink flushed her cheeks, and, smiling, she took a handful of the rushes which he held out to her with a trembling hand, and her delicate fingers applied themselves naturally to their long-forgotten work.

"Here, let me move your wheel out of your way," and he made as though he lifted the phantom wheel away. Miriel nervously watched the effect, and was surprised to see that the serene smile on Gwen's face was not disturbed.

Silvan Vaughan, flinging the whole sheaf of rushes at her feet, bent over the thin white fingers as if to learn the intricacies of the plait.

"Now let me try," he said, and taking the rushes into his own fingers, which were almost as white and delicate as hers, he twined the strands into the required pattern, which was evidently not so entirely unknown to him as he would have his teacher believe. Sometimes he made a false loop, when she would smilingly set his fingers right.

"Ah! that's it, but I'm tired," he said, when a few inches had been plaited. "Will you do a little now?" and taking the work once more, she continued to weave the rushes with a look of content on her face which had long been absent.

The green coil grew longer and trailed on the floor, the old clock ticked loudly in the corner, and Miriel, moving about silently, was careful not to break the spell of quiet happiness which reigned over the hearth. The hours passed on, 'twas five o'clock, and still Gwen plaited and Silvan Vaughan sat watching with intense interest, a flush of pleasure on his face, that made it young again.

"That is how he looked when he was young," thought Miriel, "and that is how Nanti Gwen looked. What came between them, I wonder? was it dear Nanti Matti? and was it for that she was always punishing herself? Yes, till she died!" for Miriel was learning strange lessons from her slight contact with the world around her, lessons which gave her fair face a look of pensive seriousness sometimes, that added to its charm, for the sober look never stayed too long upon the lips, to which the merry laugh seemed natural, nor too long in the earnest eyes, which could sparkle with merriment and seemed always ready to see the joys and beauties of life.

At last when the kettle was bubbling over she made a sign to Silvan Vaughan which he rightly interpreted.

"You have plaited enough for the crown, Gwen—you will be tired, 'merch i, and here's the tea. Will I stop and have tea with you?"

"Yes," said Gwen, and she allowed him to take the plait from her fingers, and carry the sheaf of rushes to a corner behind the settle, where she seemed to forget them, and, sitting at the table, she drank her tea and ate the thin slices of white bread and butter which were provided for her alone, although in silence, yet with a play of features, and a look of content, which Miriel had never seen there before.

For still another hour after the meal was over Silvan Vaughan sat beside her. She had returned once more to her spinning, but he would not try the rushes again, neither did Miriel press him to do so, so much they dreaded lest the spell should be broken, and Gwen reject their influence. At bedtime she rose, obedient as usual to Miriel's suggestion, but seemed to hesitate as she saw Silvan Vaughan standing with outstretched hand. "Good-night," he said, "I will come and see you to-morrow again."

"Good-night," she answered in a dreamy voice, and placing her hand in Miriel's she passed with her through the old oak doorway. It closed behind them and Silvan Vaughan was left to his own reflections.

CHAPTER XII

GWEN'S AWAKENING

Day after day the same device was practised, and day after day the apathy and numbness which had so long held Gwen's spirit in bondage seemed to succumb to the influence of Silvan Vaughan's presence, and the sensations awakened by the return to her old and favourite occupation. Although she was still somewhat silent and *distrait*, every day saw some fresh token of awakening interest and renewal of mental health.

The new atmosphere of hope brought unbounded pleasure to Miriel, while to Silvan Vaughan it brought a strange and unexpected happiness.

After all the long years was he now to receive this pledge of God's foregiveness? Dare he take it as such? And over his spirit swept a flood of deep humility.

No! He would count it rather as God's blessing upon Gwen, a blessing whose golden light was reflected upon him, and whose stray beams he would thankfully receive. What peace! what joy! to sit beside her every day, while Miriel's busy feet passed backwards and forwards at her work—while the old clock ticked and the cooing of the pigeons came in on the slumbrous afternoon air, while they two sat sheltered and calm together, to end their days in restored companionship.

With each returning day hope and gratitude sprang up afresh in Miriel's heart. The long-wished-for awakening

was coming! Oh, that Nanti Matti had lived to see it! "But she will know," thought the girl in her simple faith. And who can tell but that the simplest faith is nearest to the truth?

"She will know, for what did she say to Doctor Dan? 'When Gwen's reason is restored, then you may feel I am happy and forgiven.' Oh! that he would come, that I might have the happiness of telling him the joyful news." Daily she scanned the brow of the hill with eager eyes, and still every hour Gwen's mind grew clearer. She awoke earlier from her afternoon sleep, passed into the living-room with a firmer step, and leant less heavily on Miriel's arm; her delicate cheek regained its faint bloom, her eyes their brightness, and although she still, at times, spun at her phantom wheel and hummed the old refrain, she often turned from it and picked up the hat of rushes, as if recalling herself from a fit of abstraction.

She seldom spoke unless spoken to, when she would answer quietly and reasonably. Sitting there, silently weaving the green rushes, she seemed to drink in fresh life and energy from the mere presence of the man she loved; but with all the renewal of her mental faculties, her memory still slept, she showed no sign of retrospection, but lived only in the restored happiness of the present.

Silvan Vaughan was thankful that it was so, that he was spared the pain of allusion to the past, and, above all, that she was free from its bitter memories. Betta sometimes came in, and fully entered into Miriel's joy, as she watched the change in Gwen's appearance and manner.

Iago, too, with his thoughtful, earnest eyes, often stood leaning against the chimney wall, and pondered upon the scene before him; his father, still bent and grey, but with a light and colour in his face that he had never seen there before, Gwen reclining in her chair, content and peace impressed upon her features, her busy fingers weaving the shining rushes.

Sometimes a remark would fall from Silvan's lips, sometimes a quiet word from Gwen's, but generally the soft silence of the afternoon brooded over them and bathed them in a strange new atmosphere of rest.

"'Tis strange!" said Iago to Betta one day as they returned up the slope together. "It seems as if my father had found the repose for which he has always been longing. 'Tis easy to see they were lovers in the old time past, though he has never told me so, and I am sure some dark cloud blighted their youth; perhaps it was poor Gwen's derangement."

"Perhaps," said Betta, who had heard more from the gossip of the countryside and had drawn her own conclusions. "Never mind the past, 'tis peace and happiness with them now, whatever."

"I'm afraid it won't be for long," said Iago. "Dost not think he is looking more frail every day although he has more colour? In my deed, I will be glad when Phil comes home."

"Yes," said Betta, picking at the petals of a moon daisy, a "golden dawn" as they call it in Welsh. "He will soon be here now."

"I wonder will he marry that Jinny Ffowkes before long?"

"I wonder," answered Betta, carelessly, as they entered the house door together.

Miriel's thoughts were taking much the same course this afternoon as she moved about on household cares intent.

When the next day brought Doctor Dan and Deio to the gate, she sprang to meet them with so radiant a look of happiness on her face that both exclaimed, "What is it, then?"

"Oh! There's glad I am to see you! 'Tis good news I have! Nanti Gwen is better. Oh, Doctor Dan! Deio! aren't you glad?"

"Is it true?" said Deio, cautiously.

"'Tis true, indeed," she said, as she led the way into the house, talking so fast that the doctor was obliged to accept the *rôle* of silence.

"She's asleep now; but, oh! sit down here, she will soon awake, and Silvan Vaughan will come down," and she paused, breathless, as she detected a smile of patient amusement on the doctor's face. "Oh! there's talking I've been; too much, I know!"

"No, no; I like to hear you chattering, Miriel. But when did the change set in?"

"'Tis a fortnight now since I asked Vone yr Hafod to come in when she was awake. Before that he never came except when she was asleep, so she never saw him." And she recounted the manner in which he had first ventured to show himself, and the wonderful effect of his presence upon Gwen. "And there's wanting to see you I was," she continued, "because I knew 'twas *the* wish of your heart to see her better."

"Well, I don't know about *the* wish of my heart; but, at all events, I am truly glad, Miriel."

"Yes, yes! Because of what Nanti Matti said. Now we can grieve for her loss, but without bitterness, because she will know of this blessing that God has sent us."

"I wish I had your simple faith, child!"

"Simple faith! But why, then? Don't you think Nanti Matti will be glad?" And a look of disturbed thought made her eyes serious.

"Yes, yes! Let us all rejoice without questioning. Where is she now? Asleep?"

"Yes, 'tis time to fetch her in here."

"How shall I do, little woman? You have managed it all so well hitherto. How shall I meet her, for she has seen me before without recognising me?"

"Well, indeed, I think it would be better to speak as if you had been here yesterday;" and Doctor Dan allowed himself to be guided by her counsel, and when, a few

minutes afterwards Gwen entered, as usual leaning on Miriel's arm, he greeted her without any show of surprise or unusual pleasure.

"Well, Gwen! Here's a lovely day again, isn't it?" and holding out his hand she placed hers within it.

"Yes, indeed," was all her answer, as she arranged her dress in her chair and picked up her rushes from the little table, where Miriel had laid them in readiness. But those two words alone were sufficient to show him that reason had resumed control over the mind which had so long been darkened. Her eyes were often turned expectantly towards the sunny doorway, and, observing this, the doctor rose with the intention of leaving, but hesitated as Miriel said appealingly, "Oh! not before Vone yr Hafod comes! I see him coming down the slope."

She could not have laid a greater tax upon him, nor have demanded a more complete sacrifice, and a flood, nay, a very tornado of bitter feelings, rushed through his mind and heart, although the few moments during which Silvan Vaughan drew nearer were unmarked by any show of feeling in the doctor's dark face, except what a sudden and vivid flash of colour evinced. His righteous indignation, his hatred of the man whose footsteps he already heard at the doorway, his wrongs long brooded over, could these be all erased and trodden down in a moment? The bitterness of a lifetime, was it meet that it should be thrust aside and give place to the ordinary amenities of life? Surely Time is but a name for the course of events, for in that second, while a shadow fell on the floor and Miriel's soft voice pleaded in his ears, in Doctor Dan's heart a tempest of hatred and anger was conquered.

"Your face is dark and angry," said Miriel. "I am thinking Nanti Matti would say 'Let all the past be forgotton and forgiven now.'"

"So be it, Miriel," he answered, "so help me, God! I will not cast a shadow on your returning happiness," and

standing erect, no trace of the storm of feeling through which he had passed upon his face, with a bend of his head he greeted Silvan Vaughan with no anger, though without friendliness.

"Dan!" gasped the latter, coming to a standstill within the doorway. "I did not know you were here! Will I go again?"

"No. I knew you were coming. I waited for you. The young are rising up around us; it is not fair to spoil their draught of life by our drops of gall. To-day I turn my back upon the past for—for Miriel's sake, and from me you will never hear another word in allusion to it. 'Tis good news I hear of Gwen; let us all rejoice in it."

The latter had been looking from one to the other in puzzled curiosity during this conversation, and, seeing that it would be dangerous to prolong the tension of her mind, he pushed a chair towards her, and made a sign to Silvan Vaughan to occupy it.

But to him the sudden meeting had been too trying, and he sank upon the chair evidently unable to stand longer.

"This, too!" he said. "I cannot bear it!" The pale face grew whiter, the eyes closed, and, had not Miriel supported him, he would have fallen to the ground. Once more her little store of wine was broached, and Doctor Dan held the mug to his lips.

In a moment Gwen had risen and, thrusting Miriel aside, she assisted the doctor's efforts with quiet self-possession. It was she who chafed the white, thin hands and fanned the blue lips, and when at last the prostrate man showed signs of returning consciousness, it was her voice that spoke the tender words of cheer, and her smile which greeted his awakening eyes.

"Art better, Silvan bach?" she said, when, with the doctor's assistance, Miriel had made him comfortable on

the settle; and the weak voice answered, "Yes, Gwen fach."

"'Twas a faint, I think, Dan?" she said, turning naturally to the doctor.

"Yes, yes," he said; "the day has been warm. Let's have tea, Miriel. Perhaps Gwen will help you?"

"Yes," answered Gwen, looking around her as if a little dazed, and, although she was not of much use, it was delightful to Miriel to see her move about the room absorbed in thought for others, and with a look of pleased content upon her face, though mingled with anxiety for Silvan Vaughan's feebleness.

"If Iago would come, I would go home," he said.

"That will be best," said the doctor. "Quiet and rest will bring you round by to-morrow;" and Miriel running out called, "Iago—Iago!" until the name filled all the hollow slope. Her voice came pleasantly in on the soft afternoon air, but somehow the sound grated on Doctor Dan's ear, and a cloud was brooding over his face when in a short time the owner of the name entered Doloer.

"Father anw'l?" the young man exclaimed, as he saw his father's white face resting on the patchwork cushion which Gwen had placed under his head. "What is it? A faint?"

"Yes, bring the car and take me home."

In a moment Iago, with a hurried greeting to Doctor Dan, was running up the slope, returning before long with the car, into which with the doctor's help he lifted his father, and they drove over the soft turf together.

"That's a knowing lad, and tender," said the doctor, as if compelled by some inward impulse to speak the words.

"Yes, indeed," said Miriel. "Iago is kind and wise and good. And if you could hear his poetry and his voice!—he can sing well enough to try for a prize at the Eisteddfod but he won't."

"A wonderful man, I see;" and the girl, keenly sensi-

tive to every inflection of his voice, felt that she had said something not altogether pleasing to Doctor Dan. She hurried to the little tea-table, therefore, and tried to create a diversion by sitting down to it with a great show of hospitality. She tried by all sorts of pretty devices to banish the momentary look of gloom from his face, and not without success, for before the meal was over the dark shadow had fled and he had regained his cheerfulness, and even Gwen, though often relapsing into fits of musing, took part in the conversation.

"How is Betti?" asked Miriel. "There's kind she was to me; and the dear old room—is it all the same?"

"Well, no," said the doctor, "I don't think it is. The furniture and the walls and the window are there unchanged, but I think it seems rather dull and dreary lately. I must have it painted and papered like the new houses, I think."

"Oh, no!" said Miriel, clasping her hands. "'Twould spoil the pretty white walls and the brown beams—they suit the gold and red on the river. Oh, no, no! it would not be like Hendyrafon then."

"No, of course," he said; "I was joking, Miriel. You feel the spirit of the place as I do. But will you come then and brighten it up some day soon?"

"Will I come the day of the Eisteddfod?" said Miriel, almost in a whisper, a flush of pleasure colouring her face.

"Nothing could be better, 'merch i! Next month, isn't it? Now that Gwen is better you must come oftener to town. We'll go and see the old castle again, and I will tell you more about it."

Miriel sighed with content, though she only said, "Yes, indeed, I will come. More tea?"

"No more. I must go; Deio is to meet me at the top of the slope. He is gone to Bryngelly. What if you call Mali and come with me to the top, Miriel?"

She was out of the door in a moment, and Doctor Dan,

turning to Gwen, said in a matter-of-fact voice, "Good-bye, Gwen. I will come and see you soon again. Will you weave me a hat some day? It would be cool and shady for driving."

"Yes, when Silvan's is finished. Will he be well to-morrow?"

"Quite well, and with you here in the afternoon Fforwel!"

Mali came bobbing in with a "Dy, da ser," and Miriel, waiting in the porch, joined him as he left the house.

"I had to call you out," he said, "to tell you how astonished and delighted I am at Gwen's improvement. It is exactly what I could wish it to be—not sudden, not complete, for I see her memory still sleeps. I believe she will recover wholly, Miriel, and we shall have your wise little head and your tender heart to thank for it; but I foresee one danger. If she suddenly regained her memory I think it would be fatal to her, but if the wakening is slow and gradual it will be safe, so don't hurry it—say nothing to recall the past."

"I won't; indeed, I won't," said Miriel, "and—and—"

"And what, Miriel? Why do you hesitate? I cannot bear to think you are afraid of me. Can't you learn to like me well enough to say just what comes into your mind?"

"I am not afraid, indeed," she said. "I *have* something to say, but I haven't got words to make my thoughts plain. I am sure you can't understand that, because you are speaking so easy and smooth;" and she laughed at her own ignorance—that ringing laugh which had brightened the solitude of Hendyrafon.

"Yes, I can," said the doctor. "I am not sure that I am not in the same difficulty myself! so say it just as you think it. I have no doubt I can piece it together."

"Oh, 'tis only that I want to say that I know it was hard for you to be kind to Vone yr Hafod. I don't know

why, but I am sure that he was wrong long ago, and you were right; and you put all your angry feelings behind you, and you were kind to him, because of something—because of Nanti Matti perhaps, or because of Nanti Gwen, not to spoil her getting better, I mean. And then I am wanting you to know that I am thanking you in my heart, though I can't put it in words."

"I understand it all," he said, "and you guessed right, it was hard; but in one thing you are mistaken, and that is—the motive, but never mind that. Let me see, there is something I am wanting to say, too, and that is, that I am glad you know it was hard, and that's all, I think!"

Suddenly Miriel stopped. "Here's a patch of white clovares—there's glad I am!" she exclaimed. "'Tis the flower that you like so much, and so I can give you something," and she held them towards him shyly, her fair face growing pink with the very shade of the heart of the blossom.

"Will you put it in my coat, Miriel?" he asked, scarcely able to hide his admiration of the beautiful face.

"Yes, indeed, I will," and she fastened it safely, though a good deal embarrassed.

"It is very pink for a white one, whatever!" she said to cover her shyness.

"Your face is the same shade of colour. I think the clover is blushing."

"Well, indeed, perhaps it is," said Miriel, laughing; "so proud it is to be more noticed than the others in the grass!"

They were interrupted by a call that came loud and clear upon the breeze. "Miriel! Miriel!" and the air seemed filled with the name.

"It is Iago," she said, blushing a little, she knew not why, and she called in return—"I am coming." Doctor Dan saw the blush and noted the ready answer, and felt a strange sinking of the heart.

"What does he want with you?" he asked.

"I don't know, but perhaps his father is worse, and Betta is out, or indeed I don't know what," she added, with a pretty confusion.

"Never mind what, Miriel. You would miss these people out of your life now!"

"Yes, indeed!" She said no more, and the doctor said no more, but, reaching the top of the slope, got into the gig which Deio, tired of waiting, drove quickly away.

"He forgot to say good-bye," said Miriel to herself, but the omission did not pain her much, or, rather, if it did, the pain was counterbalanced by the memory of the light in Doctor Dan's face as he had spoken to her. With an unusual warmth fluttering her heart she turned towards Hafod, where Iago stood waiting for her outside the grey walls beside which she had buried Quitto. So long ago it seemed! How altered was her life! how many events had happened within the last few months. Surely it must be years since Quitto died, for then she was a child, now she was a woman, and Doctor Dan had confessed she was a woman and had conversed with her to-day as if she *were* a woman—and with the new warmth in her heart, she yet sighed, as she followed Iago into the quaint old passage at Hafod.

"'Tis the white heifer is sick, Miriel, and Betta has gone to Porthlidan to get a little brandy for my father; he is asleep now. What will I do for her?" and together they leant over the strong oak rail that made one side of the passage. The cow-house was a foot or more lower than the floor of the dwelling-house, so they had to look down at Corwen, lying on the straw, and neither eating nor chewing the cud.

Miriel once more made her ready admission of ignorance.

"There's sorry I am I don't know! but I will call Mali. She will know," and the latter came in hot haste, with a regular pharmacopœia of recipes, a bolus, a blister, a

drench, and I know not what! until Iago and the inexperienced Miriel began to look round in affright.

"See how she drops her head!" said Iago, "and how rough her coat looks! I wouldn't for a hundred pounds that this should happen while my father and Betta are both absent."

"Ts—ts—ts, what a pity!" said Miriel, climbing over the rail into Corwen's 'cratch, cooing soft nothings into her ear and passing her arm round the gentle creature's neck, "'Trwdi anwyl!"

"'Trwdi fach!" said Iago, looking over the rail in concern and anxiety—Mali standing with arms akimbo and predicting all sorts of disasters if her advice were not taken.

Suddenly, with a snort, Corwen rose to her feet and began to tug vigorously at the hay in the manger!

"Well, Tan i marw! the hussy's been cheating us!" said Mali, turning indignantly away, and not altogether pleased that her medicaments were not needed, while Miriel, catching sight of Iago's expression of mingled relief and disgust, burst into one of her ringing peals of laughter, which Iago laughingly extinguished by throwing a bundle of green clover over her head.

"Hush, lass!" he cried, "father is asleep," and Miriel, unable to stifle her laughter, hurried out through the cow-house door, where Iago joined her, looking rather shamefaced.

"Oh, anw'l, anw'l!" said Miriel, between her fits of laughter. "Here's a farmer! Well, indeed! Will I ever forget your face, lad?"

"Yours too," said Iago, "and you wasting all those sweet words upon her! Corwen has fooled us all."

"Well, I can go, I suppose!" and, running down the slope, she stopped repeatedly to look back at Iago and laugh.

Meanwhile, the two occupants of the gig had driven

away, and disappeared over the brow of the hill, each silently buried in his own thoughts. Deio, while he had been waiting for his master, had been keenly alive to everything that had transpired between him and the sea, although he had sat apparently as stolid as a fossil. He had noted the long stay at Doloer, followed by the walk up the hill of Doctor Dan and Miriel together, and Iago's call for "Miriel, Miriel!" which echoed over the slope, had seemed to him inopportune, if not impertinent. He had seen Iago, too, driving his father home from Doloer, the latter evidently suffering from one of those "nasty fints." "'Twas was a good thing master was there, no doubt," he soliloquised, for he was apt to hold more conversation with himself than with anyone else, "but there's tender that boy was to his father! That's the way things are in this world; wickedness and folly in the past, and then love and pleasantness at the end of his days. Ach y fi!"

At this moment his master arrived, and Deio drove on without a word, but the same matter evidently occupied the thoughts of each, for, as he alighted at Hendyrafon, the doctor made one remark, which seemed to relieve his feelings. "All the same, he was a d——d rascal!"

"A blackguard!" echoed Deio.

CHAPTER XIII

THE "SEA GULL'S" ARRIVAL

The summer weeks were passing rapidly onward. To Doloer they brought such a season of joyous hope and happy intercourse, that in the long years to come there was not one of that small, isolated circle but recalled it with wistful longing.

Gwen improved daily, and sang her favourite song with a happy intonation, which had been utterly absent from the crooning melody of her later years. They all grew familiar with the tune, and often in the evenings, when they were gathered round the hearth, the whole party joined in the swinging refrain which she led with a clear, true voice :—

> "On the wings of the wind he is coming to me
> Over the salt sea foam,
> Out of the west where the wind blows free
> My sailor is sailing home !
> Sailing home—sailing home
> Over the stormy sea."

Even Silvan Vaughan joined his weak voice in the chorus, his thoughts flying to the *Sea Gull*, which he knew was already on her homeward bound voyage, bearing with her his son in whom his hopes were centred. Iago he was accustomed to think of with a modified regard ; he was tender and true, he was steady and honest—a bard,

too, there was no doubt—but only a farmer, a son of the soil, while Phil, with his handsome person and charming ways, was a gentleman born, and destined to bring credit and wealth to the old family that had for years been shadowed by the misdeeds of his own reckless youth.

The hay harvest was over, and beyond the slope the barley fields were turning colour. One day succeeded another with balmy languorous softness, no sound breaking the stillness except the murmur of the sea, the cooing of the pigeons and the fanning flight of their wings, sometimes Miriel's call to her goats and their bleating answer; but, stay! if you listen, the air is full of sweet sounds; the call of the seabirds, the trickle of the stream and the song of the robin.

Gwen was so far restored that she now took her part in the regular household work, and, although she never alluded to the past, apparently never remembered it, she was interested in all the events of the present. Silvan Vaughan spent half his time at Doloer, sitting quietly on the hearth with Gwen, and weaving with her the green rushes into all sorts of fanciful and useful articles. He had even succeeded in enticing her into the garden, and from there to the shore, where the two pathetic figures might be seen at sunset, walking slowly together at the edge of the waves; both bent under the weight of sorrow more than years—both happy in the simple intercourse of renewed companionship, and both wearing the green rush hats which had helped so materially to occupy the long hours of mental convalescence.

"There's happy they are!" said Miriel, looking through the little side window, Iago and Betta peering over her shoulder.

"Yes," said Iago, "but, in my deed, there's sad they are too! Why is it that age robs us of so much of the charm of life?"

"It is not age," said Miriel; "'tis the memory of the

past, I am thinking. Their days could not have been so pleasant as ours, whatever."

"Well, indeed," said Iago, "I hope the memory of these happy days will not bend our shoulders like that! But Betta and I must go; to-night we must be busy tidying the garden and cleaning up the clos—our Phil is a particular gentleman, and we must have all neat and straight before he comes to the new home."

"When will he come?" Miriel asked.

"I don't know, but any moment; 'tis from there he will come," and he pointed straight to the north-west. "See, my father is pointing it out to Gwen. Anw'l! anw'l! he is wearing himself out with longing and looking forward; Phil is the apple of his eye," he said, with a little pain in his voice.

"Not more than you," said Betta, "only Phil is absent, and you are with him always."

"Yes, like the son in the parable," said Iago, laughing. "Well, I won't be jealous like him, whatever. Come, lass," and they went out together, while Miriel went to the orchard carrying one of Gwen's green rush baskets, and gathered the apples which hung low from the loaded trees.

Next day at broad noon Betta came running breathlessly down the slope. "Miriel! Miriel!" she called, "come out and see! the *Sea Gull* is crossing the bay. Uncle Sil sent me down; he is like a wild man with joy, and 'tis all Iago can do to keep him calm. They are going to Porthlidan in the car to meet Phil."

Miriel ran into the garden at her call, and, looking out to sea, saw a sight that is hard to be beaten by any other in the world for beauty and grace and the suggestion of hope and joy. The *Sea Gull* was there, coming in from the west, every sail set, her blue pennon fluttering in the wind, her cordage decorated with flags and ribbons of every colour, for Captain Phil was fully aware of the interest and excite-

ment which his arrival would cause, so had called into requisition every flag or strip of bunting to mark his first appearance in the bay. Even in Miriel's heart there was a flutter of excitement as she ran in to fetch Nanti Gwen, and when they both stood on the garden hedge together and saw the bright scarves and streamers which fluttered from every window at Hafod, she too must needs bring out her light blue scarf and wave it aloft in welcome to the long-expected one, while Gwen fluttered her scarlet shawl in the sea breeze.

"Oh! there she goes—Stivin!—Mali!—come and see how she flings the foam from her prow—how she rides over the waves like a real sea gull! Oh! 'tis no wonder Iago and his father are proud this day! And Betta," she thought, "poor Betta must hide her joy."

It was not long before she saw the car drive out from the Hafod clos, bearing Iago and his father dressed in their best suits. The gay ship drawing nearer and nearer until almost Miriel could see the sailors who walked the deck; at last she was out of sight round the corner of the bay to Porthlidan.

"They will not be back till evening," she thought, "so I will run up to see Betta. There's happy she'll be!" and hurrying up the slope she soon reached the house, where she sought her friend in vain.

In and out of the boidy, in the living-room, in the clos and garden she called, but could get no answer, and she was about to give up the search, when a sound reached her ear that led her to a little cupboard room which Betta had prepared for her own occupation, while the lloft had been vacated in favour of Phil. Up the rough ladder which led to it Miriel climbed, until, arriving on the floor of the cupboard, she saw Betta lying on her bed and sobbing passionately.

"Betta!" she cried, "what is it, lass?" but the girl sobbed on. "Oh, Betta! answer me; what is it?"

"I don't know, indeed," she at last answered, sitting upon her bed. "I don't know what are these foolish tears. 'Tis overjoyed I am, I think, and having to keep it all to myself is so hard, Miriel. Iago and Uncle Sil can show their joy and welcome him home, but I must hide mine like a cold stone, and show no joy when he arrives. Oh! 'tis cruel—cruel—and sometimes I feel I cannot bear it."

"But he will know that 'tis not like a stone you feel, Betta," said Miriel, "and 'tis hard, indeed, for you, and I cannot understand it—Betta, dost know my heart is aching for thee, lass?"

"Yes, yes—I know, and there! 'tis over now. I will go to the spring and bathe my eyes, and you shall see me, Miriel, how clever I will be for Phil's sake."

"Will you put on your brown gown with the yellow spots, Betta, and your yellow silk kerchief? There's pretty you look in that."

"No," she said, "I must not change my gown, or Uncle Sil would notice it."

And for this hardship Miriel felt the deepest sympathy with her friend. It touched her woman's heart, for she knew that for Iago's eyes she herself had often searched the coffer for some extra bit of finery. She passed her arm round Betta's neck, and their two cheeks leant closely to each other for a few moments, until, catching sight of their reflection in the little looking-glass which hung against the window, they both laughed, and Betta's tears were dried. There was no further possibility of work for Miriel that day, for continually she ran out to the porch to watch the road from Porthlidan. Every time she ran out the goats bleated at her, and the pigeons rose from the roof and alighted again with the musical rhythm of their wings, but it was quite late before she saw against the pale yellow of the sky the black outlines of the car and its occupants. Yes, there were three—so she knew that Silvan Vaughan's heart was at rest, and Betta's unrest had begun. Next

day, while she worked at her herb bed, she saw, with a flutter of excitement, Silvan Vaughan with Phil and Iago enter the garden, and the awkward shyness of a country girl would have completely crushed her, had not curiosity and the simplicity of her nature thrust into the background all self-consciousness. Throwing her rake away she advanced with a smile of welcome, but had almost started with surprise at the sight of Silvan Vaughan's eldest son. It is seldom that we behold a human being who in every outward particular fulfils our ideal of beauty, but such did Philip Vaughan. Perfect symmetry of form and features were his; his brown hair shone with gold touches; in his dark blue eyes there was the gleam of stars; all his movements were graceful and supple, yet withal manly. His dress, unlike that of the country youth, chosen in good taste and of English fashion, showed off the graces and manliness of his form. Never had a creature of such mould and features risen on Miriel's horizon, and when he spoke and entered into familiar conversation with her, she felt the charm of his presence, as did every man, woman or child who came within the sphere of its influence.

"Welcome home, indeed," she said, "and I am sorry that 'tis an earthy hand I will have to give you."

"Oh! bless it," said Phil, laughing, "'tis the good old soil of Cymrn, that I have longed to see for the last six months."

"Well! there's glad we are to see you," said Miriel, "and there's fine the *Sea Gull* looked; she seemed like a bird flying in from the west."

"Yes, 'on the wings of the wind,'" said Phil, "as Iago was singing all the way from Porthlidan. He has been telling me all about you here, and how you spend your evenings singing under the big chimney. Jar i! you do well to drive the blue devils away with music, for it seems to me there's nothing else to do so here."

"Blue devils! what are they?" said Miriel, "but come

into the house and see Nanti Gwen. I hear her and Iago talking, they are great friends," and in through the old porch they entered the living-room, where Iago and Gwen made room for them on the hearth. Phil held out his hand.

"And how are you, Nanti Gwen? You see, I know you all, and I am come to take my place amongst you for a good while, so prepare your good tempers and rub up your spirits, all of you, for I tell you the dumps and I are sworn enemies."

"The dumps and blue devils! Indeed, we never heard of them before," said Miriel.

"You are making us acquainted with strangers, Phil," said Iago.

"Well, indeed, I am glad," said Phil; "but this place looked like a good home for them—this part of the world, I mean, for sure this lassie looks blithesome enough"—and he touched Miriel's shoulders as she passed with a little familiarity which she rather shrank from.

Silvan Vaughan laughed indulgently at the young man's remarks; he seemed to have grown younger since yesterday, so bright was his eye, so cheerful his demeanour.

"Will you stop and have your cawl with us?" said Miriel.

"No, no," said Silvan Vaughan. "There is a grand dinner cooking for us — two fat ducks and an apple pudding."

"Oh! well, indeed, then be bound Betta is busy."

"Yes, she hasn't a word to cast at us," said Phil, rising, with a yawn. "'Tis time to go, I'm thinking."

"We'll come down in the evening," he said, without waiting to be asked, "and we'll send a roaring chorus up that old chimney," and he went out humming the old refrain:—

"Sailing home! Sailing home!"

After this came a time of gaiety and dissipation to the "lone" shore. There was tea at Hafod, to which Gwen and Miriel were invited, with oatcake and white bread, and piles of light cakes. Then of course came tea at Doloer, and for the first time in her life Miriel entertained company, and the excitement of the preparations was, as Mali said, "something beyond!" The tea was bought at Tregarreg, the best that could be procured, the light cakes mixed by Mali from the old Tygwyn recipe, Gwen taking much interest in their preparation. Then came the harvest feasts, not to speak of visits to fairs and markets, for Phil's exuberant spirits seemed to find the confines of the slope with its two isolated dwellings too narrow. Miriel and Gwen entered but sparingly into the fresh excitement of Hafod, but went on their way with the old rustic peace. And what of Betta? A curious change seemed to have come over her; immersed in the household duties, she was seldom seen in clos or garden, and Miriel felt as though a veil were falling between her and her bosom friend. She tried by many little hints and innuendoes to induce Betta once more to reopen the subject of her love for Phil, but the girl seemed altered, and if she ever mentioned him, it was with an evident wish to impress upon Miriel that she no longer felt any interest in him. Miriel was guileless and unsuspicious as the daylight, and therefore was easily deceived. She seldom saw Betta in Phil's company, but, when she did, the girl's heightened colour, her shining eyes, and her nervous, restless way were scarcely accounted for by Phil's cold and indifferent manner. He seldom spoke to her excepting in the natural course of conversation, and Miriel almost came to believe that, whatever had been their intimacy in the past, there was nothing now more than the ordinary cousinly feeling between them. Sometimes she fancied that Betta's eyes showed signs of weeping, but when taxed with it she indignantly denied, "Crying, indeed! what will I be crying

about, any more than you, Miriel?" and in the evenings when she still kept up the old custom of joining the circle on Doloer hearth, her high spirits and merry repartees were calculated to make them all believe that her heart was free from every thought of love or sorrow; her rich, ripe beauty seemed to have gained in expression, so that Miriel often wondered that she had not sooner realised how beautiful she was.

"There's red Betta's lips are," she said one day.

"Yes, I think she grows prettier every day," said Iago, while Phil said nothing, but hummed a merry refrain:—

"Lips like two cherries,
Teeth like the snow,
Eyes like black berries,
She bothers me so!"

Betta did not hear, or pretended not to, while Silvan Vaughan looked keenly from one to another, and turning to Gwen said,—

"'Tis in Liverpool Phil learns all the pretty speeches he makes to the lassies; he is very silent about his cousin, but I'm thinking 'tis a sly dog is Phil, and we'll be hearing of a wedding very soon."

"'The church bells are ringing,
The doors open wide,
The bridegroom is waiting,
But where is the bride?'"

sang Phil.

"What will we sing to-night," said Iago.

"What better than 'Hob y dery dando,'" answered Phil, and they sat till late with songs and choruses following one upon another, until Nanti Gwen was tired and went to bed, when the others dispersed and Miriel was left alone on the hearth. The August day had been calm and serene and was now succeeded by a crystal colourless sky. A few faint clouds of rose and gold still trailed across the horizon to show that day had not long departed, while over the sea

one brilliant star hung glittering to herald the approaching night. The sea heaved softly like the breathing of a sleeping child, and the beauty of the scene called irresistibly to Miriel. One run over the shore before she closed the door she felt she must have, and, crossing over the soft grass, she stepped on to the softer sands, where she was soon running across the beach to the rocks and boulders that strewed the further side of the shore. Here in a cleft of the rock she sat and gazed out to sea, where a ship was riding at anchor in wait for the flow of the tide, a light on her mast moving slowly with the rise and fall of the waves. It was a night to cast a spell of musing over any romantic or sympathetic nature, and Miriel soon drifted in thought away from her surroundings. Why, she could not tell, but the soft evening glow, the glistening waters before her, brought to her mind a different scene; a quaint old room, a broad, low window with diamond panes, beyond which streaks of crimson and gold lay on a swift, rushing river. Within, a solitary man, who looked towards the sunset with a world of thought and sadness in his dark eyes. She had wandered far indeed, but was suddenly recalled by a sound so strange and so unusual on that lonely shore, that she started in astonishment; a pleasant sound it was too, that of two young voices, who talked in soft, low tones, almost in whispers. They drew nearer, and Miriel watched breathlessly, while out of the grey twilight appeared Phil and Betta. Her first impulse was to call to them, even to join them, but surprise kept her silent for a moment, and in that moment they had passed into the shadow of the cliff, while on her mind was left a clear impression of the closeness of their intimacy. How shyly happy had Betta's dark face appeared, how tenderly protecting Phil's, as he bent his tall head a little over his companion's. In a few moments they were out of sight, and Miriel turned towards home full of vague fears of she knew not what.

PART II

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHAIR BARD

When on the following day Betta and Phil entered Doloer together, Miriel could scarcely disguise the keen interest with which she watched them, but she could detect no difference in their outward demeanour; there was the same cool indifference in Phil's looks and the same merry nonchalance in Betta's; an occasional tremor in the latter's eyelids when Phil spoke, alone showing the girl was alive to his presence and to every intonation of his voice.

Iago's visits had been less frequent of late, and Miriel missed his pleasant, homely face.

"'Tis busy I am," he said in answer to her inquiries one day. "The Eisteddfod is drawing near, and I have been writing something to send in—after it is over you will be tired of me again."

But if Iago's visits had been few and far between, not so Phil's; he haunted Doloer morning, noon and night, following Miriel's movements with eyes that made no attempt to hide their admiration. Sometimes she playfully threatened to sweep him out, and frequently left him to Nanti Gwen's society while she went to work in the garden. Phil laughingly refused to be swept away, but being left alone on the hearth was little to his taste, and one day when Miriel took up her basket, saying, "Well, I will go and gather some plums, because you two will be company," he had looked annoyed and angry.

"Nay, I will gather the plums for you," he said, follow-

ing her into the garden, and under the laden trees he stood and reached down the branches while Miriel plucked the ripe blue fruit, and filled her basket. "Why do you run away from me, Miriel?" he said at last. "'Tisn't often I've to ask the lassies that." She was reaching up to a tall bough at the moment, and, looking round at him, she said, with a dimpled smile, "Why do you run after me then, Phil? I am obliged to run away."

The laughing face, the slender form were within his reach, and it was not Philip who could withstand the temptation! so suddenly clasping her round the waist he drew her towards him and stole a kiss. Miriel wrenched herself from his grasp, the hot blood crimsoned her face, her eyes flashed, "How dare you!" she said, and, stamping her foot, she repeated, "How dare you, Philip Vaughan? I am not liking your double ways."

"Double ways, lodes, what's the matter?—and what do you mean?"

"I mean that I will tell Betta 'tis mean and wicked of you to court her and flatter her, and then be false to her."

"Betta!" said Phil. "What's the girl talking about? Betta and I are cousins, and surely, though I am fond enough of her, yet I can kiss a pretty girl when I see her."

"Well, then," said Miriel, and again she stamped her foot upon the grass, "'tis not me, Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer, you will kiss, so there!"

Phil burst into loud laughter, his eyes danced with fun, and seeming no whit abashed he stood back a few paces, as if to watch her with greater advantage. "Well—tan i marw!" he said, "look at the little peppercorn! she's enough to frighten a mouse," and he laughed again, while Miriel stood flushed and angry before him. "'Tis not me, the Queen of England, that's going to kiss you!" he repeated, strutting about and stamping his foot in imita-

tion of Miriel's little gust of passion. "Oh, will I ever forget it? But, Miriel, lodes!" he added suddenly, and holding out his hand, "come, shake hands, let's be friends again."

"Well, indeed, Phil, I will not be friends with you unless you promise never to do that again."

"Do what again?" said Phil, with provoking merriment.

"Never kiss me again."

"In my deed, I can't promise," he replied, and Miriel without a word tossed her head proudly and turned towards the house.

Phil, still unabashed, marched beside her with the same air of offended dignity, and, tossing his head, said, "The Queen is going home to Windsor." Miriel tried not to laugh, but had to hurry indoors lest Phil might see how entirely the cloud of anger had fled from her face.

And then they once more fell into the old groove of friendly intimacy, for it was impossible to be angry long with Silvan Vaughan's handsome son, and Miriel took no other steps than to avoid being alone within him, a course which Philip, although he rather resented it, treated with laughing contempt. "I'll catch you some day, Miriel," he said, and continually, when the occasion suited, he alluded to her "fit of fury" as he called it. "Get away, Kit and Brythen," he would say, when Miriel shoo'd them from the doorway, "'tisn't me, the Queen of England, that's going to be bothered by you"—what could she do with such a bold and thoughtless fellow?

What but stand aside and let the simple rustic drama pass before her, a drama so insignificant to the great world, but so all-important to the actors who took part in it.

Mali Storrom returned from Tregarreg on market-day, full of excitement about the great event which was occupying the thoughts and pens of many a cottage and homestead.

"Caton pawb!" she cried, "there's grand the town is

with papers, yellow, red and blue on the walls and on the bridge, and letters prainted on them as big as my shoe, but if they were a mile long I couldn't read them. Oh, you never saw such a thing!" and her closed fist came down on the table at regular intervals to mark her words.

"A big tilt in a field, with red and blue flaags all over it. And Doctor Dan is to be one of the jidges, there! And three old women are going to sing a hymn for a prize, there! And there's to be little tilts with food and sweets all round the field, there! And I saw the chair that the chief bard is to have for a prize, all carved it is, and standing in Jones, the cabinet's, window!"

"Woa!" said Phil. "Mali fach! have a drink of meth."

"Go along with you," said Mali, laughing. "I haven't told you half yet, but I'll come in after tea and tell you the rest. Be bound that yollin has not got the kettle boiling."

When she had gone they all laughed at her excitement, but still all had drunk in eagerly every scrap of information concerning the Eisteddfod. Iago was silent but listened with interest. For many an hour he had absented himself from the home circle to spend it alone with his paper and pen, shut up in a tiny room which he had with his own hands boarded off from the hayloft.

The results of those hours of retirement he had now submitted to the Eisteddfod Committee, and notwithstanding his calm disposition he could not suppress an eager anxiety as to the adjudication.

The Eisteddfod filled everyone's thoughts and was on everyone's lips. To Miriel it was a subject of intense curiosity, for hitherto she had never attended the national gathering; besides, she had not forgotten Doctor Dan's suggestion as to another tea at Hendyrafon, and that event she felt would be the most delightful hour of the long-looked-for day. Both Stivin and Mali had intended to

trudge into town, never dreaming that Miriel, the stay-at-home, who had spent her short life in contented solitude, had any idea of attending the meetings. Upon her making known to them her intention of doing so, however, Mali indignantly denied having ever *thought* of being present herself, much to Stivin's bewilderment, for he had taken every meal for the last fortnight to the accompaniment of Mali's conjectures, weather forecasts and anticipations connected with her intended trip to the 'Steddfod.

"Me go—no, 'merch i! not I! 'tis at home with Gwen I will be. Ach y fi! what would I be going there for? An old woman like me—'Steddfod, indeed!"

Stivin scratched his head. "Well, will I go?" he asked in an abject voice ludicrously unlike his usual stentorian tones.

"Oh! Thou!" said Mali. "I don't see what an old dolt like thee could do better. Yes, go, and bring us home a close account of it." For, with all her sharpness and her hasty temper, Mali Storrom was entirely unselfish, and for Miriel or Gwen she would have sacrificed more, far more, than a day's outing.

The month sped on, and at last came the 27th, the day before the 'Steddfod, and all was outwardly bright and happy anticipation of the following day's events, though the calm and restful peace of the summer days had departed, leaving behind a subtle sense of change.

Iago looked anxious and Phil more restless and irritable. Betta alone retained her blithesome cheerfulness, but, in spite of her mirth and sprightliness, Miriel felt some change had come over the girl whom she had learnt to look upon as her bosom friend. There was nothing tangible that she could complain of, but a veil seemed to hang between them, and so Miriel, too, shared a little in the general feeling of disquietude.

She was filled with doubt and embarrassment regarding her visit to Doctor Dan when the Eisteddfod should be

over. Had he forgotten all about it? would she dare to make her way alone to that quaint arched doorway? Well! if the worst came to the worst she could remain with Betta, but in that case she felt that the day would lose more than half its charm for her. Very often she looked up to the brow of the slope, hoping to see the swinging gig with its usual occupants, but no such sight came to reassure her.

At last it came—the long-expected day. Before ten o'clock Miriel was standing in the Hafod clos, where Betta and Phil and Iago were gathered round the car that was to bear them to town.

Stivin had started an hour earlier, and Mali stood in the porch at Doloer watching them and energetically waving her apron as they left the clos—Iago and Miriel in front, Phil and Betta behind.

"You won't trust me to drive, I suppose?" said Phil. "Well, perhaps we'll be safer with the old prophet in front"—for this was the term by which he generally designated Iago.

"Why do you call him the 'old prophet'?" Miriel had asked once.

"Well," he answered, "doesn't 'Iago' come just before 'Hebrews' in the Testament?"

"No; after—" said Miriel.

"Oh, after then, 'tis all the same, he's among the prophets somewhere," and Iago had good-naturedly accepted his name.

Out of the clos and on to the high road, upon which Miriel had startled Samson so much on her first acquaintance with Doctor Dan—she recalled the circumstance as she passed the bend in the bank, which Samson had taken so bravely, and she wondered within herself how so few months could have changed her so much. Above them the clear, blue sky of August stretched without a cloud, a crisp, fresh breeze blew in from the sea, swaying the

branches a little, and reminding them that autumn was coming.

The birds that had sung in those branches when they had last driven that way were silent, the throstle had fledged her young ones, and her work was over, the cuckoo that had made the valley ring with his call was silent, but, above them, the larks still sang ecstatically, and that merry company missed nothing of joy and delight as they passed under the over-arching sycamore trees, now laden with their tasselled horseshoes. Not a cloud shaded the brilliant sunshine.

They had not driven far before they came upon signs of the approaching gaieties in the form of a long red waggon, which emerged from a side lane, bearing a load of happy children—a juvenile choir, whose little hearts were filled with ardent hopes of a prize. Their driver smacked his whip, the two big farm horses trotted on, the bright harness jingled, and the children sang the glee which they had practised for weeks in the village schoolroom. Iago and Phil cheered when they came to an end, and, encouraged, the children began again.

At the door of a little wayside inn they passed a brake in which a brass band was refreshing itself on its way; from every cottage door as they passed, the goodwife came out with her brood of little ones decked in their finest feathers, and, locking the house door, walked sedately beside her husband towards the town.

Here was old Gruffydd Jones, like a great green beetle, carrying his harp on his back in its green baize covering, and requiring all Iago's good driving to induce Nero to pass him. Here was Meredyth Owen, the blacksmith, from the On Valley, a tenor whose voice was well known and admired throughout the county. To-day as he trudged to town, his head held high, his broad shoulders thrown back, it was evident he hoped to add fresh laurels to his fame. Carts, scarlet and blue, laden with merrymakers, thronged

the road, and to Miriel the scene was one of intense enjoyment.

Phil cracked his jokes and Betta laughed at them all, good and bad, and Miriel's very heart sang with joy as they entered the quaint little town, gay with flags and crowded with happy faces. They passed Hendyrafon and turned into the "Crown" yard, already filled with vehicles of every description.

Their first visit was to Tim Scrivenwr's shop, where they ordered their meals for the day, and found their host as usual in a flurry of nervous excitement anent his correspondence.

"Dinner you shall have, 'merch i!" he said to Betta. "Good cawl it is, with a large piece of calf meat boiled in it, and plenty of rice puddings with currants and eggs in them, are standing in a row on the counter ready. Go to the 'Steddfod? How will I go, with a letter to write for Nell Jones to her husband, and one from somebody to her sweetheart; but I don't tell secrets—no, no, or the world would be turned upside down! But I'm not saying that I won't have a 'kiwk' round the door of the tilt before the day is over."

"Well, we'll come back and have a kiwk at you and your calf meat about one o'clock," said Phil, with a nod, as they left the house.

In the street the air was full of talk and laughter, and through all a subdued murmur of music, for in many an inn parlour as they passed there were glees and choruses tried over for the last time.

As they reached the field in which the large tent had been erected, Miriel and Betta were silent with astonishment and excitement, merely ejaculating an occasional "anw'l!" as the novelties of the scene greeted their eyes.

The fresh west wind flapped the scalloped borderings of the tent and fluttered the flag which rose from its pointed roof. At the various openings the crowd thronged in or

out, while the busy officials, each decorated with a leek of green satin, endeavoured to keep some show of order.

Miriel and Betta, accompanied by Phil and Iago, were soon piloted to their seats. Behind them row upon row of expectant faces thronged the tent to its very end, in front of them rose the wooden platform upon which sat the President and the most important officials, the rival choirs and other competitors ascending and descending in their turns.

Many of my readers are familiar with the ordinary customs of an Eisteddfod. To them the details of the programme would be wearying and unnecessary; to others, who are totally unacquainted with its routine, it would also be uninteresting, but by Miriel and Betta every succeeding detail was watched with absorbing interest, and hour followed hour without bringing the slightest abatement to their enthusiasm. How they clapped and cheered the successful, and how they pitied the failures! How Miriel's eyes glistened with tears when Meredyth Owen sang his pathetic song and won a prize! and how Betta laughed when one of the competitors, catching his foot in the boards, made a lower bow than he intended. You should have been at Hafod in the evening to hear when Phil recounted it all for his father's amusement. But it would be impossible to describe the flutter of excitement with which Miriel saw Doctor Dan appear upon the platform—his advent being greeted by a storm of applause. It was well known that he was the most popular man in the district, and the large audience seemed determined to let him know it on this occasion. To Miriel, that storm of welcome was overwhelming—she had never heard the unanimous voice of a large assemblage before, and she turned pale with emotion as she watched the tall figure, the broad shoulders and the dark eyes which she knew so well looking round that thronged pavilion with a smile of gratified acknowledgment.

"Jar i," whispered Philip, "it must be a strange feeling and, in my deed, a pleasant one to be greeted with that roaring welcome."

"Hush, hush! what is he saying?" said Iago; and they listened intently while Doctor Dan spoke a few words of thanks to his fellow-countrymen, proceeding to deliver the adjudication upon the Ode for which the Bardic Chair was to be the prize.

There was a pause of deep silence, during which Miriel heard her heart beat, and Iago grasped the chair in front of him.

"It is my duty also," the speaker went on to say, "to make known to you who are here assembled to-day, that we, having duly and without prejudice considered the respective merits of the several odes which were sent in for our adjudication, after much thought and deliberation, have come to the unanimous decision that of the six names sent in, 'Cadvan' alone is worthy of the prize, and to him we have great pleasure in awarding the Bardic Chair. If 'Cadvan' is not present, according to the rules of the Eisteddfod the prize goes to the next competitor in order of merit, but, if he is present, we now call upon him to appear upon this platform."

There were a few moments of breathless silence and then came the call of 'Cadvan' from the platform. "'Cadvan!'" shouted the audience; and "'Cadvan, Cadvan!'" called Philip. Iago alone was pale and silent.

"Miriel, it is I," he whispered. "I am 'Cadvan.'" And, rising, he made his way to the steps which led up to the platform.

No one had noticed him as he passed through the excited crowd, but now when the youthful figure, and pale, intellectual face turned on the platform to face them, the storm of applause fairly shook the canvas walls of the tent. Cheer after cheer rent the air as the President, Doctor Dan, and many others pressed forward to shake hands

with the hero of the hour; while Philip, Betta and Miriel were silent from sheer excess of feeling. Many of those who occupied the seats in front and behind them congratulated them warmly, and Miriel felt such a day had never dawned upon her before. Then came the "chairing of the bard," when Iago, seated in the carved oak chair, looked, not unmoved, over the sea of faces before him. He turned a little paler than usual, when the chief bards gathered round him, and, according to the ancient custom handed down by the earliest Eisteddfodic traditions, held over his head a sheathed sword while they asked in a loud voice, "Is there peace?" And from thousands of throats came the answers in a loud shout of "Peace." This question was asked and answered three times, while handkerchiefs and scarves waved and pretty faces smiled at him. Then came many warm handshakes and heartfelt congratulations, many of these in impromptu verse.

A speech was called for, and poor Iago rose to his feet feeling that he was in danger of forfeiting the *éclat* which he had so unexpectedly gained. For one moment he stood flushed and nervous, but only for a moment; then in clear, firm tones he spoke the few words of thanks which (the President whispered) were alone required, and as soon as possible he stepped off the platform and mingled with the crowd.

CHAPTER XV

THE PATH BY THE RIVER

"WELL, 'tis a grand thing," said Miriel, as they made their way through the crowded street. "'Tis a grand thing indeed to be walking with a bard." Everywhere smiles and congratulation greeted Iago, and sometimes a horny hand would come down on his shoulder with a hearty thump. "Well din, lad," the owner would say. "There's proud of you we are; and if it is the last shilling in my pocket I'll buy the 'verses' when they are prainted. Will that be soon?"

"I don't know," said Iago. "It is the property of the Committee now." He bore his laurels very modestly, but still in his heart a feeling of pride was throbbing at this his first public success. It was to be followed by many others, for as time went on Iago Vaughan became known as one of Cymrn's best modern poets; but no success ever brought him the same proud gratification as that which he gained at the Tregarreg Eisteddfod. Miriel had been there to see it all, and Phil had grasped his hand warmly with a word of heartfelt congratulation.

They found Tim Scrivenwr writing busily between his rice puddings, a spot of excitement on either cheek and a sparkle in his blue eyes, his grey hair standing out like porcupine quills on each side of his flushed face.

"There!" he said, holding the letter close to Iago's face. "A short letter it is, but Tan i marw 'twill pinch. 'Tis to

my son John, you see. He been stopping home a fortnight in the summer, and what am I hearing after he is gone, but that he been keeping company all the time with the most worthless croten in the town. Wild and idle she is and her clothes in jibbets."

"Is she pretty?" interpolated Phil.

"What do I care for her purtiness? This is the letter I am sending to 'my gentleman,' whatever—read it and say won't it bring him to himself?"

Iago, as requested, read the letter aloud:—

"John! John! John! You villain! You villain! You villain!—From your undutiful father,

"T. Jones, 'Scrivenwr.'"

"There!" said Tim again, with a thump on the counter which made the rice puddings tremble.

"Jar-i, 'tis sharp and to the point," said Phil, with a wink at Betta. "He'll finish with the croten slap off after reading that."

"That I think too," said Tim; "but come you, I not forget the dinner—here it is all ready." And slipping his pen behind his ear he led them into the little dark parlour behind the shop, where they found several other people already regaling themselves upon boiled veal and bacon. They did full justice to the fare themselves before they rejoined the throng in the street, where booths and toys in plenty bespoke the festive character of the day. Phil and Betta wandered away, leaving Miriel and Iago to find their way to the market-place, where in a corner, a patch of bright colouring marked Peggi Doll's presence.

She was sitting as usual on her little black stool surrounded by her pincushions of brilliant hue.

"Caton pawb?" said Iago. "What is this little creature?"

"An old woman," said Miriel. "I have seen her before; spiteful and mischievous she is too," and they stood amongst

a group of lads and lasses who were examining her wares and casting furtive glances at the little misshapen creature.

"Oh, ho!" she said, when a movement in the crowd left Iago and Miriel alone standing before her. "You have come again? and this is your sweetheart, I suppose!" she added, looking keenly at Iago, who, colouring deeply, returned her look with one of embarrassment and anger.

"I am not so lucky, little woman," he said; "but we are companions to-day. Will you sell us a pincushion?"

"Take your choice," and she pointed to the bright array.

"Well! You haven't followed your aunt yet, I suppose?" she said, looking at Miriel.

At this moment a hand was laid on the latter's shoulder, a touch that sent the blood surging to her face.

"Miriel!" said a well-known voice, "I have been looking for you everywhere in the crowd. Do you remember your promise to come to Hendyrafon to tea? Betti has all sorts of cakes prepared for you."

"Yes, indeed I will come; I had not forgotten."

"Will you come too?" said Doctor Dan, turning to Iago. "I should be proud to have the Chair Bard at my table."

"No, sir, thank you," answered Iago, a little stiffly. "I have promised to be with my brother and my cousin."

"Then good-bye; I cannot stay, Miriel, there are people waiting for me in the surgery. Come early," and he hurried away.

Miriel turned her attention once more to the pincushions, the smile remaining on her lips and the colour on her face. Peggi Doll had been watching her with a keen, malicious glance. "Oh, that's how it goes?" she muttered to herself, adding aloud, "Well, as I was saying, you haven't followed your aunt's example yet!" and laughing her croaking, harsh laugh, she looked from one to the other of the young people. Suddenly her eye gleamed, "Oh, ho!" she exclaimed, rubbing her little crooked hands together, "I know *you* too now, my man! Well done! Silvan Vaughan's son and Matti

Lloyd's niece together! Ho, ho, ho! there are strange things in the world."

"What d'ye mean?" said Miriel, indignantly. "You are always talking about Nanti Matti. What *do* you know about her, I'd like to know?"

"What do I know about her?" said Peggi, her eyes gleaming with cruel enjoyment of the girl's vexation. "What every boy that whistled down the street knew fifteen years ago. How she was going to be married to Doctor Dan, and how she jilted him and ran away with Silvan Vaughan, and *he* plighted to her own sister all the time, and how she returned home in a year's time a miserable woman, as she deserved to be! Ho, ho, ho!" and she laughed again as if she had recounted a pleasant joke.

"Are you a liar, woman?" said Iago. "A cruel fiend I believe you are, that enjoys to see people suffer."

"I am not a liar to-day, whatever," said Peggi Doll, with a chuckle.

"Come, Miriel," said Iago. "Let us go back to the Eisteddfod;" and together they turned away.

"Iago, Iago! it is dreadful," said Miriel. "That witch has filled my heart with sorrowful thoughts."

"And mine, indeed! I wonder what teaching has God in store for such creatures as that!"

"Is it true, do you think, that she has been telling us?"

"I think it is," answered Iago, gloomily. "It makes it all plain to me."

"Yes; poor Nanti Matti's life of continual penance till she died from sorrow and her own hard usage! Nanti Gwen's madness, oh! I see it all."

"Yes," said Iago, with downcast looks. "I feel it is all true, and it explains to me my poor father's state of mind, his sleepless nights, his fits of gloom. Yes, 'tis all true! But, Miriel, I am sure he is truly repentant, and there is forgiveness for those who truly repent, whatever their sins may have been, though they cannot forget."

"Yes, oh! yes, indeed!" she said, and was silent again until, seeing Phil and Betta approaching, Iago laid his hand upon her arm, detaining her a moment.

"Miriel," he said, "will we keep this to ourselves, you and I? There is no need to spread the knowledge of their fault one step further—it seems too well known already."

"Yes. Let us bury it in our own hearts," said Miriel, and under her downcast eyelids she looked at the ground through a mist of tears. "Let us be more than ever tender and forgiving to the two sad ones at home. Poor Nanti Gwen! I have never loved her so much as Nanti Matti, but now pity will make me love her more."

The tears that had gathered in her eyes prevented her seeing the paleness of Iago's face, and the deep anxiety in his eyes, as he asked her, "Will this make a difference to us? Must the shadow of their sin fall upon us and come between us? Answer quick! Phil and Betta are coming."

"Come between us?" said the girl, startled. "No, no, I cannot see that at all; it has caused enough sorrow in the past, let us try to bring light out of it."

There was no time for more talk before they were joined by the others, and with them Miriel once more followed the crowd into the tent, though through all the laughter and music she seemed to hear Peggi Doll's harsh laugh and cruel taunts.

When they entered the large audience was convulsed with laughter, at a sight of which they seemed to have missed the pathetic pitifulness, and to see only the ludicrous side of the performance. Three old women, over seventy years of age, were in competition for the small prize of five shillings, the test being an old song of former days, familiar to them all when they were in the hey-day of life and youth.

The first competitor, when she had been assisted to reach the platform, seemed thoroughly unnerved by her strange surroundings and more ready to shed tears than to sing; her

quavering voice was scarcely heard beyond the front row of seats as she sang the old-fashioned melody.

"Louder, louder!" cried the crowd, but the weak voice trembled still more, and, raising her hands in a deprecating manner, she turned away and abandoned the attempt with a tearful smile.

There were scores of warm hearts whose sympathy went out to the frail figure as she left the platform, but the great body of the audience laughed and shouted until the second competitor was summoned by the conductor.

"Number 2—Nancy Jones!" and a straight, tall woman appeared, who, though older than the first, required no assistance in taking her place. Her wrinkled face was surmounted by the tall, black, peasant hat, and her eyes were adorned with a large pair of brass-rimmed spectacles. In her hand she carried the stocking which she was knitting, seeming in no way abashed by the large audience. She had witnessed the discomfiture of the first competitor, and had gained confidence in her own powers; so, with a loud voice, she sang the old air, "When Cuckoos Sing."

Even in her youth she must have had an unmusical voice, and now the hard, metallic ring of it aroused only amusement in the crowd, and even Miriel, who had looked round indignantly at the laughter which had greeted the attempts of the first competitor, was unable to keep her countenance as, in piercing tones from which every trace of melody had departed, the old woman sang her song defiantly, with many elaborate turns and impromptu grace notes. She brought her performance to a close in a storm of laughter and cheering, and left the platform with a pleased smile of self-congratulation.

"Number 3—Anne Humphreys!" called the conductor, and a man appeared, bearing with him a small spinning-wheel, which he placed on the front of the platform. The people were evidently in a merry mood, for they cheered

and shouted at him, "Wel din, Anne Humphreys! Give us a tune, 'merch i!" until he was glad enough to retire laughing to the background, while above the steps appeared a quaint and pathetic picture of aged womanhood, who seemed to walk straight into the hearts of the audience. The tumult abated almost to silence as the old woman seated herself before her spinning-wheel, the conductor explaining that "Number 3" had expressly desired the accompaniment of her wheel, as without it she dared not face so large a concourse of people, and her request was granted with a storm of cheering which had in it no tinge of ridicule.

When silence had been restored the whirr of the wheel was audible, and with it a clear, though weak, voice floated over the assembly, soft as a bird's at sunset, true and musical though tremulous with age:—

> "When cuckoos sang till the woodlands rang
> And the sun was sinking low,
> Adown the vale with my milking-pail
> A-singing I did go.
> Och-i! och-i! and well a day,
> I am no longer blithe and gay;
> 'Tis passed away, that month of May,
> Och-i! och-i! och-i!"

The weak, trembling tones reached the innermost feelings of that mixed throng. To so many there that quaint figure, black-hooded and scarlet-mantled, recalled the memory of some dead mother who had made their childhood beautiful—of some tender, spoiling "Granny" whose place had never been filled by any other tie. The maidservant home from her service in London, the shopman who had timed his holiday so as to take in the Eisteddfod, the raw ploughboy, the Glamorgan collier—to each and all came some tender reminiscence of long ago, some memory of a dear, wrinkled face whose lineaments were beautified by the veil of time and love. The old-time melody, too,

with its quaint words, was familiar to many, reaching back to the days of their childhood, so that Anne Humphreys had scarcely risen from her wheel and made her bob curtsey before she was greeted with the enthusiastic approval of an excitable, warm-hearted people.

Shouts and cries, and even tears, swept through the tent, and there was a rush of some of the most excitable towards the platform, where they clasped the old woman's hands, patted her on the shoulders, and, had not the conductor recalled them to reason, would have carried her round the pavilion; all their expressions of approval being received by Anne Humphreys with a simple smile of pleased surprise. She was led away by two or three of the calmer spirits amongst the crowd, and the next competition being that of the brass bands, the manifestations of sentiment were soon forgotten in the deafening sounds which shook the canvas walls.

At Hendyrafon, Doctor Dan was smoking the pipe of peace and quietness alone. He had found fewer patients than he expected awaiting him, and had decided to spend the afternoon with his books and his thoughts. The latter he seemed to find fully satisfying and pleasant, for he smiled as he rose at last and moved the little spider-legged table to a position from which the river would be visible.

"She will like to see it while she has her tea," he said, and looking round the room he added aloud (for there was no one to overhear), "What a difference she makes in this old room! God bless her little gold-crowned head!" and he was conscious of a strange feeling of warmth and exhilaration as he turned to leave the house to wander along the path by the river, which connected his fields and meadows with the high road running into the town.

As usual, the sound of the on-flowing waters laid its soothing spell upon him, and wooed his thoughts into a pleasant reverie. How often had he roamed along the margin of his beloved river, weaving, with its trickle and

rush, the weft and woof of many thoughts? sometimes commonplace worldly calculations, sometimes memories of the past or problems of the present, sometimes the deep communings of the mind, too intimate and solemn for outward expression; but never had its musical flow seemed to bear into his heart so many dreams of beauty and happiness as to-day. Up and down, at the brink of the whispering water he paced, sometimes standing still to watch the speckled trout that darted under the weedy banks, sometimes peering into the nests, now empty and deserted, whose building he had watched in the spring-time. Stooping to gather a bunch of white clover, he placed it in his buttonhole, with a smile of amusement at the romantic sentiment of the action, at last summing up his self-communings in a few words, which he spoke aloud—"Dan Griffiths, thou art a fool—and at forty!" and he laughed with a scorn which was largely tempered with hope and confidence. Suddenly he caught sight of a figure whose steps brought him rapidly along the river-side path.

"Somebody coming to the stables, or to see Deio," thought Doctor Dan, as he watched the approaching figure, who seemed, like himself, to find a charm in the gliding stream, for he, too, often stopped to watch its rippling flow. Something in his appearance seemed familiar to the doctor, and, as he drew nearer, he recognised Iago, who, upon being left alone by Miriel at the entrance of the Eisteddfod tent, had turned away with a warm glow in his heart, kindled by her last words.

Full of hope and happiness, which not even the sting of Peggi Doll's words could poison, he turned into a gateway which appeared to lead down to the river, and so back to the town.

"Hallo! Our bard! Are you already tired of your popularity, then?" said Doctor Dan, as he approached.

"I am tired of the noise, sir."

"And come down to seek peace from the song of the Lidan? Well, you won't be disappointed. The river is an old and unchanging friend who never fails to speak peace and rest to me, whatever."

"'Tis that in Nature that makes her such a precious friend, I think, sir," said Iago. "She is ready with her cool hand to soothe us at all times! But, is this path public?"

"Oh, yes. These are my meadows, and the path leads through my stableyard into the town, but everybody uses it. A funeral passed this way once, I believe, so I could not debar the public from using it, even if I wished, which I do not."

"Well! Now that I have met you, I may tell you that I was intending to ask a few moments of your time this afternoon," said Iago. "Perhaps I might explain to you now what I wanted to say."

"Yes. Why not? Let us sit on this shelving bank, the river will not disturb us."

Then a silence fell upon them both, the younger man hesitating to lay bare before a stranger the feelings which had hitherto been so carefully hidden, Doctor Dan fighting with a chilling presentiment of evil which had suddenly come between him and the light which had gilded his thoughts a few minutes earlier.

At last he broke the silence by a question which seemed to him natural, but the subject of which was far from Iago's thoughts.

"How will you get your Chair home? You will send for it to-morrow, I suppose. That will be an heirloom to be proud of!"

"Yes," said Iago, absently.

"But you have something else to say, I see," and the doctor looked inquiringly at the young man, who picked unconsciously at the white clover upon which he sat.

"Yes. 'Tis about Miriel Lloyd. You are her guardian, I understand."

"Not at all," said the doctor, sitting up. He had been lying on the grass and leaning on his elbow. "I am not her guardian, by any means; I promised her aunt on her death-bed to look after the girl, and I have done so hitherto as far as possible, but I have no legal control over her."

"No, no, I quite understand that," said Iago; "but I think your wishes would have great weight with her. I think she would do anything to please you."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, with a little sarcasm in his voice, "and what do you want her to do?"

He could not shake off an underlying consciousness of the strong tyranny of an unrelenting fate which was closing him in. From the first moment of Iago's appearance upon the idyllic scene of the brown Lidan's graceful curves through the green meadows, he seemed to have divined the object of his visit. The scent of the white clover seemed suddenly to permeate the air, and it took all the strong man's force of will to hide from the younger man the pain which his words aroused.

"Well, sir, in plain words, I love her, I feel that life without Miriel Lloyd will not be worth having, and—"

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, impatiently, "I know all the rest. You need not trouble to tell me."

"Well, then," said Iago, "you will know that I want her to be my wife, and I want your consent to our marriage."

"My consent! I have told you I have no right to interfere with her actions."

Iago felt a little hurt at the doctor's manner.

"At least," he said, "I hope you have nothing against me. Indeed, I was hoping you would speak a kind word for me. I know I am not worthy of Miriel—"

"I know nothing against you," said Doctor Dan. "But

the chief point is, Have you asked her? Does Miriel love you?"

Iago was too absorbed in his own anxieties to observe the doctor's hard, unmodulated tones, his white face and knitted brow.

"I have asked her, and I think she is not averse to me. A word from you would help my cause, I'm sure—that is, if you have nothing against me."

It was in a very hard, though steady, voice that Doctor Dan answered,—

"I have said before I know nothing against you, and as far as I am concerned, if Miriel loves you she has my full consent to marry you, if I had any voice in the matter that is, which I have not. One stipulation only I must make; that is, that she be fully informed of the history of her aunt's connection with your father. She should not marry you in ignorance of those events."

"She is aware of them," said Iago, a deep red flush suffusing his face.

"She is aware of them? And who has dared to sully her pure mind with such a story? I had been so careful to hide it from her."

"This morning," said Iago, "in the market-place both she and I were told the bare facts. I wish I could make plain to you, sir, how bitter to me is the shame of it, but I have asked Miriel if that terrible past must make a difference to us—must come between us and throw its shadow over our lives."

"And her answer?"

"Her answer was (and God bless her for it!)—'I do not see it, Iago. It has brought enough sorrow in the past, let us try to bring light out of it!'"

"Then there is no more to be said. You are a lucky man, indeed! A Bardic Chair and a wife in one day!"

"A wife! Dir anw'l! I haven't won her yet. I would not have you think I make too sure of it. No, no, I have

not had her final answer yet. I am waiting for your kind help. I have a feeling that a word from you in my favour will go a long way."

"Well, I will speak to her this evening," said the doctor, "and find out what her feelings are in the matter, and if I find she loves you, you may depend upon it I will say no word against her choice. Further than that I cannot promise: I will do nothing to force her inclinations, but I will tell her that I have never heard anything but good of you, and that if she decides to marry you I have nothing to say against her decision."

He rose to his feet as if to end the conversation; Iago rose too, though he was not satisfied with the doctor's promise. Perhaps the latter's manner had something to do with that feeling, for certainly he could not expect high praise from a stranger.

"This is your shortest way back to the Eisteddfod," said Doctor Dan. "You are a farmer and I would like to show you my cows, I am proud of my small farm."

Iago turned to accompany him not unwillingly, for with a lover's persistence he hoped to gain the doctor's warmer approval, and with this object opened up the subject again.

"I think I could satisfy you as to my worldly prospects, sir."

"Oh!" said the doctor, interrupting him, "that is not necessary. I have told you it is nothing to me. Say no more on the matter. You can safely trust your cause to my honour; supposing always that I find the girl inclined towards you."

"I know I can, sir."

"Here are my cows. The dun gives us ten pounds of butter every week, sometimes twelve."

"Splendid creatures they are too!" said Iago, with the enthusiasm of a farmer, "and what grass! Ah, if we had these fields at Hafod! but 'tis a 'bryn,' and the soil is

poorer on the hillsides," and thus conversing on a topic of mutual interest, they reached the stableyard and entered Hendyrafon by the back door. A crooked passage led to the front door, and, as they reached the bend, they saw standing there the subject of their previous conversation. Phil and Betta had accompanied her to the arched doorway, leaving her there full of shy embarrassment.

"Iago!" she cried, with a sudden relief. "Oh! and Doctor Dan! Well, indeed! I am come to tea as you asked me, but I am feeling that I ought not to come on such a busy day."

"We are not busy here, Miriel, and I was expecting you. And you, Iago," he said, turning to the young man, "will you change your mind and stay too?"

But Iago declined, a little stiffly, Miriel thought.

He could not feel at his ease in the doctor's presence, he knew not why, and was glad enough to follow Phil and Betta up the street.

"We will fetch you early, Miriel," he said; "the day is changing, I would not wonder if we had rain."

Doctor Dan had opened the door of the old parlour. "I am so sorry you had to stand at the door," he said. "I meant to have gone up the street and brought you back with me, but I met your friend Iago and we stayed a while in the meadows to look at the cows."

Miriel was looking round the room with a happy smile.

"'Tis just the same!" she said. "Indeed, there's glad I am, and the river running on just the same! Oh, there's the sun shining on it too, and by-and-by it will be red and gold!"

"Red and gold!" thought Doctor Dan—yes, that was what it used to be, but to him this evening the whole landscape appeared leaden grey.

Miriel was standing at the broad casement, looking out at the river and the dark trees, into the shadow of which it flowed. A little chill had fallen upon her feelings too,

as she turned to look at her host. He was taking the white clover from his buttonhole, for it had drooped its head and wilted a little. Finding a glass he placed the pale flower in it.

"Will it grow fresh again?" asked Miriel, "or is it too dead?"

"Too dead, I'm afraid," he said, with a smile in which surely a shadow lurked.

Miriel noticed the shadow, although there was nothing lacking in the warmth of his welcome.

Betti came in full of hospitable greetings.

"Well, 'merch fach i! there's glad we are to see you. You must talk to *him* and make him laugh, because, in my deed, between the sick people and the 'Steddfod he is nearly killed with work. Now, you sit here and make the tea;" and once more presiding at the little spider-legged table, Miriel tried to feel as happy as when she had last sat there.

"Will I take off my hat?" she said, when she had handed her host his first cup of tea, and without waiting for an answer she did so.

"Well, of course, Miriel; I am an old boor not to have thought of it," and he took it carefully, almost tenderly, from her hand.

"It is a pretty hat too. Who teaches you to dress so tastefully?" he said.

"I don't know, indeed. 'Tis all in dark blue I am, except my white scarf—'tis safe to be plain, then no one is looking at me."

"And how is Gwen?"

"Oh, better every day," said Miriel, while Betti brought in relays of hot cakes.

"Betti fach! Will I try those again? You are making me feel as if I was a child once more."

"There's a black cloud just coming in sight from behind the house," she said when the meal had proceeded a little

further. "See how the leaves are shivering on that tree, they don't like the dark clouds any more than I do."

"No. Dark clouds don't seem to belong to you; this one will fall upon Hendyrafon, perhaps, but you, I hope, will escape it, Miriel."

"Yes, I suppose," she answered, her gaiety a little dashed by his seriousness. Suddenly she remembered what for the moment had escaped her memory, the tale of disgrace which Peggi Doll had made known to her, and at once a wave of pity altered the tenor of her feelings, and she wondered how she could have forgotten it for a moment!

His lonely life, shattered and spoiled by one of her own blood! How she longed to lead it into the sunshine again, to bring joy and laughter into the face whose every change of expression told keenly upon her.

Doctor Dan, quite unconscious of the turn her thoughts had taken, seemed anxious to make the meal a pleasant one; he chatted and joked, but with an underlying soberness which he tried in vain to cast off, while Miriel felt as the moments slipped by, as if the clouds that were gathering above the old house were reaching even that pleasant tea-table. Trying to make a diversion, she pointed to the glass in which he had placed his withered flowers.

"Look! See!" she said. "The clover is raising its head. Will you put it in your coat again?"

"No," he said. "Leave it in the glass. I can at all events look at it;" and looking at the fair face opposite him, he thought once more, as he had often thought before, how much its tints resembled those of the delicate flower which he had gathered.

When at last the tea was over, and Betti had in vain pressed more delicacies upon the guest, Doctor Dan said,—

"And now we must have a serious talk, Miriel."

"About what, then?" said the girl, with a curious sinking of the heart.

The sky had become overcast, with purple silver-edged clouds, the river had lost its sheen, the trees at the water's edge bent down as if to whisper to the river that a storm was coming, the wind sighed ominously in the chimney, and Miriel noted it all while she waited nervously.

"Well, you know I met Iago in the meadows," said Doctor Dan at last. "We stayed there some time, and I daresay you can guess the subject of our conversation."

At the mention of Iago's name a blush had overspread Miriel's face, for a suspicion had darted into her mind that upon one point only could he have sought counsel from Doctor Dan.

The latter noticed the warm glow and drew his own conclusions, and a faint hope that had hitherto refused to be utterly stifled fluttered its wings and flew away.

"I—I—oh! indeed, I don't know what he said," stammered Miriel.

"He was under the impression that he ought to get my permission to ask you to marry him."

Miriel, fingering her white scarf nervously, cast her eyes down and waited.

"I told him I had no control over your actions further than that of a friend. He asked me to press his suit for him, Miriel, but that I would not promise. I told him, what I say to you now, that if I found you were inclined towards him, you would have my full approval—permission, if you like to call it so. So tell me plainly, do you love this young bard? and do wish to marry him?"

The hot blood that had crimsoned Miriel's face had fled, leaving her white as her own white scarf.

She made two or three attempts to speak.

"I have nothing to say against him, Miriel. I think you have chosen wisely. Tell me, 'merch i, what are your feelings in the matter?"

"I don't want to marry him," said the girl, gradually recovering her self-possession. "He is very kind and very good, but I don't want to marry him. How can I leave Nanti Gwen?" she asked, seeking about for some excuse for her reluctance.

"Miriel, I hope it is not that handsome brother who stands in the way. In my deed, I would not be willing for that!"

"Phil!" said Miriel. Her face had regained its colour, and her eyes had a spark of anger in them. "Oh, what folly! to talk to me about Phil when 'tis Betta he loves! Oh, 'tis cruel! cruel!" and burying her face in her hands, he saw the tears drop through her fingers, while between her sobs came choking words—"Why sha'n't I be quiet at home? Oh, I don't want to marry anybody! I am not doing anybody any harm, only wanting to be quiet at home all my life with Nanti Gwen. I have been a dull, blind girl, and I see now how it is. I am a burden to you and a trouble! Let me go home, I will never come here again."

The foolish Welsh pride was burning at her heart, for she believed the truth of what she was saying, while he, the solitary grave man, so little used to the ways of womankind, thought he had discovered the key to the whole matter, in Miriel's preference for Phil. That that was her feeling towards him was evident to his prejudiced eyes; what else meant the tears, the changing colour and the words, "'Tis Betta he loves?"

"Poor child!" he thought, "she is angry at my disapproval of Phil, but better she should be angry now than sorrowful for life, as I know she would with that wild, roving fellow." It must be supposed, therefore, that Doctor Dan had heard more particulars of Philip Vaughan's ways than this story has revealed.

"That is nonsense, Miriel," he said. "Can you not trust me? If you had chosen Iago Vaughan I would have

approved of your choice; but Philip! I warn you against him. It would grieve me, Miriel; but of course you are not bound to consult my wishes."

This concession seemed in no wise to have banished Miriel's resentment, for she dried her tears, and, drawing herself up, said, "I am more sorry than I can say, that Iago has troubled you about such nonsense, and all I have got to say is, I don't want to marry him nor anyone, only to be let alone, to live quietly at Doloer. Even the mouse is allowed to stop in her own hole if she likes! and, oh!" she added, with a little toss of her head, "there's sorry I am that I came here to-day! but good-bye, Doctor Dan, I will not come again," and she put on her hat hastily, and snatched up her scarf, which was lying on the table.

"Child!" he said, "or woman! whichever you are, is it nothing to you that you are wounding me sorely?"

Again her tears began to flow. "And is it nothing to you, then, that you are so cruel to me?" she said.

"Cruel, Miriel? I am only advising you to be wise. From Iago's words I had gathered that you loved him, and I would not have opposed your marrying him; but my promise to your aunt compels me to warn you against his brother."

At this moment Betti came in and stood looking on in astonishment.

"What is the matter with the lo's fach?" she asked, looking inquiringly at her master.

"Only the usual disturbance of young life, Betti! Two lovers, and she chooses the wrong one."

At this distinct arraignment, Miriel's childish tears and temper vanished, and all her womanhood rose up in arms against the false accusation.

"'Tis a mistake," she said quietly. "I am telling the truth, that I don't want to marry anyone, and I will not. There's the car stopping for me."

"You are angry with me," said Doctor Dan, rising,

"and yet every word I have spoken has wounded me more than it has you. Once more, and for the last time, I feel I must advise you, 'merch i. If you marry either of those two brothers, marry Iago."

Miriel answered not a word, but, with a heightened colour and a throb of resentment at her heart, turned to leave the room.

"We have come early," said Iago, as, followed by Doctor Dan and the bewildered Betti, she reached the front door. "I am afraid there is a storm brewing."

"Yes, yes, I am quite ready," said Miriel, while Phil jumped off his seat and lifted her into the car beside Iago.

"Good-bye, Miriel," said Doctor Dan, holding out his hand. "Let us part friends!"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I forgot," she answered. "Good-bye, and thank you for all your kindness. Good-bye, Betti, and thank you too," and they drove away over the bridge.

CHAPTER XVI

GWEN'S MEMORIES

Doctor Dan had not been far wrong when he credited Miriel with "a will of her own," perhaps he might have gone farther, and added, a temper of her own, for, sunny and bright as was her nature, there was the underlying current of impetuous passions, which generations of ancestors had transmitted to her—the hasty anger, the haughty pride—and as she drove home silently beside Iago (Phil and Betta chatting and laughing behind), all these strong feelings were coursing through her heart. The words "Choose Iago" were ringing in her ears, and in them she imagined a host of taunts and insults which had no existence, except in her own heated imagination. The dark clouds that had taken the sheen from the river were spreading further towards the west, which still retained a pale yellow light—not a breeze was stirring, and a solemn silence brooded over the darkening landscape. Iago rallied her on her silence, but Miriel attributed it all to the heaviness of the atmosphere, and the young man sitting so close to her little guessed that to his companion, generally so gay and light-hearted, the world that had seemed so golden bright when they had driven under the drooping sycamores in the morning, wore now a mantle of such leaden grey as no outward storm could have spread over it.

They had reached the top of the high bryns now, but seemed no nearer the wind.

"Pouff!" said Phil, "I wish the storm would come; we might hope for a breath of air then."

"Let us get home first!" said Miriel.

Great heavy drops of rain began to fall, and in the distance the thunder rumbled ominously.

Iago had become silent too, attending only to Nero, who seemed nervously anxious to get to the end of his journey. When he reached the Hafod clos he tossed his head and stamped, impatient to rid himself of his trappings.

Phil insisted upon running down the slope with Miriel, while Iago led Nero into the stable, and Betta pouted a little.

"Come!" he said, endeavouring in true country fashion to insinuate his arm round Miriel's waist, "the little bird that's afraid of the storm must be sheltered."

"Nonsense, Phil!" she said, flinging his arm away. "I can run much quicker by myself. There's a light in the porch."

"Dir anw'l! Who would think you had such a fiery little temper? but there! Queen Victoria is running home to her palace again." A flash of lightning lit up the sky, and Miriel ran into the shelter of the porch.

"Go, go, Phil," she said. "Betta will be frightened."

"Frightened!" scoffed Phil. "No, no, it takes more than a thunderstorm to frighten Betta; but you've had enough of me, I see, so fforwel! I'm going. 'Twas a jolly day we had, whatever!" and he hurried away under the fast-increasing drops, while Miriel drew near the cosy hearth, as a bird escapes from the storm to its nest.

"Oh, Nanti Gwen fach, there's glad I am to be home. It was beautiful at the Eisteddfod, and there are many grand things in the world to see, no doubt, but it is home suits Miriel Lloyd the best."

"Did you enjoy yourself, de-an?"

"Yes," said Miriel, with a weight like a stone in her heart.

"I will tell you all about it when I have put my best things in the coffer. Mali fach, you ought to be there, 'twas wonderful! Ask Stivin to tell you about the three old women!" and she passed into the penisha with a gay laugh, which for the first time in her life she found unnatural to her lips. She paused a moment at the doorway to add—"The music was beautiful as could be, and the grandest thing of all: Iago has won the prize for his Ode, and the Bardic Chair is his, and they chaired him and crowned him with a sword."

"Caton pawb!" said Mali. "Wasn't he frightened? There's glad Silvan Vaughan will be," and while she spoke she went through a series of pantomimic gestures which bewildered Miriel. Standing carefully in the background, where Gwen could not see her, she pointed to the bedroom, she winked, and held up her closed fist as if to enjoin silence, and at last, going herself into the bedroom, she crooked her finger two or three times at Miriel, who, though perplexed, took that sign to mean, "Follow me!" In the bedroom she found Mali gesticulating mysteriously.

"Sh—sh—sh!" she whispered, closing the door cautiously. "There's something odd upon *her* to-day, 'merch i. There's glad I am that you are come back."

"Something odd?" exclaimed Miriel. "Oh, Mali, what is it?"

"Well, 'tis like this now; all day she has been very silent, sitting quiet there in her chair and looking in the fire."

"'Twas the storm coming on and heavy in the air."

"No, no, it was not the storm. In the afternoon I said, 'Be bound Vaughan yr Hafod will be down directly, because he knows we are alone to-day, and he will be lonesome himself too.' She didn't answer, but by-and-by she said, 'I am tired, Mali, I will go to my bed and rest a bit,' and so she did, till just before you came home."

"Well," said Miriel, "she did well. 'Twas the storm, as I told you."

"Wait a bit," said Mali. "When she was lying on her bed she looked so strange at me, and I'll take my oath there were tears in her eyes, and 'Mali,' says she, catching hold on my arm, 'where is Matti?' Oh, Diwss anwl! I felt the blood running cold from my head to my heart, and I didn't answer her for a minute till she asked again, 'Mali, where is Matti?' Well, I searched about in my mind for a story, but I was as dull as Stivin and I couldn't find anything but the truth to tell her. 'She's dead, 'merch i, and gone to heaven,' I said, and at that she didn't answer, but turned her head on the pillow, and I thought she was asleep, but when I went in to peep at her there were tears on her cheek, though she was asleep then fast enough, and slept till just before you came."

She was interrupted by a blinding flash of lightning, under which Miriel cowered a little, hiding her face in her hands, but forgetting her own fright in concern for her aunt she ran into the living-room, where Gwen had risen nervously.

"Here I am," she said cheerfully, "ready to tell you all about the Eisteddfod. Isn't it a grand thing for Iago to win the Chair? and, oh, Nanti Gwen, if you were to hear the people cheering and clapping their hands!"

But Gwen paid little heed to her; a far-away look was in her eyes, not the vacant gaze that had been there for so long, but a look of absorbing thought, and Miriel soon saw that, as Mali had said, "there was something odd upon her."

She drew out her knitting, taking her accustomed place on the little rush stool in the chimney corner, and tried to entertain Gwen with an account of the day's varied scenes, and to withdraw her thoughts from some subject which was evidently holding them enchained. But all in vain, for Gwen's thoughts refused to be recalled from their

wanderings. Miriel at last became silent as herself, and the hours passed on in solemn stillness, broken only by the recurring peals of thunder, the two women sitting there in the dim light of a solitary candle and the flickering of the turf fire, each silently occupied with her own thoughts, for Miriel too had much to revolve in her mind, so full had the day been of events and conflicting feelings.

The thronged pavilion, the entrancing music, the crowded booths, and then the shrivelled, spiteful woman who had cast the first shadow over her happy day, and whose bitter words still burnt upon her heart their picture of the past.

The night wore on, the candle burnt low in the socket, and still Gwen shrank nervously back whenever Miriel offered to lead her to the bedroom. Flash after flash darted between them like a two-edged sword, and Miriel, with her inborn fear of a thunderstorm, cowered under every flash. She watched Gwen with ever-increasing uneasiness, so strange was the varying expression of her countenance, for the long-pent-up feelings of fifteen years were surging in upon her, and from the chambers of memory the sleeping forms and faces of the dead past were rising into life and crowding in upon her mind, until at last the tears that gathered in her eyes dropped slowly down her cheeks; and, wringing her hands she moaned, "O Lord, pity me! pity me!"

Miriel tried, with gentle words and caressing touches, to soothe her, and at last had recourse to the preconcerted signal which brought Mali and Stivin to her aid. A tap on the bedroom wall and the burly man and his sharp-featured wife came blustering in as acutely distinctive as their prototypes of the storm.

"I was afraid you were gone to bed," said Miriel; "here's Nanti Gwen so frightened."

"Caton pawb, no! Gone to bed! 'tis waiting for you to knock we've been."

"No need to be frightened at *this*," said Stivin, con-

temptuously; "I don't call this a storm. I don't take no notice of it, not I." He spoke as one who, being familiar with the real thing, was not going to be taken in by a poor imitation.

"Call this a storm?" he roared. "Why, I remember once when Mali and me were storing the potatoes in the shed, we couldn't hear each other's voices from one side of the heap to the other. No, no, 'merch i, this isn't a storm."

"'Tis enough for Nanti Gwen and me," said Miriel.

"Come, you," said Mali, cheerfully. "There's nothing like a cup of tea to cheer one up, and she hung the kettle on the chimney chain, and clattered the cups and saucers as much as possible.

During the meal she launched Stivin upon many a recital of adventures by sea and land, not hesitating to pull him up sharply when his reminiscences led him too near any past event which might turn Gwen's thoughts to her own troubles; for well the keen-witted woman saw that the sleeping memory was awakening and that long-dead sorrows were coming to life.

At midnight the storm abated, the tide turned, the thunder peals grew more and more distant, and Gwen allowed Mali to lead her to her room and help her to her bed, where she soon fell into the deep sleep which so frequently visited her pillow.

In less than an hour the clouds were breaking, and the moon looked down between them upon Doloer lying closed and peaceful in the bend of the slope.

Left to solitude and peace Miriel lay long awake, allowing her thoughts to run into the groove from which during the evening she had firmly withheld them. Hendyrafon! that had been so bright a spot in the restricted circle of her life's experiences! She would never see it again. Its master, to whom her thoughts had learnt to fly as a refuge from every trouble, she must learn to live without him, for had he not shown that he was tired of her? In plain words

he had bid her marry Iago—"Choose Iago" were almost his last words.

A hot flush of pride kindled in her cheek. Was she, Miriel Lloyd, to be ordered about like a child? to be told whom she should, and whom she should not marry? and burying her face in her pillow she shed some tears that were the bitterest she had ever shed, for there, alone in the moonlight, she confessed to herself what she had hitherto been scarcely conscious of, that to be in disfavour with Doctor Dan was to lose all that made life worth having. She was already conscious of her wounded pride, but now she realised also that all this sorrow and bitterness was caused by wounded love. She tossed on her pillow in a turmoil of feelings, sometimes her anger almost causing her to summarily tear the man she loved from the pedestal upon which her heart had placed him; at other times she was over-ruled by a stronger sentiment than anger, and again she recalled to mind how happy she had been on her first visit to Hendyrafon; then came the first cold touch of trouble, when she had felt that Doctor Dan's manner towards her had changed, in what way she could not explain, but with the mysterious subtle instinct of love she had *felt* it while the gold of the sunset faded and the grey clouds crept over the sky. Again the words "Choose Iago" rang in her ears, the hot blood dyed her cheeks in the darkness, and she nursed her anger as her ancestors had nursed a vengeance. No, she would *not* choose Iago, but would live her own life, and no one should know that she had been a foolish girl, and had given her heart where it was not wanted; and for a few brief days she continued in this state of mind, attending to all her household duties and meeting Iago and Betta with the usual smiling greeting and with more than her usual gaiety.

Doctor Dan had mistaken her feelings. What then? He would find out his mistake some day and be sorry for his cruelty, but he must open his eyes of his own accord,

for she would never, never, never do or say anything to explain matters to him, and she solaced herself by hugging this determination to her heart, and the days went on, her life falling into the old familiar groove, though with its brightness dulled and its hopes tarnished. Gwen had changed much in her outward manner, as her mind grew clearer and her memory returned.

The summer days were passing rapidly away, and the autumn was upon them before they had realised that summer was gone. The corn was ripe and the harvest had commenced on the sunny uplands; even down at Doloer they knew it, for Mali and Stivin went every day to work in the fields, returning in the evening laden with country fare, barley bread, cheese and butter, to which was sometimes added a dip candle apiece, not to speak of a good budget of country gossip.

At Hafod, too, the harvest called the young people to the cornfields; not to their own, for they had not arrived at the farm early enough to sow corn, so they carried their strong arms and willing hands to help their neighbours, and were making friends in all directions.

"Jar i!" said Morgan Sarnwen, "there's three strapping young people you've got, Vone. A real help they are too, so willing and so handy. A smart fellow that Phil is too —well, indeed, you've got reason to be proud of your children."

"Oh, yes, they are very well," said Silvan Vaughan, "and 'tis a good thing they can work, for I am gone past it."

"Well, you can afford to be idle," said Morgan, for the rumour had circulated that Vone yr Hafod was a rich man, and this rumour had given him a good standing amongst the farmers of the countryside, and had helped them to condone the sins of his youth.

But in spite of his money, and the happiness which Iago's success and his eldest son's return had brought him, he

seemed to fail in health every day, he grew thinner and more bent, and Iago often followed his uncertain steps with looks of watchful sadness.

"He will not be with us long, Phil," he had said one day, as their father had turned away, leaving them to their work and the laughter and jokes of the harvest field.

"Twt, twt! Don't croak, lad. I see no difference in him this many a year."

"I do, then," said Iago, with a little anger at his brother's callousness. But nothing weighed on Phil's spirits. Always brimming over with vitality, he seemed to spurn at all care or sorrow and to find no place in his nature for a serious thought; yet, wherever he went, he was liked and flattered, receiving every attention as his due, and meeting every event with a laugh or a joke.

"Perhaps 'tis the thought of Phil's sailing so soon that makes the old man so sad of late," thought Iago, but Miriel too had noticed his failing strength. He had turned from the harvest field towards Doloer that afternoon, and she had met him in the porch with a word of kindly greeting.

"Well, indeed, I'm glad you've come," she said, "because Nanti Gwen is not well these days. Come, then, and cheer her up;" and leading him to the hearth, she placed his rush chair as usual near Gwen, who was asleep, fatigued with her walk in the garden, where Miriel had coaxed her to look at the bees.

"You have not been down for two or three days, and I think she has missed you," she said.

Silvan Vaughan did not answer at once. "Mali said she thought I had better not come," he said at last, and he looked long at the pale face, paler than usual, white even as marble, in the still repose of sleep.

"What is it, Miriel?" he said in a low voice. "Will she go before me after all?"

"Are you seeing her so ill, then?" said Miriel, alarmed.

"Yes, I am afraid for her," and as he spoke Gwen opened her eyes.

"Gwen, 'merch i, are you ill?" and he took the thin, white hand in his own, smoothing it with a tender touch.

Gwen made no answer, but fixed her eyes upon his with a long, sorrowful look, and at last turned her head away, her cheek resting on the bright patchwork cushion.

Silvan Vaughan seated himself silently beside her, an expression of pained anxiety accentuating the lines and hollows of his thin face; and for some time nothing was heard but the ticking of the clock and the whirring of the pigeons' wings as they flew from roof to chimney, from chimney to roof; Miriel standing by, keenly alive to the new development in the tragedy which had begun before her birth.

Silvan had brought with him a bundle of fresh green rushes, which were now lying scattered at Gwen's feet. He picked up two or three, and, beginning to plait them, said in a voice more weak and trembling than usual, "I thought we were going to begin a hat for Doctor Dan to-day." But Gwen was still silent, and the rushes dropped through his listless fingers to the ground.

"Gwen fach! speak to us," he said.

She sighed a little, with an almost imperceptible motion of withdrawing her hand, but further than that made no sign, except that a large tear rolled down her cheek.

"Would I go, perhaps?" he said, rising, and he stood a while nervously arranging his rushes on the table. "Perhaps to-morrow you will be better, 'merch i."

"Yes," faltered Gwen, and searching absently for his stick, he turned away humbly, stumbling a little in the cobbled porch, whither Miriel followed, looking with deep pity after him as he made his way up the slope, his shoulders more bent and his hair looking greyer than ever under his broad-brimmed rush hat.

Returning to the hearth, she found Gwen still pale and

silent, the slow tears coursing after each other down her cheeks. Gradually they ceased, and for the rest of the day she sat quietly thoughtful. The sudden change in her state of mind disturbed and puzzled Miriel, although she nad for some time observed that Gwen had become subject to long fits of abstraction and thoughtfulness, and that her eyes often showed signs of tears.

She dreaded lest the too suddenly awakened memory, which Doctor Dan had warned her of, was bringing in its train regrets too strong and bitter for the frail being who had so slight a hold on life.

At last, when Miriel had led her to her room, and drawn the silk coverlet over her, she drew the girl towards her closer, closer until she could whisper in her ear, "Say good-bye to him, Miriel. I don't understand it. God will make it plain. I will never see him again in this world."

"You will be better to-morrow, Nanti Gwen fach," said Miriel. "Sleep now and you will feel different when the morning sun awakes you;" and she turned to leave the room, but stopped on the threshold as she heard Gwen's voice again.

"Miriel! Up there!" and she pointed upwards.

"Yes, dear, I understand. I will tell him," said Miriel, and almost before she had passed into the living-room Gwen was asleep.

Iago, who had been too busy with the harvest to visit Doloer for a few days after the Eisteddfod, came down one day full of animation and talk, for he had won the Chair! Doctor Dan had not opposed his suit! and, above all, Miriel's answer to his question, "Must this come between us?" had filled him with buoyant hope.

Miriel, unconscious of the interpretation which he had put upon her words, tried to be unembarrassed and cheerful as usual, though the memory of his interview with Doctor Dan in the meadows would thrust itself into her mind.

"What did your father say, Iago, about your winning the Chair? Wasn't he proud of you?"

"Well, I don't know!" he answered, his cheeks flushing, "but he was glad, whatever! Yes, I think he was proud. He sent Shemi in at once next morning with the cart to fetch it. 'Twas a nice day we had, Miriel! That old witch's bitter words made the only blot upon it."

"Yes, 'twas a beautiful day," said Miriel. "I will never forget its brightness nor its clouds."

"Well, to me there were no clouds; even the storm waited till we came home. It was all sunshine and joy to me after your words."

"What words?" said the girl, startled.

"Well," said Iago, looking up nervously from the pattern which he was unconsciously drawing with his finger on the table, "you said the past need not come between us. Oh, Miriel! don't draw back those words—for—"

"Stop, Iago, stop! Indeed, you have made a mistake; we are friends, we have been friends ever since you have been here, and I was hoping we would be friends for ever, but I did not mean anything else."

"But, Miriel!" said Iago, seizing her hand and holding it a moment by force, "surely, surely, you understood what I meant. You will let me plead with you; listen to me, lass."

"Yes, I will listen to anything you have to say, but it will only be giving me the pain of answering the same."

"Can you give me no hope? I spoke to Doctor Dan about it, and he was quite willing. What have you against me, Miriel? It seems impossible that such deep, strong love as mine must go unsatisfied. Come! trust yourself to me, and you shall never know a care or a trouble that I can ward off you, even with my life."

"No, indeed, no," said Miriel. "Always I will be your friend, Iago, but not anything more. God has not made my heart for love, I suppose, or why would I be like this?

I want only to live on quietly at Doloer; 'tis here alone I am at peace. I will never marry! Leave me alone, Iago bach, don't plague me; for, indeed, lad, as long as the waves are falling, and as long as the stars are shining, I can never give you another answer."

Iago's breath went fast and fluttering, he had turned very pale and had grasped the back of a chair as if to steady himself, but his voice was quite firm as he answered,—

"I cannot give up hope, Miriel. You said once that in ten years you might think of marrying. I have not forgotten your words, though you gave me no hope; I will wait ten years, nay, all my life, but so help me, God! I will never plague you. No, Iago Vaughan was not born to be a trouble to Miriel Lloyd!"

He walked with unconscious steps towards the doorway, forgetting his head was uncovered. Miriel ran after him, carrying his hat, and he took it absently, turning it round two or three times before he placed it on his head. "Good-bye, Miriel," he said, forgetting to thank her, "perhaps I will not be down this evening, but to-morrow I will come down just the same."

"Iago!" she said, laying both hands upon his arm, "do you know—do you understand that my heart is aching too?"

"Yes; I think I do. There's fresh the grass smells after the rain!" he added in a totally different tone of voice.

"Yes," said Miriel, turning back and slowly passing through the porch, where the wallflowers were gay with their tufts of autumn bloom.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE MILLS OF GOD"

In the evening, when the sun had set and the house was very quiet, Miriel went out to roam alone over the shore, knowing that Gwen would sleep till morning undisturbed. Leaving the door wide open as usual, she sought the edge of the tide, where she had always found peace and happiness in the time that seemed so far away, though, in reality, only a few months had passed since hers had been the only young life upon that lonely shore. "'Tis the autumn weather, perhaps," she thought, as she stood looking over the sea to the deep blue, starlit sky, "that is making Nanti Gwen so weak, and Phil going away so soon is weighing on Vaughan yr Hafod; we will all be better when the springtime comes again and the daffodils are pushing their green heads through the earth. The *Sea Gull* will come in again then, with all her streamers flying; there's a happy time it will be!" These cheerful sentiments, however, were forced, and did not by any means express her real feelings, for she, too, had of late lost some of her gaiety. Something had gone out of her life, something that in her most solitary musings she blushed to recognise as the feeling which Iago had failed to kindle within her. Ever since the Eisteddfod day life had worn a different aspect to her. That Doctor Dan had thrust upon her the conviction that he was tired of her, and would gladly see her married, had been a bitter consciousness at first, but that feeling of

wounded pride and anger was already passing away, and giving place to an abiding sense of loss, a heavy weight that refused to be lightened; and though she called all her resolution and firmness to her aid, she could not banish the strange new feeling that had entered her life. As she paced slowly up and down at the water's edge, a dark face *would* rise before her, whose eyes looked straight into her own, and brought the warm blood surging into her cheeks.

"I thought he liked me, but he doesn't!" was the simple expression of her feelings; but those childish words did not evidently express all the woman's heart within her, for sitting down beside a rock, she flung her arms upon it, and, burying her face upon them, broke into a fit of sobbing, giving words to her sorrow, and confessing in that deep solitude, "Oh, I love him, I love him! I would give my life for him, and he wants me to marry Iago!" It was well that there was no one to hear the heavy sobs but the birds that nested above her in the cliffs, none but the night wind to dry the tears that flowed so unrestrainedly. At last, exhausted, she ceased to weep, and in the silence, the voices of the night began to whisper peace and solace to her spirit. For quite an hour she continued to sit silent on the sand, breathing softly, as if unwilling to disturb the soothing influence that was stealing over her. "I know," she thought, "that God send His gentle angels to those who open their hearts to them; those messengers of His who do His pleasure!" And, sitting there alone, she drank deeply of the draught of spiritual comfort so often and so mysteriously offered to those who will receive it. She rose at length, refreshed and strengthened, and, as she turned homewards, all the healthy instincts of the vigorous country girl re-awakened within her, and although she abated not a whit of the strong love that had taken possession of her, she began to resent its thraldom, and to defy its power to depress her. "Is it I, Miriel Lloyd," she said, with a toss of her head,

"that is going to cry and to wail to the waves and wind like this? No, indeed, I will never!" But as she crossed the sands towards home, the tears still gathered in her eyes, though she hastened to dry them, and to banish all traces of sorrow from her face. She saw a shadow moving across the window at Doloer, and drawing nearer, she heard the loud chirp of a cricket who piped his nightly song on the hearth. Entering the low, raftered penisha, all aglow with the light of the fire of peat and driftwood, she found Betta sitting on the little oak stool, looking into the fire, her hands clasped round one knee.

"Well, indeed!" said Miriel. "Here's a wonderful thing!"

"What?" answered Betta, a little shamefacedly.

"That you spare a minute for my company. Phil and you will get tired of each other, I should think!"

"You do not understand it, Miriel fach! You are a cold, calm, reasonable woman; what can you know about love? Can't you understand, then, that love takes possession of one entirely, body and spirit? Yes, I would give my soul for Phil!"

"You are talking nonsense, lass, and some day you will see it yourself. Iago loves me—you know it, Betta—but do you think he would say such foolish things as that? His soul! his spirit! indeed, I would not give a cockle shell for a man who would say such things! nor a woman either, so there's for you!"

"Well," said Betta, "we must all be ruled by our planet," and she continued to rock herself backwards and forwards, her shadow rising and falling on the rosy glow of the whitewashed walls.

Miriel laughed. "That's what Mali says when she breaks a basin, but I'm thinking if she didn't dash about so much she might defy her planet."

"Twt, twt," said Betta, "but, indeed, there's wise you are, Miriel."

"Well, yes, to-night," said Miriel; "though in my deed I am not always so wise! But what is it? Something is troubling you to-night?"

"No, nothing; only Phil is going next week."

"So soon? 'Tis no wonder his father is grieving about it."

"Nonsense!" said Betta, "he will get over it in a day or two; and in this world there must be partings."

"'Tis you are wise now, Betta."

"Oh, I am not always foolish. No, we have not been much together lately. To-night I thought to find you sitting here, but you were gone. How is Gwen?"

"She's strange, very strange, so pale and silent, and going to bed as soon as she has had her dinner."

"Won't you send for the doctor?"

"Yes, I suppose, if she does not alter soon."

"Well, I must go. Will we come down to-morrow night for a song or two? Phil is wanting to come. He likes that sailing song—he is always singing or whistling it."

"I don't think Nanti Gwen will be well enough to-morrow, but soon I hope she will be better."

"Well, fforwel!" and Betta went out humming, and Miriel heard her singing as she went up the slope:—

> "On the wings of the wind he is coming to me
> Over the salt sea foam."

A little wistful longing looked out of Miriel's eyes as the clear, rich notes came back on the breeze, and a sigh heaved the frill on her neck a little.

"Love!" she thought as she sat on in the firelight. "Yes, indeed, 'tis a strange thing! bringing joy and happiness to Phil and Betta, and only sorrow to Iago and me!"

Next day Gwen was no better. She ate her breakfast silently, and afterwards sat listlessly in her chair, pushing aside the rushes which Miriel laid on the table beside her.

She only tasted her milk porridge at dinner, saying, "I would rather go to bed." Miriel tried in vain to interest her in the small details of the household; the young pigeons that had flown down with their parents for the first time, the cheese of goats' milk which she was making, the large cask of meth which stood fermenting in the corner behind the settle. "It will be ready to-morrow, Nanti Gwen. I have put a large piece of sweet brier in it, and it is as clear as crystal. A cup of it will do you good now," and she dipped a cupful out of the cask. Gwen tasted it only, and laid it down, saying, "It is very nice, but I want to rest." She looked nervously through the window at the slope where the furze shone golden in the afternoon sun, and Miriel guessed rightly that she dreaded to see Silvan Vaughan, so, no longer dissuading her, she led her into her tiny bedroom, and spreading the quilt over her said, "Will I leave the door open? Then you will see me at my work, and you won't be lonely."

"No, no, no," said Gwen; "shut the door and leave me alone. I want to sleep."

When Silvan Vaughan came down as usual he looked anxiously round the room.

"Where is Gwen?" he asked, refusing the chair which Miriel pushed towards him.

"She is no better, and is gone to bed."

"But she was down in the morning?"

"Yes," said Miriel, reluctantly, as she saw the careworn face grow paler.

"Ah!" he said, with a long-drawn sigh, and stood turning his rush hat in his fingers and looking down at the smouldering peats on the floor.

At last he spoke. "Miriel, lass!" he said. "D'ye think her memory has returned?"

"Yes, I think it has, and 'tis too hard for her to bear—Nanti Matti's death and all."

"'Tis too cruel for her, child. I was always afraid that

the peace and happiness of the last few weeks would crumble away and leave me a lonely and miserable man, and now it has come to pass, and I am just that, Miriel—a lonely, miserable man. Will I ever see her again?" and he looked eagerly in her face.

"I don't know, indeed. Perhaps she will get better. She bid me say to you 'Up there,'" and she pointed upwards as Gwen had done.

He made no reply, but bent his head a little, while his lips moved, and Miriel, filled with pity, laid her hand on his arm and said, "Oh, I am feeling so sorry for you, Vone!"

The soft touch, the gentle words recalled him from his reverie.

"You have a kind heart, 'merch i, but don't pity me. I had no pity!" and, as if anxious to change the subject, he asked, "Do you know that Phil is going next week?"

"Yes, indeed, 'tis a sore trial for you to part with him; but he will be back again in the spring."

"Yes, yes, I must let him go. Perhaps in the spring he will marry his cousin. I would die easier for knowing that Phil was settled and well provided for. Jinny Ffowkes is rich and she's a nice girl." He stood still a few minutes longer as if lost in thought, then, turning away, walked slowly homewards, leaning heavily on his stick.

Next day Gwen declined to get up, turning her head wearily on her pillow and shrinking so evidently from the effort, that Miriel gave way to her, hoping for improvement on the morrow; but day after day passed on, bringing no change to her, until at last Mali Storrom proposed making a journey to Tregarreg to fetch Doctor Dan.

This proposal seemed so distasteful to Gwen, however, that Miriel hesitated.

Gwen fretted and even shed tears. "No, no," she said. "Not Dan! I cannot see him!"

Silvan Vaughan came no more, except to the doorway, where his tall, bent figure looked more gaunt and haggard

than ever against the golden brown background of wall-flowers that lined the porch.

"How is she to-day?" he would ask humbly, looking up at Miriel with sad, hollow eyes; and at her answer, "Just the same," turning away silently.

It was late one afternoon in the same week when Miriel, bending over her knitting in the chimney corner, and often looking through the open doorway into the little bedroom where Gwen lay sleeping, was startled by a sound which she had longed and yet dreaded to hear—a footstep in the porch, a shadow on the sunny floor, and Doctor Dan, stooping his tall head from habit, entered.

Miriel started to her feet and the hot blood which had suffused her face at the first sound of a strange footstep ebbed away and left her pale, and with a fluttering breath. He took his usual chair, and holding out his hand drew her from the gloom of the hearth to the full light of the window, looking keenly at the pale face, the drooping eyelids, the lips that trembled a little.

"Oh, I thought so," he said, "wearing yourself out with nursing. Gwen is ill. I know it all, child. I told you how it would be! But you—it is killing you."

Here was the chance for which she had been longing. If he would once more broach the subject of her choice between Phil and Iago, how easy it would be to tell him, "I do not love either, I will not marry either," but he did not. He had forgotten it all, Miriel thought. It was nothing to him; while in reality, even at that moment, the strong man was deeply moved at the sight of the slender blue figure, the golden head, the grey eyes which not even his strongest resolve could banish from his thoughts. He was quite conscious of Miriel's sway over his heart, she had entered there unawares to him, but she had come to stay, of that he was quite aware, and so far he bent his head to Fate's decree; but the lessons of repression and self-control were not new to him, and outwardly

Doctor Dan was the same calm, kindly friend that he had ever been, and Miriel began to feel that some strong current was carrying her whither she would not.

"No, no," she said. "Indeed I am quite well and strong."

"Do you think, Miriel," he said, shaking his head, "that I cannot read these signs? Nights of watching, sorrow and anxiety, are telling upon you."

Oh, foolish man! but how could Miriel explain On the contrary, she shrank into herself with a little cold reserve.

"Where is Gwen?" he asked.

"She's asleep, but 'tis time to wake her; will we go in?" And she led the way. There was no time for a word of warning before he had passed down the two little steps into the inner bedroom.

"No, no, no," said Gwen, nervously motioning with her hands, as if thrusting from her an unwelcome presence. "Not Dan! I cannot bear it."

"Yes, yes, yes! Dan himself. The very man that ought to come," said the doctor, taking both her hands in his, and smiling into her sorrowful face.

"And Miriel," he said, "will leave us alone for a little while. Who knows? perhaps she will give me a cup of tea before I go."

"Yes, child, go," said Gwen, already seeming to gather strength from the hands that held hers so firmly.

Miriel closed the door gently, and went alone into the living-room, her heart full of conflicting feelings—pain at what she thought was Doctor Dan's indifference towards the subject which had caused her so much sorrow, and happiness in the mere fact of his presence. She busied herself with her preparations for tea, the oatcakes, the cream, the fresh honey, all the little dainties she could gather from her stores, but all done without the charm and joy with which she had formerly laid out her tea-table.

It recalled to her mind too her tea at Hendyrafon, when she had sat at the spider-legged table, and seen the sun go down over the foaming river. A cup for Deio she never forgot, with a plate of white bread and butter, and she carried it out, while the murmur of voices beyond the closed black door, told her that the doctor and patient were still engaged in conversation.

Deio was sitting as usual looking stolidly out over the sea, but was quickly alive to the slim, blue figure that approached him, carrying the little tray that always awaited him at Doloer.

Of course he conformed to the peasant fashion of declining the refreshment many times before he accepted it. At last, declaring over and over again that he had not "expected such a thing," he allowed himself to be persuaded, and enjoyed a good meal.

"When are you coming again to Hendyrafon, 'merch i?" he asked. "Betti and I would like you to be always there, but I hear 'tis somewhere else you'll be before long;" and he pointed with his whip handle to where the grey walls of Hafod gilded by the evening stood clear against the blue sky.

A vivid blush flashed across Miriel's face at his words.

"Deio," she said, "I have never been angry with you before. You are talking nonsense. I don't like for people to settle my plans for me—no, indeed, I can do that myself. Doloer is my home and I am quite contented with it;" and she tossed her head with a little show of offended pride.

"Well, well, well, begging pardon, 'merch i," said Deio, a little bewildered. "She mustn't be angry with me."

"No," said Miriel, the frown giving place to a smile. "I couldn't be; not long, whatever." And carrying the tray into the house she took a survey of her tea-table. While she was so engaged, the door opened and Doctor Dan entered. When he had closed the heavy door he

stood for a moment lost in thought, the old dark cloud on his face, his lips firmly pressed, his brows knitted, no sign now of the flashing smile that sometimes lit up his face.

"I thought perhaps Nanti Gwen would get up to tea," suggested Miriel.

He started. "No," he said, "let her be; do not trouble her to rise, she is better where she is; in fact, Miriel, I must prepare you for what is coming. She will not rise from her bed again. I have never seen such a sudden collapse. A week or two and it will be all over, and better for her. Be tender to her, for she has suffered much. But that's the last thing I need say to you, Miriel."

"Oh, yes, I will be kind to her,'" said Miriel. "How did you know she was ill?"

"I heard it at Bryndn, where I have been every day this week; but why did you not send for me, 'merch i? Do you still bear me a grudge?"

Miriel coloured hotly, and nervously tied and untied the ribbon at her neck. Now was the time for explanation, but she hesitatated and the opportunity slipped by.

"Is it for that bit of good advice I gave you? Remember that, be it Phil or Iago, you have not a more faithful friend in the world than I." And looking straight into her eyes he added, "Do you believe that, Miriel?"

Her eyes were cast down to hide the tears that welled up in them, and her lips trembled a little as she answered, "Yes, oh, yes, indeed!" but pride witheld her from saying more. If he would accuse her falsely, she would not explain.

"Well, good-bye, then. I will come soon again, though I can do but little for poor Gwen;" and he passed out into the porch, leaving Miriel standing disconsolately at her tea-table.

"He has forgotten," she said. "He is full of other thoughts; he has been at Bryndn every day, and not come down here. I am nothing to him, nothing, nothing!"

And, covering her face with her hands, she shed the tears which had so often risen to her eyes, but which she had hitherto restrained with a sort of contempt for her own weakness; but now they would have their way, and sitting down on the settle she succumbed to a fit of sobbing.

"I have been a long time, Deio," said Doctor Dan, as he drew the little gate to, after him.

"No—no, I have had my tea, and I wasn't expecting you to finish yours sooner," said Deio.

"Tea? Yes. By Jove! I'd forgotten. A little longer you must wait."

"Yes—yes, go you," said Deio. He stared after his master as he hurried back by the garden hedge, and his muttered remarks were not complimentary. "Ts, ts, ts, there he goes, as blind as a mole! but I will not dare to open his eyes, let him keep them shut if he likes then, ts, ts, ts!"

Meanwhile Doctor Dan had re-entered the living-room so familiar to him.

"Miriel!" he began, full of apologies, but at the sight of the girl's sorrowful attitude, her heaving shoulders and catching breath, he stopped, shocked and astonished. Was this Miriel, the gay and light-hearted? It was plain, indeed, that she was unstrung and worn out by Gwen's illness, and by his too sudden announcement of the approaching end.

"Forgive me, 'merch i," he said. "I am a blundering fool to have spoken so plainly. Remember I am a lonely man and not used to the ways of women."

"No, indeed," she answered. "You did not speak too plain; 'tis not that at all; I am quite willing for Nanti Gwen to go. She has not a minute's happiness in this life, so why should we want her to stay?"

"What is it, then? Come, dry your eyes," and Miriel hastened to make all sorts of foolish admissions, preferring

to appear weak and childish than that he should suspect the real source of her tears.

"It wasn't that, only I wanted to give you a nice tea, and I had been preparing the table for you, and I was disappointed—there's foolish!"

"Well, of course," he said, "and I was a dull boor, and don't deserve such a dainty meal as this. Gwen's illness made me forget it, but, in my deed! I'm as hungry as a hunter, so you can easily punish me if you wish, by refusing to let me taste that bread and butter."

"Oh, no," said Miriel. "Indeed you shall have your tea;" and drawing her chair to the table, she soon seemed to forget her previous annoyance in the duties of hostess.

Doctor Dan too banished the cloud from his face, and in his anxiety to make up for his forgetfulness laid himself out to make the meal a pleasant one.

"Honey in the comb too, Miriel! and that little sweet-brier rose adorning it. I must give Betti a hint of that. Well, for a dainty and appetising meal, give me tea at Doloer! But I must go now," he added, looking at his watch. "Have you quite forgiven me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," said Miriel. "'Twas I was foolish. I hope you will forget that I have been so childish."

CHAPTER XVIII

BETTA'S "PLANET"

It was, perhaps, in one sense a good thing for Miriel that Gwen's rapidly-failing strength required such constant care and attention that it gave her no time for brooding over her troubles.

She felt that the chance of setting matters right had escaped her, but, with a sense of loss and sorrow thrust into the background of her life, she gave all her energies and courage to the work of soothing and comforting Gwen's last days.

Sometimes, sitting silently with her knitting by the invalid's bed, her thoughts would run unconsciously into the forbidden groove.

On one such occasion she thought, "What wonder that he thinks nothing of me? He so learned and I so ignorant! How could I expect it? Nanti Matti used to say, 'Don't forget you are a lady, de-an, though we are so poor now, and living so far from everybody,' but I have neglected my books shocking, so now I am very ignorant!" and she cast a wistful look at her old lesson-books, ranged as of old on the little bookshelf in the corner of the living-room. It comforted her a little to remember that Doctor Dan had not minded her ignorance that day, that happy day, when she had walked with him up the slope, and he had asked her to fasten the white clover in his coat.

Through Gwen's little window she could see the grey walls

of Hafod, Betta passing backwards and forwards through the clos, Phil sauntering about with his hands in his pockets, the old man pacing up and down, a lonely grey figure against the sky-line, while Iago, the sober and industrious, worked in the fields or shut himself up for an hour's relaxation with his books in his "study" at the end of the hayloft.

The pigeons cooed, the geese cackled in the stubble fields, and the wind whistled in the big chimney of the living-room, for the autumn had made a sudden stride, and was beginning to remind the inmates of Doloer that wintry blasts were gathering beyond the grey north horizon.

The *Sea Gull* was to sail from Porthlidan next day, and Miriel was not surprised at Silvan Vaughan's dejected appearance as he paced up and down, his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back. She would have given much to have been able to restore to him and Gwen the happy intercourse which they had enjoyed of late, but the least allusion to him so distressed the invalid, that she had ceased to make any effort to change the existing state of affairs. The long day passed without a break in its monotony, until in the evening Mali came in and took her place, while she carried her pail to meet Kit and Brythen, whose bleating had long told her it was milking-time.

"Come back soon, 'merch i," Mali had whispered. "I have got news for you!"

"News" was a scarce commodity on the slope, so it was not without some degree of interest that Miriel re entered and delighted Mali with her curiosity.

"What is it, then, Mali, woman?" she asked as the latter came in her "stocking feet" into the living-room, having left her wooden shoes on the doorstep as usual.

"Well, what do you think, 'merch i? Jinny vach vach at Porthlidan has lost her pig; he swallowed a wooden spoon and choked himself; so she's going to have a tay-

party to make up the loss, and what d'you think? Stivin and I have been 'called,' and we're going, there for you! Mari Jones came up to call us to-day, and she said she hoped everyone from Doloer and Hafod would come too. And she said 'twould be a fine tay-party, no doubt, for, says she, 'Jinny vach vach has been busy making cakes by the dozen, with keerens and nitmeg in them, 'so there!"

"Well, I can't go, of course," said Miriel, "but you shall take my sixpence for me."

"Very well, 'merch i; then I needn't give my own. Vone and Iago are going, because they will be driving Phil to his ship to-morrow; not to tay, of course, but just to give a turn in, Vone said, and to drop a shilling, so I think I've done a good turn for Jinny vach vach!"

The latter personage had come by her name in a thoroughly Welsh fashion. Her mother from her diminutive size being known as Jinny vach, or wee Jinny, it was but natural that when she married, and became the possessor of a baby girl, the newcomer, although christened Jane Martha, should be known as Jinny vach vach, or wee wee Jinny. She had grown into a fine tall woman, but that made no difference to the appellation, which stuck to her all her life.

"That is the worst," said Mali, "that Stivin and me will have to come home by ourselves! It will be dark, and everyone knows there's a spirit on that road. There's Gwen moving," and she ran softly back, while Miriel sat down to her solitary tea on the hearth.

Next day Phil came in in the afternoon to bid her good-bye, accompanied by Iago.

"Well, indeed!" said Miriel, "I wish you a pleasant voyage, Phil bach! and a safe return in the spring. There's glad we will all be! and your father will be better by then, I hope. To-night you are sailing?"

"No; to-night I am going on board. We will be in the offing till the grey of the dawn. Too early for Queen

Victoria to open her eyes and wave a good-bye to a poor sailor."

"Oh, no," laughed Miriel. "I will run up to Hafod, and you shall see my blue scarf with the other colours waving."

"I'm afraid 'tisn't much sleep you are getting now, Miriel, with Gwen so ill," said Iago.

"No, not much, indeed; but I am so strong, nothing seems to do me harm. I will go up to comfort your father, too. He will feel it shocking, pwr fellow!"

"Why are you all croaking so much about my father?" said Phil. "In my deed, I don't see the least change in him the last five years; besides, remember, he's an old man now."

"Not so old," said Miriel, "only fifty, though he looks full seventy."

"*Only* fifty? When I am that age, tan i marw! I'll begin to pack up my bundle to go."

"Phil!" said Iago, "canst never be serious?"

"Not I," said Phil, "but jar i! I must go! Come, Miriel," he added, holding out his hand, his blue eyes dancing with fun, a shaft of golden light just catching his brown hair.

"'Tis no wonder Betta loves him though I don't!" were her thoughts, though she held her head very high when he, advancing, said, "Will she give me a kiss at parting, then?"

"No, she will not," she answered, nodding a little defiantly, and fixing her grey eyes upon him.

"Well, well, don't look so cross about it; a kiss more or less is nothing to quarrel about. But take warning from me, Miriel! You'll die an old maid if you're so stiff, for I hear you're mighty particular; you'll get no one to care for your kisses on this dull slope except the sea wind."

"I'll keep them for the sea wind, then, and be quite content," said Miriel, laughing.

"Well, good-bye, then, and da bo chi, till I come back

again in the spring;" and whistling merrily he went out, followed by Iago, who had frowned impatiently at his brother's words.

Later on, when the sun was sinking low in the west, Phil took his final departure from Hafod, accompanied by his father and Iago, who drove him to Porthlidan and watched him embark on the *Sea Gull*, which rocked and swayed at anchor in the bay. For one moment, as he held his father's hand at parting, a sober look came into his eyes, and a tender word to his lips, as though the golden curtain of youth and buoyancy were lifted for an instant, disclosing the realities of life behind it, but as he stepped into the boat in which the cabin-boy was to scull him to his ship, his heart was as light as ever, and he called back to the two men left standing on the rock,—

"Cheer up, father bach! I'll be here to dance you a hornpipe again in the spring."

Silvan Vaughan only answered with a wistful smile and a wave of his hand; then, getting into the car, he drove silently homewards, stopping a moment, however, at Jinny vach vach's, where Iago deposited their two sixpences, every guest being expected to pay that sum upon entering the house.

"No tea, thank you, Jinny," he said; "my father is waiting," at which stretch of generosity Jinny showed much discomposure.

"Caton pawb!" she exclaimed, "what! two sixpences and take nothing? Well! a cake apiece, whatever!" and she thrust them into his pocket as he got into the car. He had caught a glimpse of Stivin and Mali, both deeply immersed in the joys of the tea-table.

They had started from Doloer at four o'clock, having first presented themselves for Miriel's inspection.

"How does he look? will he do?" said Mali. "I've been at him since three, whatever, and I can't make him look any better!"

"He looks very well, and so do you," answered Miriel, restraining the smile with which she afterwards watched them go up the slope together; for you might have sought from Kamschatka to Peru, and not found a more extraordinary, not to say ludicrous, looking couple. Mali's short petticoats! the handkerchief of brilliant red and yellow which enfolded her head! the little green shawl worn over her shoulders pinned tightly down to the back of her waist, the other ends crossed over her bosom! her tall black hat worn over the handkerchief and crowning the costume. But it was Stivin's best suit that bore the palm. The upper part of his person was encased in a jacket of dark blue cloth, made after the fashion of a boy's Eton jacket or of a dress coat without the tails, and adorned with brass buttons of the size of a halfpenny. His trousers, which had been his father's, had been altered by Mali to suit his burly proportions, the tailless jacket revealing in the nether garment, here a take in, there a let out. A chimney-pot hat, much too small for his head, rested somewhere on his mop of red hair, and out of his jacket pocket protruded his handkerchief of blue and white cotton. Although Miriel had seen them thus attired every Sunday of her life, it was not to be wondered at that she looked after them with a smile of amusement.

Betta was very much in evidence this evening, as she passed in and out from the yard to the house, singing too, in her full contralto, the refrain of Gwen's song, which no longer shed its harmonies over the hearth at Doloer:—

"Sailing, sailing over the salt sea foam."

The clear voice came down on the evening breeze, reaching Miriel's ears as she watched beside Gwen's bed. "I wonder she sings so loud and so joyful," she thought, "and Phil going away; but 'tis to show she doesn't care, no doubt. Poor Betta!" and she continued to sit watching the moor, as it turned to purple and gold in the sunset light.

She saw Iago and his father return in the car from Porthlidan, she heard the cooing of the pigeons, and the cawing of the rooks as they flapped lazily home to their nests on the cliffs; later on, she saw the pale crescent moon above the Hafod chimney, and gradually the shadows falling, and the stars coming out; and still Gwen lay pale and silent, obediently taking any nourishment or medicine offered to her, but showing no sign of interest or recuperation.

It was quite late when at last Miriel heard the sound of footsteps coming round the garden hedge, which hurried into a rush as they reached the porch and burst into the penisha. Mali and Stivin had returned from their "tay-party" with every appearance of flurry and fright.

"Oh, Dei anw'l! Let me shut the door," said Stivin, turning hastily to slip the wooden bolt into its place, while Mali, too breathless too speak, went through a series of pantominic gestures that roused Miriel's curiosity as well as amusement. She pressed her hand to her side, as if to still her fluttering heart, she held up her closed fist, she wrung her hands, while Stivin sat down panting for breath.

"We have run the last half mile!" gasped Mali at last. "Oh, Miriel! 'tis true what they say about a bwcci on the road to Porthlidan, and we have seen it! It was in the form of a woman, coming to meet us as if she was coming from here. 'Who is this?' said Stivin, 'going to Porthlidan so late? 'Tis a woman just coming into the shadow of those tall bushes.'"

"'I hope it isn't the bwcci!' said I; now, didn't I, Stivin?"

"Yes, thou didst," said Stivin, nodding his head as if he was certifying an important fact. "Those were the very words."

"Well," continued Mali, "when we came to the place, 'merch i, *there was nobody there!* Nothing but the white road, with the thorn bushes each side, and the wind

whispering in them enough to daunt you. We ran by the place, 'twas a dark corner, and I'll swear there was nobody there, but when we looked back, what did we see, d'you think, but the black figure of a woman. There she was, as plain as life, hurrying on, her cloak fluttering in the wind behind her. No one passed us, and yet there she was flying along the road to Porthlidan! Pass us, no doubt she did, ach y fi! but invisible as the wind, and most like it was she was whispering in those bushes if the truth were known."

"You may be sure of that!" interpolated Stivin. "Never again will I lay my foot to that road in the dark."

Miriel could give no explanation, but offered to accompany them round the corner of the house to their own dwelling.

"No, no, only lend us a lantern, 'merch i, and we'll venture, whatever!" and in terrified silence they went out, Miriel softly bolting the door and returning to her watching beside Gwen's bed.

In the first grey of the morning she rose, and looking up towards Hafod saw there were already signs of movement there. Dressing hurriedly, she went up the slope all spangled with dew, behind her the sea stretched away to the horizon, the silver of the rising sun just catching its ripples beyond the shadow of the hills.

Silvan Vaughan was the first to greet her with a "Boren, da Miriel! you are just in time, here's the *Sea Gull* coming round the point. Now, Iago! Come, lads and lasses all, and wave her 'fforwel.'" Iago followed by the farm servants ranged themselves at the top of the slope, each one waving some article of brilliant colour.

"Where is Betta?" said Miriel.

"She's in the gable window, be bound," said Mari, and she did not press the question, thinking it likely that Betta was hiding her tears at her own little window.

The sea was every moment growing lighter as it caught

the sun sparkles, and the *Sea Gull* bounded gaily on her way. Phil had hoisted a flag to the mast, which fluttered on the breeze, as the ship ploughed her way across the offing, and at last turned her prow to the far-off horizon. Silvan Vaughan's very soul seemed to look out of his eyes as he gazed at the receding ship. Involuntarily he stretched out his hands to the sea, as the *Sea Gull* bore straight ahead, every moment growing smaller and fainter in the distance. There was no turning back, so at last he turned to re-enter the house, Iago drawing his arm through his own, and guiding his unsteady footsteps. "Come, father bach!" he said, "here's a roaring fire Mari has lit, and Miriel will stop to breakfast with us."

"Where's Betta?" now asked everyone, except Miriel, who ran noiselessly up to the loft to condole and sympathise with her friend.

But in Betta's little cupboard room there was no sign of her. Her bed, with its coverlet of brilliant patchwork, was smooth and unrumpled, and, looking round in astonishment, Miriel saw that her "box," that invariable *vade mecum* of the country girl, had disappeared; there was no sign of Betta anywhere, no ribbons, no shoes, no kerchiefs; and, with a terrible sinking of the heart, she sought for Iago, and found him and his father somewhat annoyed at Betta's absence.

"Is she coming?" Iago inquired of Miriel. "We want breakfast!" But startled by her white face, he stopped short, and followed her into the clos—"What is it, Miriel? for mercy's sake tell me what is it?"

"Oh, Iago! I don't know; but where is Betta? She's not in the loft—her bed has not been slept in—Oh, dear! oh, dear! where is she?" and at the same moment there came into her mind a vision of the flying figure that Mali and Stivin had seen hurrying through the darkness to Porthlidan!

It was now Iago's turn to be frightened. He turned deadly pale. "God help us!" he exclaimed, "if what I fear is true. Can she have gone to Porthlidan this morning?"

"What for?" said they all.

"Perhaps to bid Phil a last good-bye. He might have rowed in in the boat," suggested Iago.

"But her bed!" said Miriel, and so intent were they upon their conjectures, that they did not hear a footstep approaching them on the soft stubble, until Silvan Vaughan himself grasped Iago's arm, and looking round startled, they saw the old man, his face growing grey and drawn with some dawning apprehension.

"What is it?" he asked. "Where's Betta?"

"Well, we don't know," said Iago; "but father anw'l! we must not jump to conclusions. Perhaps she is gone to Doloer and has missed Miriel."

"Have you looked in her room?" and Miriel, willing to stave off the moment of certainty, turned to search once more.

Before she had gone many yards towards the house, however, Mari came running out, and the old man's pale face turned to her with an eager look of expectancy. "Betta!" he gasped.

"Gone, mishteer! Her bed has not been slept in, and her box is gone. She's gone with Phil, no doubt, for I know she was dying in love with him," she said volubly. But Silvan Vaughan heard little of her chatter, for at the word "gone" he had reeled forwards, and before Mari had spoken her last words, with a cry of "Phil! Phil!" he had fallen on the stubble, Iago trying in vain to support him.

"Run, Miriel! For God's sake, some brandy!" and she flew over the stubble, returning quickly with the stimulant which had always hitherto revived the frail frame. But it was of no avail to-day; in vain Iago poured a little be-

tween the blue lips, in vain Miriel rubbed the white hands, for Silvan Vaughan was dead, the heart that had so long flagged and failed had ceased to beat, under the sudden shock that had overwhelmed him.

The farm servants came running from field and barn, and together they bore him into the house, and laid him in the "preachers' room," where Mali Storrom, fetched by Mari, was soon in attendance, moving about softly in her stocking feet, and tearfully calling to mind every kind or pleasant word that the dead man had spoken to her.

And so silence fell on the old grey house, broken only by the soft whisper of the sea and the cawing of the rooks in the ivy-covered gable. In the clos the servants stood about in little groups, talking with bated breath of the sudden removal of their old master, and the loneliness of the young man who would now fill his place in field and market. But it was on the hearth at home they felt that the solitude would press most heavily on the young master, and "that hussy of a girl, Betta," came in for her full share of censure and contumely.

"He will marry now, pwr fellow," said Morgans, of Bryn, his nearest neighbour, "and, indeed, I have heard that he is courting Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer. Well, he can afford to marry without money, and, barring that fault, 'twill be a good match for him, for she has good blood in her."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Essec Jones. "They're a genteel family at Doloer!" and thus, in the countryside gossip, it came to be a matter of common talk, accepted and approved of, that Iago Vaughan, yr Hafod, and Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer, would be married when the time of decent mourning had elapsed.

At many a farm on the countryside the rumour reached the ears of Doctor Dan and Deio, the former accepting it as the inevitable, Deio with an inscrutable look of stolid indifference.

CHAPTER XIX

GLANBERI

On the day following his father's funeral, Iago sat alone on the hearth at Hafod; Miriel, full of sympathy for his loneliness, would have stayed in the house and endeavoured to make up for Betta's absence had not Gwen's increasing weakness called her away.

"I must go, lad; you know it. I must not leave Nanti Gwen. But I am feeling it all with you, Iago, and I will come up often."

"Yes, I understand it all; you must go," he said. "'Tis better so, I had better face my loneliness at once." And Miriel returned to Doloer with a heart full of questioning trouble. It seemed to her that some unkind fate had descended upon Doloer and Hafod, some ungenial wind had ruffled the calm lake of their existence. "So happy we were," she thought, "and now it is all so sad," but she dried her eyes as she ran down the slope, and entered Doloer with a smile of greeting for Gwen, who, however, was evidently too inert and weak to notice it. For, after all, if sorrow and death were shading their lives for the present, in Miriel's nature there was a perennial spring of courage and joy, which brightened to her even the darkest scenes, and whispered to her that gloom *could* not last, and that happiness *must* be the lot of all God's children some day. And were not the waves still dancing in the sun-

light and the sea birds still calling? Were not the wall-flowers still blooming in the porch? And did not the household and Nanti Gwen provide sufficient employment for all her thoughts and energies?

"Is she worse, Mali?" she asked, looking at Gwen, when she returned from Hafod. The face seemed strangely sunken, and the fluttering breath scarcely audible.

"Yes, 'merch i," said Mali, in an undertone. "She will not last the day." But here she was wrong, for when the sun set and the moon rose Gwen was still alive, Miriel sitting beside her bed, while Mali sat in the background knitting, where the home-made candle made a small halo round its own head. The window was uncovered, and through it the moon shone in upon Gwen's bed, and upon her still, white face. The hours passed slowly on, Miriel gazing alternately on the pale face and at the flying clouds that hurried over the moon, and listening to the monotonous breaking of the waves on the shore. At midnight, when the tide turned, there was a change in the sound of the sea, and a sense of change too in the quiet atmosphere of the little room. Suddenly Gwen rose to a sitting posture, she who had lain so helplessly inert for days. Miriel drew nearer with the intention of supporting her, but stood still in awed astonishment as she saw the complete change in the expression of her face. The look of collapse and weakness was gone—transformed into one of intense interest. A light as of joyful surprise illumined her features, and, stretching both hands as far as she could towards the foot of the bed, she exclaimed, "Matti! Silvan!" and sank back in Miriel's arms dead, with that happy smile still on her lips.

Meanwhile, Iago sat in his Bardic Chair in the old living-room at Hafod, trying to arrange the affairs of his farm, which had all been left as much as possible unattended to during the few days preceding the funeral, for such days are considered as sacred as Sabbath days in Wales.

When Miriel had left, he had found plenty to occupy his time and thoughts until the evening, when, sitting alone by the hearth, the fire of logs casting fitful shadows on the walls, he realised to the full the life of loneliness that lay before him. The rush hat which his father had worn, the staff he had leant upon, hung on their accustomed hook; the cows, fastened to their posts, stood in a row at the further end beyond the passage, their gentle eyes and soft breathing giving a little life to the stillness; and, sitting there alone, he pondered with bitter feelings on the deceitful conduct of Phil and Betta, which had not only brought disgrace to themselves, but had been so cruel and fatal a blow to his father. He paced up and down restlessly, and at last unbolted the heavy door and went out into the night air, continuing his slow pacing backwards and forwards at the top of the slope, and frequently looking down at the little gable window at Doloer, where the light in Gwen's room made a little glow through the uncurtained window. Occasionally he saw a movement in the room, and, thinking it was Miriel, he drew gradually nearer, until at last he could watch her figure as it bent over the bed or sat looking out at the moon. The flying clouds above him, the swish of the sea, the hooting of the owls in the Hafod walls, the roar of the breakers on the reef that crossed the bay, the chirping of the crickets at Doloer—nothing of the beauty of this was lost upon his poetic temperament, and, as he stood in the fitful moonlight, a silent black figure, a soothing calm fell upon his soul, and he realised the truth of the old Druidical motto, "A Diw a digon" ("Having God having everything").

As the days passed on, the old content and cheerfulness seemed to have returned to Doloer and Hafod, and, with a natural desire for human companionship, to say nothing of the warmer feelings that still reigned in Iago's heart towards Miriel, these two young lives drew towards each

other, finding solace for their loneliness in the friendship which had begun with their first acquaintance.

Both had been left peculiarly alone, to tread the journey of life, and in each the sorrowful experiences of the last fortnight were to bring forth the fruits which grew most naturally from the soil of their respective natures. Miriel, with the exuberant vitality of a healthy country girl, would rise victorious from the depressing influences which had latterly shadowed her life, and Iago would take to heart the lessons of patience and brave endurance which, in his nature, were the reasonable outcome of the circumstances through which he had passed.

It was Sunday morning, though there was little to distinguish it from any other day on moor or shore, except, indeed, that Stivin and Mali had walked sedately up the slope in their best clothes; no footsteps hurrying to church or chapel, no jangle of bells marked the day. The waves tossed their crests just as freely in the sunlight, the sands spread just as golden, the gulls and sea crows were just as busy as on any other day, for, after all, was it not always Sunday here? The great, broad sea telling of God's glories, the winds hymning His praises and the birds taking up the chorus. Thus Iago thought as he came down the slope about a month after his father's death.

"Will we go to church, Miriel?" he asked, entering the shady penisha, and her face kindled with pleasure as she turned from the hearth to greet him.

"Yes, indeed, let us go," she answered; "there is nothing to keep me at home now; I will dress in a minute. But what is that?" she added, as Iago opened the sheets of a newspaper and laid it on the table. "Oh, Iago! Another prize?"

"No," he said; "something better, only 'tis too late," and from a corner of the *Teithiwr* he read aloud the announcement of Phil and Betta's marriage.

"In Liverpool on the 18th! If my father had only seen

it! It is Philip's writing on the address, but not a line has he written of excuse or explanation. I can never forgive them their cruel conduct."

"I knew Betta loved him dearly," said Miriel; "but I did not know Phil cared so much for her that he would marry her. Dir anw'l! Even now I cannot think of him as a married man; he was so thoughtless, and Betta so rash and hasty."

As they walked up the moor together they continued to converse on the same subject.

"No, I cannot think any good will come of it," said Iago. "I find out, from my father's accounts, that he gave Phil £50 before he left. Poor fellow! he little thought what he wanted it for, or he would never have given it. He was so set upon Phil's marrying Jinny Ffowkes. Indeed, I thought Phil liked her too. But there! 'Tis no use grieving over the past, we can't alter it."

"No," said Miriel, stooping to gather a creamy white clover and looking at it pensively; "and after all, Iago, if they loved each other, why should Jinny Ffowkes come between them? Real love seems such a precious thing; that's what I'm feeling, whatever!" and she fastened the clover in her bodice.

"Is that what you are feeling, indeed?" said Iago, smiling at the verbal difficulty. "Well—perhaps some day you will pick it up, and wear it, like that clover!"

Miriel stammered and blushed, for she had forgotten for the moment all that had passed between her and Iago.

"I mean it may turn to good after all," she said. "Phil will grow more steady, and Betta will be so happy."

"Well, perhaps; but I could never be happy if my conduct had caused my father's death," said Iago, sternly. He was recalling his self-control and the cool, unconcerned manner which for a moment he had laid aside, and Miriel was at her ease again.

She was sometimes troubled with compunctions and regrets concerning Iago's life of loneliness, and it was only his generally carefully-guarded words and manner that made their intercourse so free from constraint.

Glanberi Church was quite three miles from Doloer and Hafod, so the little bell had almost ceased to tinkle when they arrived in the porch.

Perched on a steep hillside, the weather-beaten edifice had stood for centuries almost unchanged; the old white-haired vicar rising Sunday after Sunday to read and preach to the string of nearly empty pews that stretched before him, the scant congregation to quaver through the same old hymns that their fathers and grandfathers had sung before them; or they sat down to snuffle and cough in the same manner. Occasionally a baby lifted up its voice and wept, sometimes a dog walked up the whole length of the church in search of his master, and, finding him asleep, curled himself round at his feet and slept also.

All this was very reprehensible, no doubt, but it did not grate on Iago and Miriel. On the contrary, how pleasant was the cool calmness of the old building, how soothing the old hymns, that rose and fell without hurry and without accompaniment. The old familiar Liturgy too, that for many generations had fallen on the ears now lying deaf to all earthly sounds under the green mounds in the churchyard, how soothing it was! The sermon too seemed little less familiar, for if the old vicar did choose a new text every Sunday, it was very difficult not to fall into the same old platitudes and the same old arguments.

The congregation, however, were entirely satisfied, and were dismissed at last, feeling quite refreshed by their quiet doze.

They loved the old church and the old vicar with a depth of affection seldom accorded to the modern hardworking clergy; they would have shared their last loaf with the

Rev. Jabez Jones, they were ready at all times, in sunshine or storm, to help him with his gardening, or harvesting, to drive him to market or fair, funeral or wedding. His surplice, which did not quite reach his knees, had become shorter year by year as its frayed hem was periodically "turned up" by some thrifty member of his congregation, an attention which he never noticed, even as he never took note of the increasing spots of iron-mould which covered it, as though from a shower of yellow rain.

Occasionally, when it became quite too dingy in colour, an old woman would carry it home over her arm, and would wash it, and "blue" it very generously before returning it to the vestry.

As Miriel and Iago emerged into the crisp autumn air after the service, they both sighed, and smiled as they detected each other doing so. It was partly a sigh of appreciation of the old swaying hymns and the long rest, and partly of satisfaction at being released from the sleepy atmosphere. As if by mutual consent, they turned towards a shady corner of the churchyard, where lay, not far apart, the three graves whose occupants had borne a part in the events so closely connected with both their lives. Over Matti's the green velvet turf was sprinkled with daisies, but the two others still looked rough and unfinished, waiting for the gentle hand of Nature to mould the rough clods into smoothness and beauty.

"They lie still, Miriel," said Iago; "but if they could speak what would they say to us to-day, I wonder?"

Miriel did not answer at once, but stood silently musing.

"One thing I am sure they would say, Iago; I'm thinking it is this: 'Don't forget us, but don't grieve; because the very best thing has happened to us that God could send.' Iago, I am an ignorant girl, and you are a learned man—oh, yes, indeed! I know, your poetry shows me that, and your talk is more smooth than ours—but the simplest can learn God's secrets, and I am thinking that is one of

them; that when our time comes, death is the very best thing God has to give us. You are smiling! at my simple words, perhaps."

"No, no," said Iago. "I was smiling at the beautiful thought. Let us go home; we won't forget them, but we won't grieve for them, Miriel."

"No," she said, and together they passed under the lych gate and took their way through the lanes and fields towards the coast. Arrived at the top of the slope, their ears were assailed by sounds most unmusical and curious, evidently emanating from Doloer or its precincts.

"'Tis Stivin and Mali!" said Miriel, laughing. "They are repeating their 'Pwnc' together; 'tis a long chapter, and next Sunday they will have to repeat it in chapel. Indeed, there's wrong I am, but I must always laugh when they are learning their 'Pwnc,' and they are so serious about it too."

"No wonder you laugh," said Iago, "the two voices are so different. Yes, there's the last verse, now they will sing a hymn together;" and on the clear autumn air their voices came up the slope in the most extraordinary blending that harmony ever bore; Stivin's deep bass in a continual rumble, accompanying Mali's sharp, metallic voice, which roamed and quavered round the tune with turns and grace notes *ad libitum*.

"On my word! 'tis like the Scotch music we heard in the fair; the tunes that the man with the bag and the pipes and the bare legs gave us. Do you remember, lass?"

"Yes," said Miriel; "I couldn't think that day what his tunes brought to my mind, but I know now; there they are, on the bench at the door;" and, catching sight of them, Stivin waved his hand round two or three times, and called out, "Iago! come here, man!" in stentorian tones, that were brought to a sudden stop by a nudge from Mali's sharp elbow reminding him it was Sunday.

"There!" he said huskily, trying to modulate his tones, and holding his Bible towards Iago. "Come and hearken

us our chapter, and question us close as you can now, for you are a knowing man, Iago, boy, and we'll be safer to appear before the preacher at Zion; he's an awful dodger, remember you, so question us close."

"Caton pawb! I can't," said Iago. "Give it to Miriel."

"Nor I, indeed," said Miriel, shyly; "I couldn't question you; I don't know much myself."

"Well, tan i marw!" said Stivin, "there's far back you are, both of you. We'll have to question each other, Mali. But come in with us now and drink your cawl, 'tis boiling over, and a nice piece of bacon in it, as well as Miriel's fowl." And with the simple familiarity of rustic ways, both Miriel and Iago accepted the proffered hospitality, delighting the hearts of the old people by declaring they had never tasted such cawl.

To Iago the hours spent in Miriel's presence still sped with fleeter foot, and left more golden light behind them than any others, although his dream of happiness had been buried out of sight by her plain speaking and her subsequent unembarrassed and open friendship; and, as he turned towards his solitary home, he tried to banish from his heart the longing for a closer and more tender tie. Sitting alone under the wide chimney he missed the grey, stooping figure that had been his companion for so many years, and even Betta's bright and rather boisterous ways, the full, red lips, the glistening black eyes, returned to his mind with more appreciation than they had ever possessed in her presence. He did not fare so badly in his solitude as some men would have done, for Mari and Madlen vied with each other in their care of the young master, and in trying to fill up the gap caused by Betta's sudden flight. They had always been a little jealous of the place she filled in the household, and were not sparing in their censures now that she had fallen from her superior position; and it was with a look of blank astonishment, not unmixed with annoyance,

that they listened to Iago's reading aloud of the announcement in the *Tiethiwr* of Phil and Betta's marriage.

"Jar i! there's a sly girl she was," said Madlen, who had felt a little sentimental predilection for the handsome sailor.

Iago had neat domestic ways with him, too, which prevented his being entirely dependent upon the women folk for comfort; his poetic temperament and literary tastes and abilities also stood him in good stead.

There was no longer occasion for him to retire to his hayloft study; there was plenty of room for his writing-table under the Lwvwr chimney beside his Bardic Chair, and Miriel, who came in frequently, remembered, as she saw the solitary student writing or reading in the chimney corner, her dreams of the old harpist, who sat in that very spot producing from his phantom strings such strains of music as she had never heard in reality. She told him of her dreams one day, and of the place he filled on the hearth, as she sat with her knitting opposite him for an hour's chat, "And indeed, 'tis strange," she said, "although you are young and he was old, and although 'tis poetry that you make and not music, 'tis strange, Iago, you seem the same person that I used to fancy sitting there."

"Perhaps 'twas a prophetic dream, Miriel, and you will see me here bent and grey some day."

"Well, Ann came true, too, for that was Betta; but the woman and the children."

Iago smiled. "I think 'twas like all dreams, Miriel, a mixture of truth and folly."

"Yes," said Miriel, looking into the fire, "and the music he played, I'm sure I'll never hear; so strange it was, so sad and so beautiful. I have come up to ask will Mari lend me a cheese vat? Mine cracked in two yesterday."

"Why, of course," said Iago, hurrying to the dairy, "anything in the house, Miriel, as if—as if—as if Betta were here."

"Can Diolch;" and she turned away with her cheese vat,

unconscious that he had been on the point of saying, "as if it were your own."

She sang over her cheese-making too, unconscious that the wind carried her voice up the slope, that Iago's grave eyes had followed her flying footsteps, and that her song brought a more sorrowful look into his eyes.

Mali and Stivin had repeated their chapter at the "Pwnc" with great *éclat*, though they had not won the prize, which exasperated Stivin so much that he declared that he would not wear out his tongue and his teeth by learning another. Nevertheless he and Mali had already begun another which was to be repeated at a Christmas "school meeting." "And Christmas won't be long," said Stivin, "though 'tis only October; next week 'twill be November, and then Christmas comes slap upon us; and the storms, Dei anw'l! I don't know what is the sea thinking about this year—nothing but smiles and soft songs, if you please."

"Yes, indeed," said Miriel, "it has been beautiful, whatever."

"Oh, stop a bit," said Stivin, "he'll be waking soon, and showing his teeth out there;" and he shook his closed fist at the rippling sea.

"Well, you'll be ready for him," said Miriel, laughing.

"Yes, I've got my tarpaulins and my lifebelt ready;" and Stivin snorted like a warhorse who scents the battle afar off. He pointed his brown, thick finger northwards. "There's signs up there," he said, "that are making me think the storms won't wait till November; and time enough, too," he added indignantly.

And he was right; when the 11th of November came the season was quite justifying its Welsh name of "Clyngeia winter calend."

The wintry blasts that had gathered beyond the grey north horizon were blowing straight in upon the unsheltered coast, sweeping up the slope and bending the

rushes in their path. In the roads and lanes the grasses lay flat on the clear, brown pools under the hedges; the black, shrivelled leaves of the meadow-sweet, which had decked the road with its creamy blossoms in the summer, now turned their grey backs to the sunshine, shivering like ragged beggars under the hedges; the brown and golden fronds of the bracken bending over them as if in pity for their shabbiness; and although the sun shone brilliantly, the wind rushed through the furze and broom, and hissed significantly in the crooked thorn bushes. Miriel and Iago, on their way to church on Sundays, were strewn with the dry crisp leaves of the beech trees, instead of the elder blossom and wild rose leaves which had carpeted the ground in the summer.

Mali Storrom closed her door and knitted close to her tiny fire, while Stivin, in his element, joined the herring fishers on the stormy bay, providing Miriel and Mali with sufficient employment in curing the herrings which he brought home from his fishing. Every day they salted the silver haul, bending them frequently head to tail to make sure they were properly prepared, and when they bent easily, throwing them into the tubs with layers of salt; in a few days they were washed and hung up to dry in rows in the smoke of the chimney, and when the wattled sides were filled with the silver garlands, both Mali and Miriel felt they were well provided against the plain bareness of the winter's food. Darker and greyer grew the sky, fiercer and wilder the storms, but Miriel's vitality rose triumphant over all gloom; her goats, her needle and her household work filled up all her time, and at almost every hour of the short grey day she might be heard singing at her work. Dull? she knew not the meaning of the word; with Mali and Stivin to entertain her, and Iago's visits sometimes, to vary the monotony of the day. Lonely? when she sat alone by the hearth and listened to the wind howling in the chimney and whistling in the latch-hole. Yes, it was

lonely sometimes when the foam blew against the little window with a soft pat, and Miriel, looking up at the dark panes, saw the curious shapes which the foam flecks took as they fell. At one time it would be a baby's hand that lay there flat and cold; at another, the long, thin shape of a woman's hand, but all cold, all drowned and dead. It was a foolish fancy of which she was always ashamed, but she rose to pin her apron over the offending window when the cold hands pressed in too persistently. With the morning her courage rose again, and, as she fought her way through the wind to wipe off the flecks of foam, she laughed at her foolish fancies.

"Have you heard, Miriel, there will be a 'Plygain' at Glanberi Church on Christmas morning at six o'clock? Will you come?" said Iago one day. "'Twill be dark, of course, but 'twill be old and strange; the fashion has nearly died out."

"Yes, indeed, I'll come, Iago, and Mali and Stivin, and we'll all come home under the stars to breakfast!"

"No, not home," said Iago, "'tis always to Gwernddu people go to breakfast. 'Tis close by, and Jacob is a rich man and hospitable; and every Christmas he has a grand breakfast for those who attend the 'Plygain.'"

"But I have not been 'called,'" said Miriel.

"But I have, and all my 'company,' and you are all my company now."

Mali and Stivin had indignantly declined Iago's offer to take them in his company.

"Ach y fi! no!" said Mali. "Old Devods and Ferems* —I have nothing to do with them! Coming down to us from the foolish old times, and sticking fast to the church, you see! Caton pawb! we are more enlightened in the chapels. Service at six o'clock, indeed! No, no! nine o'clock is the time for our chapel service, and early enough these dark mornings."

* Customs and forms.

"Well, I'm going," said Miriel; "with Iago I will be quite safe, and to Gwernddu to breakfast afterwards."

"Oh! there's some sense in that, now. Breakfast at Gwernddu! That is worth getting up for, I have heard, indeed—fowls and hams and tongues and black puddings and tea and coffee. Yes, go, 'merch i, and a merry Christmas to you, as the Saison say."

So, early on Christmas morning, when darkness yet shrouded sea and shore and windy moor, Miriel dressed hurriedly, and joined Iago, who, at five o'clock in the morning, was knocking at the door. The stars shone brilliantly, crowding the sky as if to make up for the absence of the moon; the ground was hard with frost, and a little sprinkling of snow lay on the slope, and whitened the road on which they began their walk. The frost crunched under their feet in the little road pools; no sound broke the stillness but the boom of the waves, which grew more muffled as they went further inland. Young and full of vigour, the cold, biting air only made the blood course more warmly through their veins. To Miriel especially it was a keen enjoyment, as for so many years the peculiar and urgent nature of her home ties had held her in bondage, and had thwarted and cramped her young life, though she had not been conscious of it; but now that these ties were relaxed, and she was free to go her own way, and like other girls attend market and fair, and take her part in all the simple enjoyments of a country girl's life, the intense pleasure which these little interludes brought her more than made up to her for the restrictions of her earlier years.

"Oh! there's beautiful it is, being out under the stars, Iago," she said, "and to think that in six months the sun will be shining at this time of the morning. There's the bell ringing, and here are some people coming up from that wood."

A light streamed out through the church door, and

entering the little porch, where the people began to arrive in groups, breathing hard and stamping their feet in the doorway, Miriel opened her eyes in astonishment, for, lo! the little dark church had been transformed into a fairy palace. Candles were lighted in every sconce, at the door of every pew stood a bush of holly decorated with its own scarlet berries mixed with those of the ivy, some of which had been dipped in whiting to imitate snow. Indeed, there was a good sprinkling of whiting over all the decorations, which were simple in the extreme though plentiful. To Miriel it seemed an enchanted scene, and when the village band opened the service with "Awake, my soul, and with the sun," and the whole congregation joined heartily in the familiar strains, her eyes filled with tears, so new and strange and so impressive was the whole scene to her. The church was crowded by worshippers from the surrounding neighbourhood, the yearly "Plygain" at Glanberi and the subsequent breakfast at Gwernddu making it a very popular yearly festivity. The old vicar's cheeks burnt with excitement as he saw the pews so well filled, and he accepted their emptiness on the following Sunday with meek resignation.

When she had a little overcome her feeling of surprise, Miriel began to look around her, at the red-mantled women with their tall hats; at their manly companions in coats of mulberry or blue frieze; all looking so picturesque and "respectable," and the thought crossed her mind that amongst them there were none of such eccentric appearance as Stivin and Mali.

Glancing round at the crowded congregation, a familiar figure caught her eye. Straight and tall, and broad shouldered, she recognised him at once. It was Doctor Dan, and a strange feeling of pleasure throbbed through her as she saw the well-remembered features, and for the rest of the time she found it difficult to fix her attention upon the sermon. Would she see him to speak to, she wondered?

and the recollection that Iago was with her sent a hot blush to her face. He would think—but what did it matter? It was nothing to her; it was plain he looked upon her as a troublesome burden, and she would show him that she could live without his help, and that what he thought was of no consequence to her. As the sermon came to an end, and she saw the tall figure rise, the clear-cut profile marked against the dark hollies, she tossed her head a little impatiently at her own folly, and felt relieved when, making her way with the crowd towards the door, she reached the open air, and could stand a little aside in the darkness to wait for Iago. A rapid change had come over the weather; the bank of black clouds had overspread the sky, and was beginning to fall in feathery flakes with a persistence that threatened a heavy downfall. And where was Iago? He had missed her in the crowd, and on reaching the outer air had hurried forward eagerly in search of her, inquiring as he went, "Have you seen Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer? A girl in mourning, with a little black wing in her hat?"

"Yes, yes! she has run on, no doubt, to get out of the snow."

And he ran on too, but Miriel was still standing by the porch wondering and waiting for him, and beginning to grow a little nervous as the snow fell thicker and faster, and the people passed her more hurriedly. Suddenly a hand was on her arm, a familiar voice was speaking to her, and in a moment all fear was gone, and she felt safe and content.

"Miriel, what are you doing here?" he asked. "Are you alone?"

"No, no, but I have missed my friends."

"Who are they? We must look for them."

"'Tis Iago Vaughan," said Miriel, with a flush that the darkness and the snowflakes hid.

"Well, he must have gone on in search of you, for the

church is empty. Come," he said, hesitating a little, "you must not stand here in the snow. Are you going home, or where?"

"No; I am going with Iago to breakfast at Gwernddu."

"Of course! I am going there too, so I will take you there safely—if you will trust yourself to my guidance."

"Yes, indeed, and thank you," was all she was able to say, for while she was speaking he was wrapping her up in the storm cloak which he had slipped off his own shoulders. Miriel expostulated, but in vain.

"Now, I fear that little wing will suffer if I pull the hood up."

"I will take off my hat and carry it under my cloak," she said. And, alas! notwithstanding all her wounded pride, and in spite of all her resolutions, the strong, brown hands that tied the hood under her chin brought a warm glow into her heart and a rich flush to her cheeks.

"Now we can face the storm, if you are well shod," he said.

"Is it my shoes? Yes, they are strong. I am used to the storms, you see."

"Yes, as much as I am, perhaps."

They were following the footsteps in the snow that led over a mountain pass to Gwernddu; there was no one in sight before or behind them, nothing but the grey sky above, and the fast-whitening landscape around them. The wind blew keen from the north, and the wintry world looked bleak and bare, but to Miriel all was warmth and sunshine, while to Doctor Dan the sight of the slender figure that walked beside him awoke within him (if they ever slept) all the strong emotions which he had striven to control, although he could not conquer them. He had not sought the situation, but being in possession of it he could not but rejoice in it, and as he saw that on that unsheltered bryn the wind sometimes thrust Miriel out of the direct

path, he drew her arm within his own, and steadied her uneven steps.

"I must guard you from harm till I can place you safe with Iago Vaughan," he said, and in a moment Miriel's happiness was clouded and her pride was up in arms.

"Well, indeed, I am sorry; I am always giving you trouble, but no doubt Gwernddu is not far now, and then I will be quite safe." And on the pretext of fastening her cloak, she slipped her arm away from his.

"Sorry, Miriel! Trouble! Well, as you say, Gwernddu is not far now, and I may not have the *same* trouble again, so do not let us talk like strangers! Tell me about your life, child; do you find Doloer dull now that you are alone?"

"Dull? No," she answered, with a dash of spirit, though, truth to tell, she had hard work to steady her voice. "No, indeed, I am never dull."

"No, I suppose not. I had forgotten. How are Kit and Brythen?"

"Oh, well.—In the shed at nights now."

"Yes, we are facing the winter now, and I expect you are feeling it at Doloer, more than we do at Tregarreg even."

A pleasant memory softened Miriel's vexation a little, and she asked, almost timidly, "The river, is it just the same in the winter as the summer?"

"No, indeed! It is not. Very swollen sometimes, and rushing by as if it was in a hurry to get to the sea, and its foam often stained by the peat bogs. Can you picture it?"

"Yes," said Miriel, with a little sadness in her voice.

Perhaps it was this that made him say, "Perhaps you will come and see how it looks in the winter some day, although you did toss your head and say, 'I will never come here again!'" He regretted the words as soon as they were spoken.

"No," said Miriel. "Winter or summer, I will not come again."

"Well," he answered, "perhaps you are right." And the words fell like lead on her heart, though she had brought them about by her own unreasonable sensitiveness.

CHAPTER XX

BREAKFAST AT GWERNDDU

At Gwernddu the house door stood wide open, and Mrs Hughes's portly figure standing at it was well revealed by the glow of light behind her.

She had stood there, in spite of the falling snow, until all her guests had arrived, to welcome them and to marshal them with a hand across their shoulders, into the warmly-lit "hall," where the loud talk and laughter, and the clattering of knives and forks, showed the sociable meal had already commenced.

Doctor Dan was an honoured guest, so the hostess turned at once with special attentions to his companion, and began with busy fingers to unclasp her cloak from top to bottom, talking volubly as she did so, Miriel bending her head to watch the unfastening of clasp after clasp. When the last was undone, and she emerged from its folds, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing with exercise and excitement, the pale golden hair all touzled by the grey hood, Mrs Hughes stood back a few steps to look at her.

"Well, dir anw'l!" she said, "what is this pretty creature you have brought to see us? Well, in my deed, sir, you have been a long time about it, but I think you have found the right one at last!"

Several of the merry company looked round and laughed boisterously, one man rising to give Doctor Dan a resound-

ing slap on the back, while Miriel stood blushing and overwhelmed with confusion. To Doctor Dan, too, the situation was tryingly awkward, but, without a shade of outward embarrassment, he raised his hand to stop the hilarious applause, and, with a pleasant laugh, said, "You are mistaken; this is Miriel Lloyd, of Doloer, and comes in Iago Vaughan's company! They missed each other in the snow."

At these words an awkward silence fell upon the merry company, for not only had many of them heard the rumour which connected the names of the two young people, but the girl herself was an object of interest and curiosity to them; for they had heard of her solitary life on the "lone shore," of Matti and Gwen's deaths, and of the tragic events at Hafod, which they supposed were now delaying her marriage with Iago. All this gossip threw a halo of romance around her, and though the laughter and loud talk was silent for a moment or two, there were many glances of curiosity and interest cast towards Miriel, as Doctor Dan placed a chair for her at the table, and sat down beside her, leaving the chair which had been prepared for him vacant.

"Miriel," he said, when Mrs Hughes had satisfied herself that nothing more could be piled on the girl's plate, "child, I am sorry. But you will not think any more of their stupid nonsense! Will you?"

"No, no, of course!" said Miriel, bravely fighting with her shyness and a strange inclination to cry. "They are very merry, whatever, and Mrs Hughes is very kind, but, indeed, I am sorry too; it was worse for you than for me."

"Worse for me?" he said thoughtfully. "Well, yes, perhaps it was;" and then he seemed to dismiss the subject from his thoughts, and endeavoured to make her do the same, by pleasant talk, and much information concerning the guests, whom Miriel knew only by name.

"Do you see that shabby old man with his back to the

fire? To my knowledge he is worth £20,000, and yet he lives more barely than the labourers on his farm.

"And that pale girl at the corner? She is his niece, and lives with him, and bears with his scrimping, sordid ways in the hopes of inheriting his riches some day!

"That little woman with the black bows in her cap? She is Esther Owen. She has lost all her children, three fine sons, all drowned at sea, and her face has grown sweeter with every sorrow, I think."

Miriel was getting deeply interested, and beginning to forget her annoyance. She was, at least, no longer frightened, but was able to enjoy the scene of true though homely hospitality. Mrs Hughes did not sit down to the table, but, assisted by her daughter and maidservant, waited upon the guests, who did full justice to the profusion of good cheer provided for them.

A little later, Iago arrived, breathless and flurried, but seeing Miriel and Doctor Dan, made his way towards them at once, relieved of all anxiety.

"Why, Miriel!" he said, "I have been frightened! I pictured you lost in the snow and blown about by the wind, and here you are safe and sound, and looking as bright as ever. Indeed, I am very thankful to you," he said, turning to Doctor Dan. "I don't know how we missed each other!"

"Well, now I can leave you to find that out," and, rising, he made Iago take his place, unceremoniously carrying his plate towards the vacant chair which had been prepared for him, returning for a moment to wish Miriel good-bye.

"I must start almost immediately," he said, "to see a patient living eight miles away over the hills."

When he was gone, Miriel tried hard to be amiable and pleasant to Iago, but it must be confessed that while she applied herself to her breakfast, and took note of the new circumstances and scenes before her—the well-spread table

the ropes of onions, the hams hanging low from the rafters, all in such quantities as she had never seen before, the ruddy glow of the fire that touched the whole scene with crimson—still her thoughts would fly to the bare mountain road, where a solitary gig, bearing two muffled figures, was making its way against the driving wind and snow.

Mrs Hughes's lamentations were loud and prolonged when she saw Doctor Dan prepare to take his departure. "What! only a cup of tea? and going out so early with nothing inside you, ach y fi!"

"Nothing but platesful of fowl and ham, and buttered toast and coffee!" said Doctor Dan, shuffling into the cloak that had sheltered Miriel. "The snow is over," he said, "so the girl will not want it, but you will lend her a warm shawl, no doubt, if it is very cold."

"Caton pawb, yes!" said his hostess. "I'll see she is well wrapped up;" and he went away, satisfied that Miriel's only difficulty would lie in choosing between Mrs Hughes's "whittles." After much hand-shaking and promises to "call soon," he made his escape, and, finding Deio and the gig in the stubble yard, was soon on his way to the mountain road which was so vividly present to Miriel's mind.

At last the hospitable meal was over, and the guests turned away from the table, the women to sit stiff and sedate in the parlour, where a large fire was drawing out the smell of damp walls and mildewed cushions, for it was never warmed or lighted except on the rare occasions of a "tay-parti" or the Christmas breakfast. The men had turned to the hearth and were filling the "hall" with clouds of blue smoke from their pipes. Miriel, shy and embarrassed, had followed the women into the parlour, where she was subjected to a cross-examination before which she surrendered entirely.

"You are living by yourself, 'merch i?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! But I'm thinking it won't be for long!"

"Why, then?" asked Miriel.

"Because you are going to be married to Iago Vaughan, they say. Eh?"

"No, I am not, indeed," said Miriel. "I can't think what makes you say such a thing?"

"Oh. Perhaps, indeed!" and Mrs Jones laughed knowingly, and patted the back of her hand. Such a denial was utterly useless to refute the report, and Miriel felt it was so, for ignorant as she was of the ways of the world, she yet knew that it was considered the proper thing to deny such a rumour even on the very eve of a marriage.

"Your two aunts are dead, pwr things?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! I suppose they left you their money?"

"Oh, yes," said Miriel, simply

"Well, that's one comfort! Have you a cow?"

"No, only two goats."

"Goats! Ach y fi, troublesome things!" And Miriel, tired out, wondered how she could escape from her good-natured tormentors. Great was her relief, therefore, when Iago appeared at the door and intimated that it was time to go.

There was another shower of regrets and expostulations from Mrs Hughes before they finally succeeded in reaching the cwrt.

The snowstorm was nearly over, and the dawn was breaking as they reached the brow of the hill, beyond which stretched the sea and the rugged grey cliffs so familiar to them both. A strong wind from the north met them, biting and cold, with a smell of the spray in it, but to both it felt like a kindly home greeting, though it roared through the hoary lichen-covered thorn bushes and whistled as it tore by them, carrying with it the powdered snow and the dry beech leaves.

"How nice the sea wind smells, Iago," said Miriel, as they drew near their own "slope."

"Oh, yes," laughed Iago, "and 'tis a fine smell of fried herrings and wood smoke it is bringing with it to-day. Mali and Stivin are having their breakfast, no doubt."

"Oh, how the waves are rising!" exclaimed Miriel, when she caught the first glimpse of the sea. "'Tis a storm coming, I think, by that roaring;" and down at Doloer they found Stivin prophesying the same thing.

"'Tis coming, 'merch i, I know the sound of it."

"Well, indeed, I don't mind, if it won't blow the roof off," said Miriel.

"Well, I will go," said Iago, "and leave you to tell all about the 'Plygain,'" and, entering, she found all her work done by Mali and a bright fire lighting up the old room.

Mali listened with disapprobation to her glowing account of the church with its lights, its music, its decorations. "Red, black and white berries in bunches, Mali fach, there's pretty they were! and something like snow on the shining green leaves."

"Humph! Hadn't they plenty of snow outside without having it inside?"

"Well, it was very pretty, whatever. And the breakfast at Gwernddu! Enough for two harvest suppers."

"Was there bloom pudding?"

"No, 'twas not dinner, you see."

Stivin was much interested in the account of the breakfast, though he made several excursions into the garden during its recital to watch the storm.

"Yes, 'tis coming," he said; "to-night it will be upon us, no doubt."

As the day wore on the wind increased in violence. A dark mist brooded over the sea, the waves fell thundering on the beach, and Miriel closed her door against the sights and sounds without.

When the short afternoon closed in and the darkness

deepened she sat once more on the hearth in her favourite attitude, nursing her chin in her palm, and if her mind returned again to the events of the day, how could she help it? while the burning logs crackled and the wind roared in the chimney! and though she sighed at one moment, the next she was smiling as she gazed into the glowing fire. She was interrupted by Mali and Stivin, who came again to hear a little more about the "Plygain" and the wonderful breakfast that followed it.

"This is the first Christmas Day that I can remember," said Miriel. "Nothing has ever happened before to mark it from any other day that I can recollect, whatever; but, indeed, to-day has been a beautiful day."

"Well, well," said Mali. "You call wind and snow and stormy waves a beautiful day? Ach y fi! no, I don't agree with you; but 'tis no wonder you don't remember other Christmas Days, because, see you, we're not like the Saison, who mark it with roasted ox meat and bloom pudding. 'Tis no wonder *they* remember it. But we go to chapel on Christmas Day, and say our 'Pwnc' and come home to our cawl."

"And so 'tis no wonder we forget it," said Miriel, laughing.

"Well, I'd rather have a good bowl of cawl than any roast in the world," said Stivin; "but a bit of ox meat dried under the roof is good, no doubt, to flavour the cawl, and that's what we had to-day, Mali and I. Jar i, the foam is flying up the slope like a flock of sheep!" he added, peeping out through the window.

"Yes, I must make a blind for the side window," said Miriel. "I don't like to see it lying on the panes."

"Didn't I ever tell you about Beni Tygraig's blind?" asked Stivin, and he stirred up the logs and made sure the bolt was safe before he began his yarn.

"Well, 'tis as true as the sun is shining, because I have seen him many times and been in his house. 'Twas the

last house in the village, see you, and the little window of the penisha very near the edge of the cliff—and there he lived with his mother, pwr thing! She was doting upon him, but he was a hard, cruel man, and I believe if they'd opened him and looked for his heart they would find 'twas made of stone, or nothing softer than leather, whatever.

"Well, all of a sudden he began to go courting to Neli Rhydafon, and how she ever took up with him I don't know; but there! there's never a brute of a man but some fool of a woman is willing to marry him. And Neli agreed, and they were married; but before his wedding day he turned out his pwr old mother, and she went to a little hut on the mountain about a mile from the village. 'Stands to reason,' says he—and that was his favourite word—'stands to reason! one woman is enough in a house, and that must be the wife!' So poor old Malen went to live by herself, and Beni and Neli lived in Tygraig. She was a nice, kind woman, fat and jolly when she married him, but before long she began to fade away, and in less than two years she was dead!

"Everybody said he had killed her with his hard ways as surely as if he had cut her throat.

"'Stands to reason,' he would say to her, 'thee can't want new shoes yet! Didn't thee have two pairs and a pair of clocs when we married?' and when she was having her tea, 'Woman,' he would say, 'thou *art* wasteful! thou can't want sugar *and* milk in thy tea. Stands to reason!'

"Well, when she was dead and laid out in her coffin, and he sitting alone over the fire in the penisha, a sudden thought came into his head, and he went in his stocking feet into the penisha where she was lying, quiet enough, pwr thing! My mother had given two of her own candles to place at her head, for he wouldn't give her one; so he stood there and looked at her, and the candle light shone on her wedding-ring, and the gold glittered, and a

spark came in his greedy eye, and he took hold of her cold hand. ''Twould be wasteful to leave this on her finger,' he said, ''twill be no use to her in the grave, stands to reason,' he says, and with that he began to draw off the ring, but jar i! her finger was swollen, and it would not come off. But the more it wouldn't come, the more he wanted it, so he took out his penknithe and cut her finger a little, till it slipped off easily, and then he went back to the penisha and sat by the fire, and next day they closed the coffin and she was buried, and Beni was alone in the house.

"Well, 'twas stormy weather at the time, and well I remember it too, the wind and the waves so loud, and the foam flying all over the village. On the night after the funeral Beni was busy making clocs—did I tell you he was a clocswr?* There was no blind over the window then, and everything was very silent, only the lumps of foam falling on the window—pat pat—and Beni was thinking how wise he had been to keep the ring from the grave. 'Why, I might want to be married again some day,' says he to himself, 'and 'twould be wasteful to buy another wedding-ring, stands to reason! Not but Neli was very good-natured, pwr thing! but wasteful, very wasteful!'

"*Pat*, came a lump of foam on the window. Beni looked up from his work, and there it was, a large lump exactly like a dead hand, exactly like Neli's hand had looked in the coffin. Beni's heart leapt up in his breast with fear (though it was a stone heart), and he bent over the wooden shoe he was making, and tried to forget the foam on the window, but he *couldn't* help looking up sometimes, and there it was, the dead, white hand as plain as ever, and Beni shook in his own clocs, and went to bed and drew the bedclothes over his head. But 'twas no use, whenever the wind blew in from the sea, Beni was in terror and fright, and then it was that he himself fell sick,

* A wooden shoe maker.

and wasted away as Neli had done. He never complained, but got angry if anyone noticed how sick he was. He seemed to have a fright upon him, always starting and looking over his shoulder as if he could see a spirit, and if my mother had not seen her die, everyone would have thought he had murdered pwr Neli. Well, before six months were over he began to look around him for a second wife. 'Stands to reason!' says he, 'a man can't live alone on the edge of a cliff. 'Tis shocking lonely in the winter,' says he, and, tan i marw! he found another fool to marry him.

"But stop a bit! she was a shrew, his second wife, and fit to meet him; and thinner and thinner he grew, never telling anyone what was the matter with him.

"Well, let me tell you, when he married again, he was glad enough to put Neli's ring on Nani's finger, and get rid of it himself, and he thought he would no longer be plagued by the foam from the sea.

"The first little job he gave his new wife to do was to put up a blind on the little window that looked over the bay.

"One night in the autumn, late, came a storm from the north, and 'Pull down the blind,' says Beni, 'and don't pull it up till the storm is over,' and she went to do his bidding when *pat!* came a lump of foam on the window.

"'Caton pawb! there's like a hand it is there on the glass,' says Nani.

"'No more like a hand than a foot,' says he, but trembling like a leaf he was.

"'In my deed, it is then; 'tis a woman's left hand, and oh, mawredd anw'l! there is a ring of blood round her third finger, where her wedding-ring ought to be.'

"Beni looked, and there it was sure enough, and he ran away with a scream like a woman's and went to bed and pulled the clothes over him again.

"Now, Nani was a spirited woman, as I told you; so,

says she to herself, 'The man must be a fool to be frightened at a lump of foam. I'll soon get rid of that.' So she fetched a cloth and determined to wipe the foam from the window. Well, she opened the window to push her hand through, when, whist! came a gust of wind, and blew the foam hand flat on to her own, and she felt the cold, dead hand laid on hers.

"Then *she* screamed, and flung off the uncanny thing, and it fell on the window-seat; but with it she had flung off her wedding-ring, and there it lay on the window-seat under the foam hand, and there she stood staring at it. Gradually it melted away, bubble by bubble, and when the last bubble was gone there was nothing under it. The ring was gone! So Neli had come for her ring, and had got it, see you!

"Beni never got over that, but soon went about with his head tied up,* and, tan i marw! he died and was buried, but Nani lived on well and happy, and took his old mother to live with her. No blame to her, she was not a bad sort, see you."

"Most like 'tis all true," said Mali, "for I've heard it many times before, but what business hadst to tell it to-night when the lo's fach will be here by herself, and afraid of her shadow because of the storm?" but Miriel's merry laugh reassured the abashed Stivin.

"No—no, Stivin, I am afraid of nothing, with you so near and snoring so loud, I'm never afraid."

"That's thy good sense, 'merch i," said Mali, "and no thanks to this dunderhead. But come, Stivin, 'tis time to go to bed"; and obediently the burly man rose to follow her.

When they were gone Miriel put out her light, and sat down to dream a little longer before retiring to rest. A pat on the window-pane startled her, a lump of foam blown against it by the strong north wind, another and

* A peasant's cure for all ailments.

another, and she looked towards them, recalling Stivin's weird story. Then she fell to dreaming again, in the fire-light, and listening to the roar of the wind in the chimney, and to much more than the sound of the wind, for on its wings it seemed to bring from the stormy north all kinds of mysterious sounds that came to her out of the turbulent elements and her own imagination, not untinged by the tales with which Stivin had often wiled the wintry hours away. Now it was the crunching destruction of some ice-bound ship; there were the cries of the despairing crew! Now it was the strains of martial music that came with its thunder, and then came the wailing of a woman lost upon some lonely moor, and now it was her own name, "Miriel! Miriel!"

Even before Mali and Stivin's departure, she had fancied that she heard her name in the storm-blast, and now there it was again coming down the big chimney—"Miriel! Miriel!" She started to her feet, and looked towards the window, as another lump of foam flew against it like a storm-bird. Beneath it came another shape, so like a human hand that she hid her face in affright. Again she ventured to look, and surely it moved, the fingers tapping softly on the pane, while again came the wailing cry of "Miriel! Miriel!" Ashamed of her nervous fears, she approached the window, and looking closely at the white hand which still tapped softly, she felt suddenly reassured, for no doubt it was a living hand, and not the spectral form which had visited Beni Pengraig.

Miriel was not wanting in courage where the impalpable and unseen did not intrude, and scarcely a moment had elapsed before she was running through the porch and struggling through the high wind, which came against her like a solid wall, as she reached the round of the garden hedge. She clutched at the thorn stumps, and bravely fought her way round to where the side windows looked out on the bay, only just in time to see a flutter-

ing grey figure escape through the rushes to the dark shore.

Frightened and astonished, she returned to the penisha, where the dying logs still smouldered on the hearth. Instinctively she drew them together, and threw on a fresh supply, before she once more placed herself near the window, but deep in the shadow where she could not be seen.

Louder and louder the wind howled in the chimney, faster and faster gathered the scudding foam on the window, and before many minutes the hand, the living hand, again crept up the pane, and tapped a little louder, as if with more confidence than before.

In a moment she had run once more round the garden hedge, and once more she saw the grey figure retire a yard or two into the darkness.

"Miriel!" called the same voice that she had heard on the wind, and, making a sudden raid into the darkness, she grasped a wet, sodden form, that drew away from her a little.

"Who is it that is calling me?" said Miriel. "No, I will not let you go; this wind and storm is not fit for anyone to be out in. Come to the house and to the fire. Pwr thing, you are shivering, and no wonder!" and she drew her now half-reluctant, half-willing captive into the house, and, bolting the door, stirred up the fire till the leaping flames lit up the whole room.

When by their light she recognised the pale, trembling figure she had rescued from the storm, astonishment and horror kept her silent for a moment.

"Betta!" she exclaimed at last. "What does it mean? Where is Phil?"

But at these words the shivering woman hid her face in her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

Miriel, seeing this, restrained her curiosity, and, drawing her towards the fire, clasped her arms round her neck, and,

Betta doing likewise, the two girls stood for a moment in a close embrace, Betta hiding her face on Miriel's shoulder and crying as though her heart were breaking.

"Come!" said the latter at last, quietly unclasping Betta's arms. "Come! the first thing to do is to put on dry clothes. I will put them all ready while you warm yourself at the fire."

Returning to the living-room in a few moments, she found Betta standing in a little pool of water which had streamed from her sodden garments, and twisting the wet out of the coils of her thick black hair.

"Now, 'merch i, go and put on the dry clothes, while I get a hot cup of tea ready for you."

The brisk tones and warm welcome only seemed further to unlock the store of sorrow in the rescued wanderer's heart, for, as she passed into the inner room, she still sobbed and moaned, "Oh, Dire! Oh, Dire!"

At last, returning dressed in Miriel's clothes, her hair still unbound (for it was too wet to coil), she looked as she came into the light the mere shadow of her former self, and Miriel impulsively clasped her again in a warm embrace. "Oh, my little friend!" she said, placing her in the warmest corner of the hearth, and, drawing the table towards her, she sat down herself to preside at it. "'Twill be supper for me," she said, "because Stivin and Mali stayed here so late, that, indeed, I am hungry;" and, pretending to eat herself with good appetite, she pressed the simple food upon her unexpected guest.

Betta ate hungrily, and, while she did so, Miriel took note of the terrible change in her appearance. Her own eyes overflowed with tears while she watched her, but, resolutely drying them, she applied herself assiduously to cheer and comfort Betta.

"I am eating so much, Miriel! I am ashamed, but 'tis hungry I am. I never thought in my life to want for food, but I have the last two days. I have walked from Stran-

port all the way, and, oh, Miriel! 'a heavy heart makes a heavy foot.'"

"From Stranport! 'Tis forty miles; and you so weak!"

"Yes, but never mind now, 'tis past, and 'tis nothing to the sorrow that is here!" and she pressed her hands on her bosom. "'Tis that, Miriel, that is wearing me out, that is *killing* me!"

"Betta fach! I don't know yet what is your trouble, but one thing I know, and that is that there is no trouble so heavy but God can lighten it."

"Not my trouble, whatever!" said Betta. "You are very kind, Miriel, and you are not asking me again, 'Where is Phil?' Well, then, I will tell you. He has sailed away and left me by myself, and I have heard 'na sinc na son' of him; from himself, I mean, for I have heard from others where he is. He is sailing up by the warm countries to Italy and France, and much farther; to places where it is still warm and sunny weather, and he is going much farther again to a place called Monte Video, for a cargo of fruit."

"But sailors, Betta! they have to leave their wives behind them. Only sometimes they are allowed to take a friend with them."

"I know that, and I would not mind if he had not gone away without telling me. 'Tis that that is killing me. And, worse than all, though he would not take me, he has got Jinny Ffowkes with him."

"Jinny Ffowkes?"

"Yes; and her father and her aunt!" And leaning her head against the back of the settle, she seemed to fall into a reverie of sad thoughts, from which she presently awoke, starting to her feet, and crying, "Don't leave me, Miriel! I am at the end of my courage."

"No, no, 'merch i, I will not leave you; you are safe here at Doloer, and there's glad I am to have you. Now, turn to the fire; are you warm and dry?"

"Yes, warm and comfortable as I never expected to be again; and there's nice everything looks here. 'Tis like coming home, only I have no home!"

"Yes, you have a home here indeed."

Betta shook her head with a weary smile.

"Let us go to bed now and rest."

"No, no," said Betta. "I want to tell you everything first; but will Mali or Stivin hear me?"

"No, there is no one to hear you; they are asleep at Hafod, and Mali and Stivin are asleep. 'Tis twelve o'clock, the wind is going down, the snow is falling fast, and 'tis as if there was no one in the world but you and me, Betta, so tell me your story if you like, but, if you like better, keep it till to-morrow."

"No, I will tell you everything now, for we have been like sisters, Miriel, until—until the *Sea Gull* came home. And sitting there she told her story, sometimes interrupted by a shower of tears, Miriel sitting beside her on her low stool, holding her hand, and sometimes pressing it in silent sympathy.

Outside, the wind was rapidly sinking, and in the darkness the snow was falling fast; the thundering of the waves upon the shore reached them, but muffled by the snow. The old clock ticked in the corner, Kit and Brythen moved in their shed outside the window, the soft pats of the snowflakes fell on the window-panes, and the dropping wind still sighed in the chimney.

CHAPTER XXI

BETTA'S STORY

"Do you remember," said Betta, "the evening before the *Sea Gull* sailed from the bay, when Iago and poor Uncle Sil went with Phil in the car to Porthlidan? Well, I saw them go with a heart as light as a feather, for I had promised Phil to meet him on the point beyond the harbour at ten o'clock; he would be there, he said, with a boat to scull me back to the *Sea Gull*. Uncle Sil was tired when he came back, and went to bed at once, and before ten I was on the road, running my best to Porthlidan. Phil had sent my box by a cart the night before; we carried it out together when they were all asleep, and there's happy I was! though indeed, Miriel, I often looked down at Doloer and wondered how would I be without ever a sight of your grey eyes nor a sound of your voice. It was the only sorrow in my heart then, but och-i! there have been plenty since."

"Did you meet Stivin and Mali on the road?" asked Miriel.

"Yes, indeed; they were coming home from Jinny fach fach's tea-party. I hid in the hedge till they had passed, and then I ran as fast as I could to be at the point by ten. Phil was there and rowed me back to the *Sea Gull*, and he made a bed for me on the deck, with a sail pitched overhead like a gipsy tent, but I couldn't sleep much so excited I was, and before the dawn I was up and dressed and

standing with Phil to watch the flags and the streamers at Hafod. I saw your blue scarf, Miriel, and the tears came into my eyes, but Phil laughed and scolded me, and said we would soon be back again, and that Uncle Sil would forgive us when he knew we were safely married, and all would be right again. And then the wind changed, and we didn't get to Liverpool next day till late in the evening, too late to be married as he had promised, and I was very nervous and frightened, and said I would rather go back to Hafod than sail another day with him without being married, and then for the first time I saw that Phil could look cross, and he said, 'They would never receive thee at Hafod, and as for Miriel Lloyd she would never look at thee! But of course, if thou pleasest! If thou art preferring them to me!'—and then I cried, and he wiped my tears away, and kissed me, and we were married next day, and I was the happiest girl in the world. And then in three days we sailed to Barcelona in Spain, and from there all the way to a place they call Oran, oh! a long way off, where I fancy he is gone again now. Well, in five weeks we were back again in Liverpool, and, oh! 'tis a place I wish I had never seen; but Phil liked it, yes, he was happy and merry again as soon as we landed there, though sometimes on board the *Sea Gull* he was impatient and cross; but I forgave him everything because I loved him so much! He took lodgings with a very nice woman—Mrs Roberts was her name—from North Wales, and I will never forget her kindness to me."

Miriel threw a fresh log on the fire and the flames leaped up, lighting up the old rafters and the clock in the corner, which solemnly struck one.

"And now to the bad part that's coming!" continued Betta. "Who would think that so much happiness could turn to dust and ashes? Could you think it, Miriel?"

"Well," said Miriel, looking into the fire, "I don't think it would be so much happiness for me if a man

was cross and impatient with me sometimes, it wouldn't take much more to awake me from my dream of happiness!"

"Well, but then 'tis so different with you, Miriel, you don't know what it is to love a man as I loved Phil, and you don't know what it is to hate as I hate him now!" Her black eyes flashed and her cheeks grew red with excitement, and she looked more like the Betta of old than when she began her story.

"'Twas when we arrived in Liverpool the second time we heard of poor Uncle Sil's death—a letter from Iago was waiting for Phil in the owners' office, and a bitter, hard letter it was. Oh, Miriel, it was a blow to my happiness, the beginning of my troubles; and Phil, too, was feeling it very much for a day or two; but you know him! it would be impossible to dash his spirit for long. There is nothing in the world that can make him serious. In a few days he had cast off his sorrow and was as merry as ever again. He had plenty of money, and he took me about at first and showed me the grand sights of the town; but before long I saw a change in him, he began to neglect me, and to leave me at home by myself. He didn't come home till late at night, sometimes not at all for a day or two, and 'twas always business, business was the excuse, and the owners and the docks, and I don't know what would I do if it wasn't for Mrs Roberts and her little daughter! Well, you know, Miriel, my temper is quick and sharp like a flame, and one day I spoke out very sharp, with some hot words, when he said as usual 'Perhaps I won't be home till late. He swore a deep oath, and 'I don't know what did I hamper myself with you for,' he said, and he banged the door shocking as he went out. When Mrs Roberts came in I was crying, and she tried to comfort me, pwr thing! and little Mary, her daughter, came in with a letter, ''Tis Captain Vaughan's,' she said; 'he dropped it in the passage.' I took it and read it, Miriel. It was only a few

words and it was English, but I remember it, every word. It was :—

"'DEAR PHIL,—Dad is expecting you to dinner to-night, and will you come with us to Neville Jones's concert afterwards?—Your affectionate cousin, JINNY.'

"The address was on the top, 10 Ransome Square.

"All that day I waited and waited, because there was no date on the letter, so I didn't know when Phil had had it, but when night came and no sign of him I knew where he was, and miserable and angry I was! So miserable that I cried myself ill, and so angry that I bit the pillow that kind Mrs Roberts put under my head. In my hot temper I don't know indeed what did I say to Phil, when he came home at last about one in the morning, but he was very angry whatever! I remember I said I supposed he had never told his fine cousin that he was a married man, and his answer was 'Yes, I have, and if it wasn't for thy temper I would have taken thee there with me. But she wants to see thee whatever, so try to look thy best, and brush up thine English, and put on the black silk gown I gave thee and I'll take thee to-morrow.'

"I said I wouldn't go to be shown to her, but I went after all, Miriel, and she shook hands with me, with her small cold hand all covered with rings, and her eyes looking all over me, and Phil quite red in the face, and I could see he was ashamed of me.

"They had had their supper (their dinner they called it, that time of night, ach y fi) and Mr Ffowkes was very kind to me. I don't think he would have been willing for that grand match that poor Uncle Sil had set his heart upon. But the aunt who lived with them! I couldn't bear her."

"Well, they didn't take much notice of me, and Phil and his cousin were joking and laughing together all the time, and my blood was boiling. Whenever I said any-

thing I could see her smiling at her aunt, and Phil blushing up to his hair. Very like you she was, Miriel, only not so pretty, not half so pretty. And then she went to sing, Phil standing by her all the time.

"Her singing was shocking bad, too; indeed, if I had the heart, I could laugh at her."

"'Can your wife sing?' says she, looking at me in the corner of her eye.

"'Oh,' says Phil, 'only Welsh songs and hymns.'

"'Well, let's have one of them,' says she. 'I'll try not to laugh at the Welsh.'

"'No,' I said, tossing my head as proud as she, 'I would not be ashamed to sing before anyone in this room, but I won't trouble you not to laugh at my Welsh.' Oh, I was angry with myself, Miriel, that I lost my temper, but I couldn't help it!"

"I wish, for all that," said Miriel, "that she had heard you singing 'Aderyn Pur.'"

"I was too unhappy to sing; my heart was bursting with pain and anger.

"'Well,' she said, 'you sing, Phil! You have a lovely voice.' So he sang, she playing the piano with him—and what should he sing but Gwen's old song, 'On the wings of the wind he is coming to me!' Oh, Miriel, the blood rushed from my heart to my head; I could hear the sound of the sea in my ears, and I could see this old room as plain as I do now, all of us sitting round the fire and singing together, and I thinking of Phil all the time, and when he came to those words, 'Out of the west, where the wind blows free, my sailor is sailing home!' oh, I could not bear more."

"No, indeed," said Miriel, "I can understand that, Betta fach; we can bear our sorrows while we can bury them away in own hearts, but music comes and unlocks the doors, and calls them out by name, and we cannot bear them any longer."

"No, that's what I felt, and I jumped to my feet and said to the aunt, 'I must go. It is making me think too much of home and Uncle Sil.' Phil was too much taken up with the singing to notice me, so I slipped to the door, and the aunt followed me, looking very cross."

"'You will wait for your husband,' says she; but I wouldn't listen to her. I found the front door, and out to the street I went, and I could hear Phil's voice through the window singing, 'Sailing, sailing over the salt sea foam,' and I ran away from it, the tears blinding my eyes. I did not know the way, but I didn't care if only I could get away from that song.

"No one noticed me in that grand street, until at last I asked someone to show me the way to Stepwold, and then a man was walking behind me, and saw me crying, so he put his hand on my arm.

"'What's the matter, 'merch i?' said he, and by that I knew he was from my own country, because there are a great many Welsh in that part of the town, so I felt quite safe with him, and bit by bit I told him some of my troubles.

"'And you want to go home to Cardiganshire?' says he. 'Well, 'merch i, take my advice and make it up with your husband, and ask him to let you go home; 'tis better than a strange town for a young woman,' he said. 'I'll take you safe to your lodgings, and to-morrow I'll be sailing for Stranport, and you can come aboard if you can put up with our rough ways,' says he; so I took his advice, Miriel, and made up my mind to try once more. It was so dreadful to think it had come to this between Phil and me! so I met him with a smiling face that night. Oh! 'twas very late, but for every frown I only gave him kind words, and he was more like the Phil that used to be, and I thought the old happy time was coming over again, and I was full of joy and gladness, moulding my words, and my face, and my very spirit, to please him; but one day he said,—

"'I will be sailing next week, Betta.' And there's glad I was to think we would get away from Liverpool, the bad old town, with its thick air and its lamps and its cruel people!

"'Oh, I am glad!' I said. 'And where will we be going, Phil?'

"'We!' he said. 'Not thee, child; I can't take thee again. The owners would not be willing. Besides, I am going to Russia and the North, and what would thou do there in the ice and snow? For the winter is coming on quick now."

"My heart sank down, and a sharp word was on my tongue, but I curbed it, Miriel, and I answered him quite quiet, 'And what will I do while thee'st away, Phil?'

"'Do?' he said. 'Why, stop here with Mrs Roberts. Thou hast every comfort, and if thou want'st more money go to the owners' office, they have two months of my pay untouched." And he went out whistling, quite happy, while I spent my day crying in that dark old parlour.

"Well, the week passed by, and he wished me good-bye as light-hearted as ever. 'Fforwel, 'merch i!' he said, 'I'll be back in a fortnight or three weeks.'

"He would not let me go to the docks to see him sailing. 'No, no,' he said, 'I don't want to be bothered with women there. Fforwel, 'merch i, and try and find thy roses and thy smiles before I come back, for, in my deed, thou'st growing as white and as dull as any of these Liverpool women! Come, cheer up! and fforwel!'

"Oh, Miriel, I looked after him going as if I was looking at his funeral, so altered he was, and so heavy my heart was! Mrs Roberts came in and tried to comfort me and to scold me. 'Caton Pawb!' she said, ''twill never do for a sailor's wife to cry like this! They must learn to be brave and fearless like their husbands.' So I tried for a bit to be brave and patient, but more and more

I was thinking of Jinny Ffowkes and that night when Phil took me there and she seemed more to him than I was; and when I thought of her smiles, and her looks at Phil, and the many hours he had left me alone to spend them with her (I was sure in my heart), oh! then the blood boiled in my veins! and I made up my mind to go to her and tell her what a wicked woman she was to come between me and my husband.

"So one day I went. It was a cold grey day, and the snow was falling a little, but I didn't care. I went to the house and I rang the bell, and a servant opened the door.

"'I want to see Miss Ffowkes,' I said.

"'You can't see her, she's not at home,' she said.

"'Where is she then?' I asked, for I was determined to see her, so angry I was, and my heart hot with pain and sorrow.

"'She's gone abroad with Mr Ffowkes and her aunt. They're gone in Captain Vaughan's ship a trip up the Mediterranean; didn't you know, ma'am?'

"Oh, Miriel! The cry in my heart was, 'Mother! mother!' though she died when I was twelve years old.

"A dark cloud seemed before my eyes, and I thought I would faint. The girl offered me a chair, but I turned away, and out in the street I was better, and I turned towards the docks and found the owners' office, and I went in quite fearless and bold—I, Miriel, who was only used to the cows and the fields and the seashore!—and 'Can you tell me,' I said, 'where is Captain Philip Vaughan?'

"'He has sailed up the Mediterranean to Oran; one of the owners is with him,' they said.

"'Mr Ffowkes?' I said.

"'Yes, and his sister and daughter.'

"'When will he be back?' I said.

"'In about three months, for he is going further from there.'

"I didn't wait to hear more, but I went straight to the side of the water. All the love that I had in my heart turned to bitter hatred, and for a short time I think I was mad. I wanted to throw myself into the water! To think he was tired of me! To think how he had cheated me, saying, 'What would you do in the ice and snow, 'merch i?' and he all the time meaning to go to the warm countries with Jinny Ffowkes for company, and leaving me at home to break my heart if I liked!

"'But no!' I said to myself, 'I will not do a wicked thing and drown myself, but I will tear him out of my heart, and I dragged my wedding-ring off my finger and threw it into the deep, dirty water in the docks, and there it is now.

"Then I was weak and worn out, and I turned round to go back to my lodgings, when who should I see but Captain Jones, who had advised me to make up my quarrel with my husband. He was standing there with his hands in his pockets, and I went straight up to him. 'Captain Jones,' I said, 'when are you sailing for Wales?'

"'Sailing for Wales?' says he, looking so strange at me. 'Who are you?'

"'I am Betta Jones,' I said, 'and I want to come with you.' (I wouldn't call myself Betta Vaughan!) 'You said once you would take me to Stranport with you.'

"'Caton pawb! I didn't know you! What is the matter, 'merch i fach i? you are looking so white, and such black marks under your eyes! I'm afraid you didn't take my advice and make it up with your husband,' says he.

"'No,' I said, 'and I didn't say any more, because, although I was hating him so much that I wouldn't call myself by his name, yet I didn't want to tell all Phil's faults to a stranger.

"'Well,' he said, 'come home with me then, 'merch i, there's no doubt 'tis home is best for the sorrowful. Day after to-morrow I will be sailing, and if the wind is fair

we'll be in Stranport next day; so be you here by ten in the morning,' says he, 'and ask for *The Curlew*, Captain Jones."

"Well; I thanked him and went home a little comforted, and I was busy all next day packing up the clothes that Phil had given me—every rag, every ribbon I had bought since I had married him—and only my old clothes I kept in my own box. I showed the others to Mrs Roberts, and gave her the key to give to Phil when he came home.

"'And what will I say to him?" she said.

"'*Nothing*,' I said. And I sent my box to the docks when Mrs Roberts and little Mary were gone out that day, and 'tis at Stranport now, and a sailor that's coming to Porthlidan next week will bring it with him. Oh, 'tis late! there's the clock going to strike two! but I have nearly finished now. I had no money to pay Captain Jones because I wouldn't touch Phil's money, but left it all with Mrs Roberts to give him. Captain Jones was very kind and didn't charge me anything for my voyage to Stranport, and indeed I couldn't pay him because I had only a shilling in my pocket when I started from there; sixpence I paid for food for my journey, and sixpence for my lodgings that night when I had walked miles and miles—about twenty, I think. It was very cold, and the sleet was stinging my face like needles when I was crossing the mountains, and asking sometimes, 'Is this the way to Cardiganshire?' but I didn't care, nor feel it a bit, my spirit was so full of pride and anger. This morning it was different. My body was tired and worn out, and my spirit only wanted to reach here and die; and oh, Miriel, when I saw the light in this little window I was afraid to knock because of how I had deceived you, and because I had been the cause of poor Uncle Sil's death. So I stood in the snow a long time, and called you softly, softly, many times before I ventured to tap at the window."

"Yes, I heard it," said Miriel, kissing the hand which, for the first time, she noticed wore no wedding-ring. "You shall stay with me always, Betta fach; and indeed there's glad I am to have your company. You shall never go away till Phil comes to fetch you, and to ask you to forgive him."

"Forgive him? *Never, never.* I will never forgive him! Let him go to the South or the North, I will not care. No, never!"

"But if he is ill or in trouble?"

"Oh, that would be different, of course. Yes, then I would go to him and help him all I could, but forgive him? I am afraid never as long as I live."

And seeing her feelings were strained to such a pitch of excitement Miriel forbore to say more, but endeavouring to soothe and calm her, she at last persuaded her to retire to rest in the little bed that had once been Gwen's.

The snow continued to fall all night, and when next morning she awoke she saw a white world, the slope all covered in a smooth, soft mantle of white unmarked by a human footstep. Only the rabbits ran over it sometimes, scattering the powdered snow as they ran. The wind had fallen and the pale dawn was lighting up the sky. Betta still slept, and, dressing noiselessly, Miriel left the worn face on its pillow, wondering much that in so short a time sorrow could have made such ravages in Betta's ripe full beauty.

For herself, a fresh interest had come into her life. There was Betta to comfort and cheer, to restore her to health, and, who knows, perhaps to happiness, for to Miriel's nature gloom and despondency were strangers. Sorrow she could feel deeply for herself and others, but morbid sadness was a thing impossible to her temperament, and she cast off the dark clouds that sometimes gathered round her as some gallant ship that rides the stormy waters straight to her destination, flinging the angry foam from her prow as she speeds on her way.

Her heart was sorely distressed for Betta—but—she was asleep and resting; the snow was thick and the wind was cold, but the storm was over and along the coast the salt air would soon melt it; the roads would be impassable, but not for long; and in that snowed-up house there was, at all events, one bright, energetic being who began the day with zest and courage, not fearing to take up the odds against sorrow and gloom.

Kit and Brythen had to be milked, Mali and Stivin had to be communicated with somehow, and, above all, Iago had to be informed of Betta's return. Here she hesitated a little, and was glad that, for the present at least, the snow was too deep to wade to Hafod.

Already she heard Stivin's spade at work, and before very long he appeared at the door, his burly form, his red face and shock of rusty hair forming so complete a contrast to the delicate white scene around him, that Miriel received him with a burst of laughter in which he joined heartily without knowing why.

"Mali is wanting to know how you are. 'Clear thou to the lo's fach,' says she, 'and I'll clear to the pig!' I hope he isn't smothered, pwr fellow. *There's* snow! Ach y fi!"

It was late in the forenoon when Betta came in to the penisha. In a gown of Miriel's, with her black hair coiled round her head, she no longer looked like the forlorn figure of the night before, but the thin, pale face that had once been so round and rosy, the dark shadows under the eyes, told a tale of wakeful nights and sorrow-laden days.

She helped Miriel with her household work and prepared their frugal dinner as she had been accustomed to do at Hafod, but with an utter absence of interest and a listless apathy which Miriel reproved gently.

"Betta fach!" she said, "he will return some day, I'm sure he will, and will beg your forgiveness, and you

will go away again, in the *Sea Gull* perhaps, bright and happy."

"There you are mistaken, Miriel. That is what will never happen, for I tell you if he came back to-morrow I would not forgive him. I would know that in a month he would be weary of me again, and I will never give him that chance. No, no, nothing can alter Phil!"

"Well, indeed, God can whatever," said Miriel; but seeing that argument was useless she refrained from further attempting to change Betta's mood, trusting that time would soften the bitterness of her trouble.

A dozen times that day she looked up the moor for signs of the snow's melting, but more fell in the afternoon, and the third day was drawing to a close before a stamping was heard in the porch and Iago appeared with the same air of composure which reigned over him at all times, sometimes contradicted by the sparkle in his eye and the smile on his lips.

"Miriel," he called at the doorway, "are you alive here? In my deed, from the top of the slope Doloer looks so buried in the snow, that I couldn't wait longer without coming to see how you fared. Oh, ho," he added, catching sight of Betta, "you are not quite alone I'm glad to see." For a moment he did not recognise Betta, who was sitting in the shadow of the hearth, her head bent a little over her knitting, but upon realising who the stranger was the expression on his kindly face altered completely. He drew himself up and a look of indignant anger shone in his eyes. Betta cowered before him, and, as he continued to stand silent for some time, she dropped her knitting and, bursting into tears, stretched her hands towards him; but as though he did not see them he turned away, and with a bitter anger darkening his face he passed out into the snow, merely waving his hand to Miriel as he passed her.

"Oh, it cannot be like this!" said Miriel, looking after him. "He must forgive;" and running after him round

the garden hedge, she followed the path that his footsteps had made through the snow, catching him up as he reached the gate into the Hafod clos. He had hurried almost unconsciously up the moor, startled by the sudden sight of Betta, so that when Miriel laid her hand upon his arm he was doubly surprised.

"You, Miriel, through all the snow? Why didn't you call me back? It is dangerous walking between these drifts."

"Your face was so dark, Iago, I was afraid to call you; but I beseech you to forgive poor Betta. If you only knew her sad story."

"I can imagine it all," he said. "It began that morning when they sailed away together and my poor deluded father waved his blessing and his fforwel to Phil. No, I cannot forgive the girl who deceived so cruelly those who had brought her up from childhood, and been kind to her. I look upon her and Phil as my father's murderers. How can I then pardon them? 'Tis not in my heart to feel it, and I will not tell a lie about it."

"Oh, Iago!" was all Miriel's answer; but her eyes looked wistfully imploring, and the tremble in her voice touched him a little, but his anger kindled within him, and on his brow a dark cloud lowered.

"I would do anything for you, Miriel," he said, "but I cannot make wrong right. It would seem to me cruel to my father's memory so soon to forgive his enemies."

Miriel turned away rather hopelessly, picking her way over the track which she and Iago had made in the snow. She was accustomed to these moods of implacable anger in her countrymen, for the race that is so tender and pitiful to distress, is unforgiving and even vindictive in a strange degree towards injuries, or imagined offences.

It was therefore with an unusually grave face that she re-entered Doloer, where Betta, sitting dreaming over the fire, rose nervously to meet her.

"He won't forgive me, I know."

Miriel shook her head.

"No, I didn't expect it. And yet I was thinking here, over my knitting, if I could go back to Hafod and take up my work as before, I would spend myself in Iago's service; and I would wipe the past out of my mind, and it would be like a bad dream."

"Well, it shows you are to stop at Doloer and be company for me," said Miriel, kissing the pale face tenderly. And so it seemed likely to continue. The two girls dropped naturally into the terms of their old friendship. Complete contrasts as they were to each other in character as well as in outward appearance, each seemed to be the complement of the other, and the result was a calmly united companionship which was very pleasant to Miriel, and lightened though it could not heal Betta's sorrow.

CHAPTER XXII

STORM BEATEN

BETTA's return, sick and alone, made some stir even in that sparsely-populated neighbourhood. Everyone had his or her own theory as to the meaning of it, but agreed that it couldn't be "olreit" with the young people; and whatever it might be, 'twasn't worse than she deserved, ach y fi!

But heedless, and indeed ignorant of all these remarks, the two girls lived on together in peaceful seclusion, and one at least found in the hollow of the slope, on the cosy hearth, and in her small household duties, enough to fill her life with interest and her heart with content; while the other, though often sad and sorrowful, yet gradually regained her health and comparative peace of mind. She regained her beauty too, with the additional charm and refinement that sorrow patiently borne invariably lends to every face.

When the winter was over and the first days of early spring began to loosen the frost, and to move the sap in the thorn bushes, Iago was still unrelenting towards Betta, and seldom entered Doloer—never, unless he was sure of her absence. She seemed to flag a good deal as the days began to lengthen, when the evenings grew grey and soft at sunset, and the moor began to send up the smell of the awakening earth; and she often stood with Stivin on the garden hedge and looked wistfully over the bay.

To the latter the winter months had brought little satisfaction, for they had passed without the usual excitement of a shipwreck; not even a fishing smack had been imperilled.

"Never saw such a winter," he said, with an indignant snort. "Plenty of noise and wet, but no storms."

"Well, we don't want a shipwreck, Stivin bach," said Betta.

"No, 'merch i, of course not. 'Tis to save the drowning men I want. Dei anw'l! you don't know what it is to be in the foam of the breakers and then to catch hold on a poor struggling fellow, or to feel *him* catching hold on you. 'Tis then the blood rushes through your veins like fire, and you feel yourself like a giant fighting with the storm."

"I have heard you have saved many lives indeed, but I would rather not see you do it. The pwr sailors struggling in the water! Ach y fi! no, I could not bear it. 'Tis quite stormy enough for me to-day." For March was upon them with its bluster and foam; and Betta, having been brought up amongst the inland mountains, had a dread of the equinoctial gales, that only brought music to Miriel's ears and a sense of invigoration to her heart.

For several days a heavy grey mist had shrouded the horizon, the wind blowing fitfully in sudden gusts, the sea answering its call with tossing spray and heavy incoming breakers.

"It is a good thing no ship is passing to-day," said Miriel, her experienced eyes recognising the signs of the turbulent weather. "'Tis a slow rising wind; it will be worse to-morrow, and the foam fingers will be tapping at the window again, like the night you came, Betta. Oh! anw'l! there's frightened I was!"

"Yes, and I too; so afraid I was that you would turn me away from the door."

"No, no, I wouldn't do that, and I longing for a companion so much!"

This was not quite true, though she was scarcely aware of it, for she had been very content with her solitude.

Next day the wind had risen to a gale. Mali ran in and out with her bare arms wrapped up in her apron, while Stivin stood defiantly at the corner of the house, where the wind blew straight in his teeth. The storm increased with every hour that passed, and towards evening was at its height, huge breakers rolling their foaming crests towards the shore and rising in clouds of spray, where their course was obstructed by the reef of black rocks which ran across the little harbour. Here they reared and reeled backwards, tossing their white arms high in the air and mingling with each other in a pandemonium of angry strife. The two girls standing in the warmly-lighted penisha could scarcely leave the little window, from which, between the flecks of foam, they could watch the seething waves and the rearing columns of spray against the leaden sky. Over the scene of turmoil the darkness of night was fast falling.

"Ach y fi! let us put up a blind," said Betta at last, for in spite of herself her thoughts *would* fly to a distant sea, where perhaps the storm raged just as furiously and a lone ship perhaps was in deadly peril.

"Yes, as Beni Tygraig did (Stivin will tell you the story some evening); and let us go on with our candle-wicks!" for they were in the middle of candle-making, twisting the wicks of cotton and hanging them on rods, in readiness on some convenient occasion to dip them into the pot of melted grease; and in spite of the hurly-burly outside, by that cosy hearth the evening passed cheerily enough.

Stivin came in with his budget of stories, and Mali with her store of gossip, for she had seen a woman who had been to market the day before, and had learnt from her that at

Tregarreg there was much sickness, and Doctor Dan was worked to death, looking very ill himself, too, "and no wonder, pwr fellow!"

"Well," she said at last, "'tis plain we can't rule the storm, so go you to bed both of you, and cover your heads from the sound of it, and you will sleep all night."

But this prediction seemed unlikely to be verified, for Miriel lay long awake, disturbed not only by the turmoil of the elements, but by that unrest also in her own spirit, to which she could give no name, and which sometimes in spite of her courage refused to be stifled.

"Looking very ill himself, too." The words haunted her, and she sighed and turned wearily on her pillow as she realised that an intangible but very real cloud had fallen over Doctor Dan's friendly feelings towards her, for that he had any more tender or definite sentiment than that of friendship for her had never dawned upon her mind. At last she fell asleep, the heavy, dreamless sleep that follows a troubled wakefulness, but from that she was suddenly roused, and started up in affright at the sight of a white figure standing at her bedside.

"Betta! What is it, then?"

"Oh! I cannot sleep, Miriel. 'Tis the noise; I am hearing voices in the wind. Strange sounds and cries!"

"Twt, twt, that is nothing," said Miriel. "I have heard them many times; cries and sobs, and sometimes music. Come and sleep by me, you will perish with cold, lass!"

But in another moment they were startled by a loud thumping at the door, Stivin shouting to them in the darkness, "Miriel! Betta! rise! 'tis a ship on the rocks."

Hurriedly the two girls opened the door, to find Mali gesticulating and shouting in the gale. Stivin would not wait to give them any explanation, but left them with injunctions to "look sharp" and be prepared with blankets and hot water.

Having made their preparations, they left the house together, and struggling against the sleet and snow, buffeted by the wind and driven hither and thither by its force, they at last reached the shore, where they found all the inmates of Hafod were already gathered. Conversation was impossible; they could only huddle together and wait and watch while Stivin launched his boat.

To Miriel the turmoil and the strife were familiar; she had been bred in their midst, had often played hide and seek as it were with the storm. But upon Betta, who had not long lived on the sea coast, they had a different effect. She shrank in terror as each fresh gust swept down upon them, threatening to carry them back to Doloer in its swirling embrace; and clinging to Miriel, she trembled as the strong blast passed by. Stivin was already trying to cross the inner harbour, which, protected by the reef of rocks from the full force of the wind, was comparatively safe and calm.

As the boat got clear of the sandy shore, Iago, too, sprang into it, and together they pulled across the harbour and disappeared from the sight of the watchers in the grey darkness, through which the dawn was beginning to shed the first gleam of light.

But although the tiny boat was lost to view the grim black line of rocks was plainly visible beyond. Outside them it was evident the storm was at his height, for the waves rose higher and higher as they dashed against the reef and poured their torrents of spent wrath over the barrier into the quieter waters within.

As the light increased they caught sight of the boat again, a black speck on the white, and their hearts stood still as at last they saw Stivin dash into the foam and climb up the rampart of rocks.

"Most like he will find someone flung upon the rocks dead or alive," said Mali. "We saw the ship half an hour ago, but now you see there is nothing of her left except a

shattered mass of planks and splinters," which was true, the waves tossing and swirling them about as if in play. She had ridden before the relentless fury of the gale to her headlong destruction, and now all that remained of her were these splinters and a few torn sails which clung to the rugged edges of the rocks.

The men who had walked her decks (except one who was tossed about on the billows) were out of this storm, and were even now lying with calm and placid faces at so great a depth in the hidden caverns of the sea that no disturbance of the upper world could reach them.

Ignorant of this, Stivin crawled and crept for long, but was about to give up his search in despair when on the towering crest of a huge approaching billow he saw a dark object lifted up for a moment and then dashed with relentless force against the jagged reef.

In a moment he had pounced upon it, clutching it with a grip that nothing but death would have relaxed.

The apparently lifeless body, sodden, limp and silent, was dragged across the reef, and with Iago's help was lifted into the boat. "Now, row on, my lad!" roared Stivin, for nothing less would have been audible.

Straining every muscle, and helped by the force of the wind, they drew rapidly towards the shore, where the two men-servants from Hafod had already prepared a sail, and in this impromptu stretcher the inert form was gently lifted and carried over the sand towards the slope.

"To Doloer, I suppose," shouted Iago; there was no possibility of explanation, but Miriel knew it would be too far to carry that dead weight up to Hafod, and ran forward to acquiesce.

"Yes, yes, Iago," she said, coming up with him, "and on Nanti Gwen's bed. Betta and I can sleep in the big bed together."

The two girls followed the silent procession as it crossed the beach, both dreading and wondering what might be

the fate of that long, straight form that went before them through the darkness, and both shrinking nervously when Stivin's awkward, though willing, footsteps stumbled a little, as though they felt themselves the pain of the jar. Carefully they carried their silent burden over the threshold and into the little inner room, which had been latterly occupied by Betta.

"He's dead, I think!" said Stivin, as softly as he could, and he drew the curtains so that the disfigured form of humanity might be hidden from the sight of the two girls. A low moan from the bed, however, corrected this impression.

"'Tis Doctor Dan we want at once," said Iago; "send Evan for him, Betta." And so glad was she to hear the kindly tones in which he spoke to her that she was preparing to run at once through the storm to Hafod, but Miriel stopped her.

"He is gone already," she said; "and no doubt the doctor will be here soon, because Evan saw him at Bryndu late last night. The mistress is ill, and they had sent for him."

"There's lucky!" said Stivin. They waited in the old penisha while the dawn broadened and the storm lessened a little, as if ashamed that the morning should find it still raging.

Miriel's hot cup of tea was gratefully partaken of by all, for the cold was bitingly severe. Iago sat on the table dangling his legs, Miriel moving about attending to the wants of all the group, while Betta ran continually into the penisha, listening, with bated breath, for the faint moaning in the inner room, which showed the hardy sailor was still alive. The moments seemed lengthened into hours while they waited, but, in reality, less than an hour had passed before Doctor Dan's footsteps were heard in the porch, and, as he entered, all gathered fresh hope and courage from his firm step and cheerful tones.

"Well," he said, taking in the whole company with a nod, "where is the man?" and Iago led him into the inner room.

In a few moments, however, they both re-entered the living-room, where the others waited in suspense.

"Let someone unharness Samson, and send Deio to me," he said, and noticing Betta for the first time he looked inquiringly at her.

"This is Carbetta, my brother Phil's wife," explained Iago, for Miriel was hanging back under the lwvwr chimney.

"Yes, yes, I remember. Well, I want her and Miriel; is she here? I want them to go out of the house while I do what I can for this pwr fellow."

"Can't we help?" said Miriel, coming forward. "We can be quite strong and quiet."

"I know you can; but I would rather you went out of the house."

"To Mali Storrom's?"

"No; further would be better," and he turned away into the penisha, and Iago followed, returning quickly, however, to explain,—

"He wants us all to go except you, Mali and Deio. Oh, here he is!"

They all therefore obediently left the house, leaving Mali and Deio alone with the doctor; Stivin fuming indignantly at his banishment.

"I'm afraid the pwr man is very bad!" said Miriel, as she entered the Hafod clos alone with Iago, Betta having lingered behind, unwilling to enter the old home without permission.

"No doubt," said Iago; "but where is Betta?"

"She is afraid to come without a word from you," said Miriel; and he turned and passed through the gate to where, standing behind a thorn bush, she was sheltering from the wind.

"Come in, Betta," he said. "Let there be no more anger between us. I have been bitterly angry with thee, but I'm thinking God has punished thee enough, and I will not add to thy troubles by my surly ways, lass," and he smiled the old kindly smile which she knew so well, and her heart was lightened of a great burden.

In the living-room at Hafod she found Miriel awaiting her on the hearth, where Mali was beginning to lay the table for the unusually early breakfast, while the cows, still tied to their posts, their heads and backs just level with the stone floor, looked at them with their large soft eyes, chewing the cud, and "mooing" softly as they recognised the signs of an early milking.

How familiar it all was to Betta! Even the smell of the cows was homely and pleasant, for, opposite the front doorway, was another opening into the garden, and between these two there was always a current of air sufficient to keep the old house well ventilated.

Mali stared in undisguised and impertinent astonishment at Betta's arrival, and through the latter's heart swept a wave of proud satisfaction, somewhat akin to that with which a queen resumes the sway of a kingdom from which she has for a time been banished. Iago left the two girls to themselves when he had seen them safely settled in the cosy kitchen and ran down the slope to Doloer so as to be in readiness should he be wanted. The clouds of night were dispersing, and a pale crescent moon was sinking below the horizon as if weary of the night of storm, while the sun rose strong and radiant, and looking down on the sleet-covered earth promised a speedy thaw and a change of weather. He found Stivin standing by the garden hedge waiting impatiently until the turning tide should carry over the reef the spars and broken planks, which would take days to collect and to gather into a heap for future burning.

Meanwhile, Miriel and Betta set to work to prepare the

breakfast, and before long the pleasant smell of hot coffee and fried ham filled the house, Betta bustling about with a brighter look on her face than it had worn for many a day.

But, when all was ready, their patience was sorely tried, for although Iago ran up to snatch a hurried meal, it was quite two hours before they saw Doctor Dan and Deio drive up the moor, Iago walking slowly behind.

Arrived in the clos, the doctor alighted and entered the living-room, where, in the light of the blazing logs, the two girls were hovering round the long-delayed breakfast.

"Will he live?" asked both at once.

"That I cannot tell," he answered gravely. "I have done my best for him, but his recovery depends upon his constitution. Pwr fellow! he is badly hurt, and must have been dashed more than once upon those rocks. He is asleep now, and Mali is sitting by him."

"Breakfast is ready," said Miriel, nervously, "and you must be hungry. Will you sit here?" And she placed a chair at the table; but, try as she would, she could not shake off an awkward coldness of manner which she was very far from feeling.

"Oh, no!" he said. "Mali has given me all I require. I must go back to Tregarreg; there are several people there waiting for me; but I will be here to-morrow again."

Breakfast under Silvan Vaughan's roof, with Miriel, too, presiding at the table! With all his self-contained stoicism he felt himself unequal to the ordeal, so he hid his vexation under a garb of cold reserve.

The lwvwr chimney stretched its warm shelter over the group, the sparks flew upwards, the rhythm of Mari's milking filled up the pauses in the conversation; and this picture he was to carry away with him and often recall to memory by his own lonely hearth.

"Iago will be very grieved that you will not have

breakfast," said Betta, for Miriel had shrunk into herself in silence.

"I am sorry, but I must go," he said; and at that moment Iago entered.

"I am sorry too," he said, "but I have already pressed Doctor Dan to stay!" And both the girls saw the look of offended pride with which he spoke. Probably Doctor Dan saw it too, but he did not allude to it.

"I want to give you a few directions before I go, Miriel," he said. "You can both return to Doloer now if you wish. You will have to provide yourselves with a stock of courage and patience. I want perfect quietness and almost darkness for this man or he will have no chance of recovery; and, understand that he *must* not talk even if he could, though I think I have taken precautions against that. Give him only milk till I give you leave. Well, I think I have said all, so good-bye!" and he turned away and drove out of the clos.

Betta and Miriel looked blankly at each other when he was gone. "There's a pity!" said the former; "well, we must eat ourselves, for Iago, I know, is hungry."

"Yes," said Iago, "we cannot force a sulky man to eat."

"Sulky! There are other sick people waiting for him," said Miriel.

"Well, he has done well for the poor man any way, although I will never like him nor he me, I think!" said Iago, and they drew their chairs to the table together—the unrest of the storm outside seeming to have spread its influence over both Iago and Miriel.

The talk, of course, was of the storm and the stranger whom it had thrown upon their hands.

"I am afraid he is very bad!" said Miriel.

"Yes," said Iago, "his face and head are much injured, and if he lives Doctor Dan fears for his eyesight."

"Ts, ts, there's a pity!" said Betta. "Will we go down at once, Miriel, and see how he is?" And they went

together down the slope, where every moment the change in the weather was more and more evident.

The sun shone and the larks sang. You could almost hear the snow thawing. In the garden there were already visible brown patches of earth, bursting and cracking with the upheaving life beneath it, clumps of daffodils on the hedge thrust up their pale yellow sheaths, and in the sheltered hollows the pale pink primroses stole a march upon their yellow cousins.

In the porch a bunch of wallflowers were already opening to the sunshine and suggesting sweet odours of spring. A row of sparkling drops edged the thatched roof, and there was a sound of running water everywhere.

Unconsciously the disappearing snow, the promise of spring, had filled them all with a renewal of hope and courage. Nevertheless Mali shook her head in answer to their question, "Has he awoke?" He had not, and continued to sleep for two or three hours. When he did awake he was in a burning fever, talking incessantly, to their great vexation, as the doctor had desired perfect quiet for the muscles of the face.

Miriel and Betta were indefatigable in their care of him, taking it in turns to sit beside him, and with Mali's help doing all they could to soothe and lessen his pain.

He continued to ramble incoherently, but the numerous strips of plaster with which Doctor Dan had drawn the wounds together made it impossible to distinguish the jumble of words which poured from his parched lips. Right glad were they when the next day brought the doctor's gig down the soft turf. His visits continued every day for a week, afterwards becoming a little less frequent as the shipwrecked man not only still lived, but showed some signs of recovery. In this way three weeks passed away, and yet the poor battered form lay on Gwen's bed, his face and eyes still bearing the disfiguring bandages which gave him the appearance of a swathed mummy. Mali was even

more impatient than the two girls to discard these disfigurements, but Doctor Dan was inflexible.

"He is recovering—that must be enough for thee, Mali," he said. Gradually the fever had abated, succeeded by an apathetic quietness and depression which the doctor felt would be as hard to combat as the shattered body had been to heal.

The window was deeply shaded. Indeed the room was kept in almost complete darkness.

"Another week and we will remove the covering from his eyes," the doctor had said, "but gradually." All were equally interested in the invalid's cure, even Stivin often filling the doorway and peering through the gloom at the straight, stiff figure on the bed. He had collected a great pile of driftwood on the beach and was busily engaged every day in wheeling it up and stacking it behind his cottage.

"There's fires we'll have next winter," he said to Miriel one day. "Never was such a break up! No need for me to use my hatchet. There's one piece with letters on it—only two or three—but I am kiwking at every bit now to see can I find the rest of it. 'Tis the name of the ship, no doubt."

"Oh, let me see," said Miriel, running out with him to the shed, where he hunted for and found a piece of wood amongst a heap of bowls and platters.

"There you see," he said, pointing to the letters, "an 'EE' and an 'll,'" pronouncing it with a good Welsh hiss.

"But in English that would be a 'u' and a double 'L,'" said Miriel.

"Well, see underneath there's an 'Ay' and an 'Er' and an 'l.'"

"Yes, that would be an 'E' and an 'R' and an 'L.'"

"Caton pawb! there's a way to say their letters, and me thinking the Saison were so clevare!"

Miriel did not answer, but turned slowly towards the porch now growing gay with its tapestry of wallflowers and ferns.

Before entering it she stood looking out to sea, thinking hard, with quite a pucker on her white forehead.

The spring had made a grand step in advance; the hedge was gay with daffodils and snowdrops, every branch was bursting into green, the bees venturing out into the sunshine, and the garden calling for attention; but she scarcely noticed all these signs, for everything must wait while the invalid required nursing. Entering the darkened room she sent Betta out into the sunshine, taking her place at the bedside and, at last, when her eyes were a little accustomed to the gloom, looking earnestly at the silent form on the bed.

A strange idea had entered her mind as she spelt with Stivin the letters on the piece of driftwood—an impression that she could not banish. Was it the *Sea Gull* that had been dashed to pieces on those jagged rocks? Was this stranger, who had been the object of their care and solicitude, Phil? Dare she tell Betta of her suspicions? No, she would wait for further certainty, and tell no one of the idea that had taken possession of her mind. She watched and listened more closely, while the sick man, now making daily though slow progress towards recovery, lay apparently lost in deep thought, as disinclined as he was unable to enter into conversation.

That day the doctor remained much longer than usual in the sick-room, Miriel and Betta waiting anxiously in the penisha to which he returned at last with a satisfied look.

"Well," he said, "I have taken off the bandages, his face is free; but his eyes must remain as they are for the present. One thing you must promise, that you do not let him talk more than is absolutely necessary until his face is entirely healed."

"We promise!" said both girls at once, and with his usual brusque "Good-bye" he left the house.

A few days later on they gained the long-wished-for permission to let a little light into the sick-room, and Mali delighted Stivin's heart by giving him a peremptory order for a pair of crutches, "and be sharp about it, man, for I tell thee the sailor is getting well and troublesome. We sha'n't keep him in bed much longer."

"Hast asked him what's his name yet?"

"Yes, indeed, many times I have slipped it in my talk, but he is taking no notice and not answering. Wait you till to-morrow, and I'll make him give an answer. Caton pawb! that's the least thing he can do for all our care of him."

"Perhaps he hasn't got a name," said Stivin, hunting about for a straight pole for his crutches. "I knew a man in Monte Video—"

"Oh, tchwt! I have no time to go to Monte Video with thee now," said Mali, unceremoniously turning her back and leaving the shed.

That evening she insisted upon sending the two girls out together. "The man is getting well," she said, "and I am quite enough to be with him here. Go you out both of you," and they went, to walk up and down at the edge of the tide as of old, with each one's arm round the other's waist.

"There's a sweet smell comes down the slope," said Miriel. "There is something very bright and hopeful about the spring, Betta."

"For you, perhaps, lass, but not for me whatever."

"Yes, for you too, indeed! I am sure enough it holds some joy for you too, more than for me, most likely."

"For me? That's nonsense, Miriel; there is no more joy for me, except that Iago will take me back to Hafod. It will be hard to leave you, and hard tasks are before me

there, but nothing will be too hard. 'Twill be a pleasure to me to do all I can for Iago."

"Well, he will be glad to have you back, no doubt."

"Yes, when this poor man is well. Jack we call him, but surely he will tell us his real name now."

"Yes. Have you seen his face yet?" said Miriel.

"Oh! one glance. I couldn't look again. 'Tis dreadfully scarred, and that green shade over his eyes! Ach y fi!"

Not till the next afternoon, however, did Miriel obtain the certainty she desired as to the stranger's identity. Stivin brought in the crutch with the help of which he was to get up and leave the darkened room for the shady penisha, but the sight of it did not appear to give Jack as much satisfaction as it had given Stiven. He lifted the green shade off his eyes a little to look at it, and then with a sigh turned his head away, much to Stivin's indignation.

"Straight and strong, and smooth as satin! What would you have better?" he said.

"It is very nice," said Jack, wearily, in the indistinct tones which his tender though fast-healing wounds still caused.

It was curious how the sound of his voice invariably sent a shiver through Betta's frame. Even now she shrank back behind the curtain as the invalid asked again,—

"Miriel, is that you?"

"Yes," said Miriel, taking Betta's place.

"I am at Doloer, I know."

"Yes, but you must not talk much, Doctor Dan says."

"Oh, he is too careful! I can talk very well these last days only I have not had the courage. Miriel, if you knew who I was you would not be so kind to me."

"I know, Phil bach, it is you!"

"You know! and yet you have nursed me as if I had been your own brother?" and again he fell into that deep

thought which had been so constantly brooding over him during his convalescence, and in the dim light and silence Miriel had time to ponder too, and piece together the strange course of events that had brought Philip Vaughan a shipwrecked waif to his old home.

She was alone, for Betta, astonished at her words, "I know, Phil bach, it is you!" had risen in nervous trepidation and slipped quietly into the penisha, where, entering a short time afterwards, Miriel found her, her arms leaning on the table and her face buried upon them, sobbing with that abandonment which sometimes has in it as much of happiness as sorrow.

"Betta! Betta! These tears? and my words coming true so soon! Joy for you! didn't I tell you? Phil come home and you here to nurse him!"

"Yes, yes, I know. 'Tis more than I deserve," said Betta, drying her eyes.

"Well, go in and show yourself, then, 'twill cure him at once."

"I will go; my place is there, and my happiness. But, Miriel, I will not let him know 'tis I am nursing him. I can hide in that dark room, and my voice is very like yours. No, not until he is asking for me, and until I am sure he is wanting me in his heart and is tired of his wanderings."

"Oh, go, lass!" said Miriel, rather impatiently. "Go, and be thankful! If I were in thy place I would fly to him and kiss his poor bruised face."

"Well, indeed," said Betta, smiling through her tears, "'tis wonderful how little we know ourselves! *I* am quite certain you would not forgive before you were asked!" That was what she was longing to do, but instead she went quietly into the room and took her place by the bedside. Carefully lifting a corner of the blind, she looked at the head where the brown locks tipped with gold were once more beginning to curl. She saw the mouth with its

curves of beauty was uninjured, although a deep scar crossed the cheek and upper lip. She looked at the brown hands, now lying inert and blanched upon the coverlet, and wondered could it be that the inner man of Philip Vaughan was as much changed as his outward appearance.

"All things are possible with God," she thought, and a throb of hope sprang up within her.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF THE STORM

NEXT day Betta sat in the shaded room as usual, near the window, where the raised corner of the blind let in a gleam of light, and where she was out of Phil's sight.

"Miriel," he said, "I shall be more thankful to get rid of the bandage than to get up even."

"Yes, I am sure, but you will have to wear a green shade for some time."

"Yes, I suppose," and after a pause he began again,—

"You *have* been kind to me, Miriel—I can never repay you; and your voice is so gentle, it soothed me to sleep when I was at my worst; but 'tis making me very sad too."

"Very sad, Phil bach?"

"Yes, because 'tis very like another voice that I am longing to hear. Oh, Miriel! 'tis Betta's, my wife's! You do not ask me what has become of her. How can I tell you the truth?—I deserted her—I left her alone in a large town, and sailed away to the bright, warm countries where she wanted to go, but I wouldn't take her with me. Do you hear, Miriel? I have been as cruel as that. You are crying; I hear you trying to choke your sobs. Think, then, how she must have cried, as Mrs Roberts told me she did, neglected and alone. And I have worse to tell you—I took Jinny Ffowkes away with me and her father and aunt. They wanted a trip up the Mediterranean (Mr Ffowkes owned nearly the whole of the *Sea Gull*), so I could not

well refuse, but I was mad with folly and Jinny's flirtations. I don't want to blame her, but 'tis a real truth, that a good woman helps to turn a man's heart to good, but a foolish woman leads him to evil.

"John Owen, the mate on board the *Sea Gull*, was a good man, one in a hundred, and from this neighbourhood somewhere. He had seen Betta with me—on our first trip after we were married—and he always looked black at Jinny Ffowkes, and many a time, sitting on the deck together, he spoke to me, and blamed me sore; and though I cast off his advice and closed my ears to his words, they used to sting me and cut into my heart.

"The sky was full of stars, the sea whispering around us, the wind was sighing in the rigging, and many a night like that Betta had stood with me looking over the sea, and I felt sometimes, great big man as I was, that I could cry like a child, and call her name out to the stars and the wind, and then a laugh or a joke with Jinny Ffowkes, or a glass with her father, or a quarrel with her old aunt, would hearten me up again, and I was comforting myself all the time with the thought of returning to Liverpool at the end of the voyage, and of finding Betta waiting for me there. I had left money for her, so I tried to strangle the fears that would rise in my heart, and to shut out the picture of her pale, reproachful face. But I would not stoop to tell the mate. I wish now I had, poor fellow. But why am I calling him that? 'Tis all right with him, wherever he is. 'Tis I am the 'pwr fellow,' left here a wreck, not knowing what has become of Betta. What use is it to tell you how broken-hearted I was when Mrs Roberts told me she was gone, and gave me the key of her box? There was every little ribbon and present I ever gave her, but not a word of good-bye. How could I expect it? 'Twas a dreadful time I lived through then—roaming about those streets in search of her, looking over the docks into the dark water, and wondering—was she there? I hated the thought of Jinny Ffowkes, her

flirting ways, and her flat singing, but I went there one day to see could I hear anything of Betta, and the servant told me she had been there. Then I went to the owners, and found she had been there to ask where I was gone, but had taken no money; and then, Miriel, I was mad with grief, and thought I would come down here, and *this* is the end of my voyage! I did not expect to find her here, for I knew she would not dare to face Iago, but I longed to see you, her friend, and confess all to you."

"But are you sure, Phil bach, that you truly love her, and want to find her, and that you would not grow tired of her again? Perhaps it was not all your fault, for 'tis a high spirit Betta has got and a shocking temper!"

"Shocking temper? *No*—not even you shall say that of her, Miriel, I cannot bear it. No woman was ever tried so much—I out all day, spending my time with Jinny Ffowkes, and she at home by herself, in dull, small lodgings; and yet 'twas a smile on her face and a kind word when I went in. Do I want her, you say? Oh, anw'l! cure me, let me walk once more, and I will search for her over the world till I find her, and show her what real love is, poor thing! she has never known it yet, for I was a selfish brute, even in my love," and with the bitter pangs of unavailing remorse he groaned and turned restlessly on his pillow.

Betta stood pale and trembling in the shadow of the curtain, overcome by the tumultuous feelings that his words had stirred within her. Was it a dream? or was Miriel indeed right, and was the spring restoring to her the light and happiness which she thought she had lost for ever?

She turned to the window, and deliberately drew aside the curtain. Then returning to the bed, and casting aside the slight accent with which, since their recognition of Phil, she had been careful to disguise her voice, she said,

in a tone whose tenderness alone was a confession of love—"Doctor Dan says you may have more light to-day. Phil! what is the first sight you would like to see?" and she stood in the full shaft of light, with a look of passionate love in her eyes, and a trembling smile on her lips, which must have awakened him had he been asleep!

"Oh, you know," he said, "what is the first sight and the last I want to see!" and, turning his shaded eyes to the light, he saw, and recognised her with a cry of joy, which Miriel, working in the sunny border outside, heard through the open window; heard and understood. Raising herself from her stooping position, she looked out to sea, where the waves were dancing in the spring sunshine. Her grey eyes were suffused with happy tears as she listened to the murmuring voices within. "Oh, there's joy for Betta at last," she said, "and indeed it has come to her as we used to sing all together:—

"'On the wings of the wind he is coming to me.'"

She hummed the refrain to herself as she went on working, and Betta's happy face came for a moment to the window just to say, "It is all true, Miriel:—

"'Out of the west, where the wind blows free,
My sailor has come to me!'"

It took some time to convince Mali and Stivin that the shipwrecked man was no other than Philip Vaughan. "What! that scarred face, like a patch-quilt, handsome Phil Vones? I don't believe it! and such a sharp woman as Mali by his bedside all the time, and not know him? I won't believe it!"

"Know him?" said Mali, indignantly. "How would I know him, the blackguard! Lying there like a corpse, and never saying 'bo' to anyone, ach y fi! and me waiting on him hand and foot, and his poor wife losing her sleep to watch by him! But *she* didn't know him any more than me," she added, with a sudden change of tone,

for it comforted her to feel that someone else had been as blind as herself, and that one who should have been the first to recognise him.

"But he tried to keep us all in the dark, you see," said Miriel, soothingly, seeing that Mali's self-esteem had been severely wounded. "Afraid he was to tell us who he was, knowing how he had led Betta to deceive us all, and then left her to fight the world alone!"

"Well, 'twas no wonder he was ashamed indeed, and I didn't know Phil Vone could be ashamed of anything!" said Mali.

"He is changed," Miriel hastened to say; "oh, yes, indeed, he is changed!"

"Well," said Mali, not yet pacified, "if his inside is as much changed as his outside, that'll do!"

"There's glad Betta is!"

"Betta? Has she forgiven him? Well, the little fool! I would have made him eat humble pie for a year, and *then* I'd have thrown it in his teeth at every chance!"

"I think he is sore afraid of thee!" said Miriel, diplomatically.

"And well he may be, the villain! Let me go and give him a bit of my mind!" and she flounced into the penisha with every sign of anger in her face and manner.

"Let her alone," said Stivin, with a wink, and Miriel took his advice, and remained with him in the penisha, while Mali entered the bedroom with a firm patter of unshod feet.

"Well, Phil Vone!" she said, "you have made fools of us! Tan i marw! you are the first man that has ever deceived *me!*"

"Mali, woman!" said Phil, "forgive me if thee canst! I have been sore afraid of thee!" and he stretched out his thin hand towards her.

"Afraid of me, 'machgeni!" said Mali, grasping his hand in both her own, "afraid of Mali Storrom? the

greatest sinner in Wales? Come you! We'll soon have you well now. You are to get up to-day, and there's happy we'll all be together on the hearth once more. Anw'l! if I had known you I would have been more tender to you, man."

"No, no, Mali, thee couldst not be that."

"Well, how would I know you with no hair on your head and a lot on your chin?" She surreptitiously dried her eyes with her apron, and when Betta entered soon after she was fussing about the room, shaking up the pillows and smoothing the coverlet.

"There's happiness for thee, 'merch i!" she said. "We'll have him 'olreit' in no time. Will I go and tell Iago? There's glad he'll be!"

Betta looked frightened at this sudden proposal, but Phil answered quietly, "Yes, go, Mali; and tell him I am begging him to come and speak to me." And waiting for no further permission Mali ran out into the kitchen, where Stivin waited for her.

"Well! Didst cut off his head?" he asked, with a chuckle, which exasperated Mali so much that she only flung an "Old fool!" at him as she passed out to the porch, where Miriel was feeding her pigeons.

"Going to fetch Iago I am. Phil wants to see him at once," she exclaimed, slipping her feet into her wooden shoes, and before Miriel had time to stop her, she was running up the slope with all speed; and finding Iago in his "study," she blurted out her sensational bit of news with every sign of delight. When soon afterwards he entered Doloer he looked pale and stern, his lips hard pressed; and Miriel trembled lest he might refuse his forgiveness to Phil.

Entering, he passed Betta in the doorway. "Phil wished me to go," she explained, and Iago entered the room alone.

"Oh, I hope he won't be very hard, Miriel!" she

said. "I wish you were there. You can soften everyone."

Miriel shook her head. "'Tis very stern Iago is, indeed, when anyone has done wrong, but I think he will forgive when he sees how repentant poor Phil is," she said. "Yes, and when he remembers what he has suffered." But still they waited anxiously, while from the inner room the murmur of voices showed that the conversation was at least calm and quiet.

At last, when a full hour had gone by, Betta became impatient, and was on the point of going in to see what had transpired, when the door opened, and, framed in the arched doorway, the two brothers appeared. Both were looking very grave, though Iago's sternness was a good deal softened by the protecting anxiety with which he watched and guided his brother's difficult progress. Both too, were pale, the one from the strong emotion through which he had just passed, the other with the pallor of weakness.

There were exclamations of surprise and delight from the two girls.

"Oh, anw'l! Phil! and dressed to; well, indeed!" and they would fain have carried him across to the hearth, where Gwen's chair awaited him.

"Miriel's stool for my foot, and this grand cushion for my head!" said Phil, trying to hide his emotion and weakness with a laugh. "You forget I am a rough sailor." But though he demurred a little, he was glad enough to lean back and rest his head on the bright patchwork cushion.

While they were busily engaged in settling the invalid into his chair, Doctor Dan entered.

"Ah, ha!" he said, "I thought I would find you up, having once given you permission! No need to ask," he said, looking at Betta, "whether you have found him out!"

"I have made a clean breast of it, doctor," said Phil,

"and I wish now I had taken your advice, and done so sooner."

"You knew then, doctor?" said Iago and Betta in a breath.

"Yes, I have guessed it all along, from some words he spoke one day when he was in great pain; and as soon as his eyes were well enough for me to look straight into them, I was sure of my man!"

"Yes, I *am* your man, indeed, sir," said Phil, seriously, "and I only hope, if I live, you will not be ashamed of me. I know I have been a coward lately, but, in my deed! though I am as fearless as anyone in a storm, I was as frightened as a chicken of Miriel and Mali Storrom, and especially of Iago. If I had known Betta was here too, I would have been worse, and never have summoned courage to make myself known."

"You will soon be well now," said Doctor Dan. "I am quite proud of your face, or my face shall I call it? 'Twas no wonder we did not recognise you at first, for your head was like a map of the globe, and your face but little better."

"Yes, I'll do to stand in the garden and frighten the crows, for I will never go to sea again, and I will want something to do at home," said Phil.

"Oh!" said the doctor, "you will soon have quite as many good looks as you need to have. You had more than your share before, you know."

"This little woman says she will put up with me as I am, whatever!" said Phil, looking at Betta.

"Yes, I expect she will; and I don't think I need come and see you again unless you send for me; you are on the high road to health and happiness now."

"Yes," said Iago, "my brother and I have settled all our plans in this last hour; there is plenty of room at Hafod, and Phil is the eldest. I will be very glad to have more time for my books."

"I have no doubt you will all be very happy!" said Doctor Dan, with a little bitterness in his voice, which, however, no one detected.

"As usual," he continued, "I have several other places to go to, so I will wish you good-day."

"Not before I have said a word of thanks," said Betta, grasping his hand; "but no, I cannot say what I mean."

"Twt, twt," said Doctor Dan, waving his hand as he reached the doorway. He glanced round the cosy old room as if in search of something. The flames leapt up on the hearth, the old clock ticked in the corner, but the familiar blue figure with the eyes of grey was missing.

Indeed, it had become very much a habit of Miriel's latterly to absent herself on the occasions of the doctor's visits. Why, she could not have explained, but the formal greeting and professional manner grated upon her, and as soon as she saw the swinging gig begin its descent down the moor, she found some excuse for leaving the house. Kit or Brythen had strayed, the herb bed wanted weeding, or the tide was just right for crab hunting!

When Doctor Dan rejoined Deio at the gate, he paused a moment, for, at the farthest end of the shore, he saw a stooping figure, with bare feet and yellow hair, and knew it was Miriel, but, as if suddenly coming to some decision, he stepped into the gig, and Deio drove away silently.

When, a short time afterwards, Miriel entered the house, she found two of her guests immersed in "business"—Phil, leaning back in his chair, and dictating a letter to the "owners" of the unfortunate *Sea Gull*, which Iago was writing for him, while Betta hovered about the hearth with a smile on her lips and a light of calm happiness in her eyes, which showed the old disquiet had departed, Phil's eyes following her movements with a loving tenderness. He had discarded the beard, which had helped so much to hide his identity, and the moustache, which the doctor had been obliged to get rid of, was growing again, so that he looked

more like the Phil of old than he had done for the last month. Betta had drawn down a lock of his brown hair to hide the scar on his forehead too, but that across his cheek, as well as his lameness, alas! he would have to carry with him all his life.

"Look at her, Miriel," he said, imprisoning Betta's loving fingers, "she's trying to hide my ugliness, but she never will. You must all take me as I am now, and if Betta doesn't mind, I don't."

"Well, in my deed!" said Stivin, unceremoniously burst-in upon them, "here's a happy company! The old *Sea Gull* behaved well in one thing, whatever, no blame to her, she brought you to your own home."

"Poor old *Sea Gull*," said Phil, with a more thoughtful look than had ever been seen on his face while he had been her captain, "she's lying low enough under those blue waves to-day."

"Oh, stop a bit!" said Stivin, "make no mistake, my lad! *She's* not at the bottom of the sea, not she. She's going off in fine style, with fireworks to mark her going!" and he pointed his fat brown finger at the fire of driftwood which was spluttering and blazing up the chimney with a shower of sparks. "Come you out to the shed," he added, if you want to see the rest of her!"

"Is that her end, indeed, indeed?" said Phil, laughing, for it was not in his nature to be serious long. "Well," he added, "let her go, and a fair wind to her! I've had enough of her. Iago, lad, what sort of a farmer will I make? for it will be hey for the cornfields and the hay-fields with me now!"

And, oh! what a happy time those days of convalescence brought him, and not to him only, but to Iago and Betta also. Miriel alone, although she was outwardly as blithe as any of them, carried about with her a sense of something missing.

As the days passed on, too, the old harmonies once more

filled the house, for every evening Iago came down from Hafod, and glees and choruses were sung again, even the "Wind Song," as Phil called it, although Betta had shrunk a little, saying, "Ach y fi, not that!" remembering the pain the hearing of it had once brought her. Phil's less sensitive memory recalled nothing of that little episode. "Why not?" he said. "'Tis the jolliest song of them all;" and Betta, of course, had acquiesced, and joined her rich contralto in the chorus:—

> "Sailing, sailing, over the salt sea foam,
> Out of the west, where the wind blows free,
> My sailor is sailing home!"

If Stivin Storrom had been dissatisfied with the winter's tameness, he had no reason to be so with the spring, for in spite of the promise of opening bud and blossom, the season was remarkable for its succession of storms, and it was difficult to realise that it was April. If a week's balmy weather tempted Miriel to trim up her flower bed, a two days' storm from the north-west came sweeping over the lone shore, shrivelling her simple flowers into unsightly blackness. Then came the brilliant sunshine again, when every blade of grass glistened and trembled, and every spray and blossom swayed in the soft breeze.

On one such day Betta and Phil took their final departure from Doloer. It was a day of blue and white skies, a day of dewdrops and sunshine, and Phil whistled a merry tune as he planted his crutches firmly on the hedge opposite the window before starting. "Let them be there till they take root, Miriel!" he said, "they will remind you of me; but you won't have a chance to forget us, for we'll be down most evenings for a tune and a chat."

"Yes, and I don't think Betta and I will ever spend a whole day without meeting," said Miriel; "but wait you till Stivin and Mali come home from Porthlidan. He'll

soon have your crutches down, and turn them into spoons and ladles."

Iago had sent the car down, but Phil insisted upon walking "to show his lame leg was as good as the other," he said, so the car bore only Betta's "box," which had seen so many vicissitudes, and which she was now delighted to see borne with due honour to Hafod, and deposited with due respect as "the mestress's box" in the "preacher's room."

It was a merry parting; but, truth to tell, when Miriel looked round the old living-room after they were gone, and peeped into the little inner room where Betta and she had watched so anxiously beside the unknown sailor, she felt their absence would leave a great void in her life. The old clock still ticked in the corner, the pigeons still cooed on the roof, and the bees still hummed in the garden, but the charm of human companionship was missing.

Mali and Stivin "popped in" as often as ever to see her, and the evenings were bright with music and laughter, but for the first time in her life Miriel's gaiety flagged a little, and she began to realise that her life was lonely and that old Doloer could be dull and gloomy.

One evening, in the twilight, she walked alone at the edge of the tide, the sea glistened in the soft grey light, the waves scarcely whispering as they fell. All was calm and serene, and quite in keeping with the scene, a grey figure approached through the dusk.

It was Iago, who had been sitting in his hayloft study, to which Phil and Betta's presence on the hearth had once more banished him. A pile of papers lay before him, which had been sent for his perusal and criticism. He had worked hard at them, until, raising his eyes from his task, he had seen Miriel pacing up and down the darkening shore. Then he had laid aside his pen and had fallen into a brown study, whilst the horses munched their hay beneath him, and sometimes the dragging of a chain or the

stamping of a hoof had broken the stillness; but having seen Miriel he was unable to settle down to work again, so he had taken his way down the slope to the sandy shore.

Her face brightened as she saw him approach, for Iago's presence had for everyone a soothing influence, though he could be stern and hard enough when occasion required.

"Iago!" "Miriel!" said both together; "here is a beautiful evening!"

"Yes," said Miriel, looking up to the sky between the Hafod chimneys. "Do you see the moon like a silver boat up there?"

"Yes, and I can see its reflection in your eyes," he answered.

"Have you been writing poetry to-day, then?" she said mischievously.

"No, but I have been reading it, or what they call poetry! I have been asked to attend the National Eisteddfod, and I think I will go."

"Are you sending in anything yourself?"

"No. It is as adjudicator that I am invited."

"Oh, Iago! You are getting so grand. There's proud we are of you!"

"Well, indeed, *I* am proud to hear those words from you, Miriel. Only one little word I could wish altered. If you could only say 'I' instead of 'we'! But there, I have promised not to press you," he added hastily, as he saw a look of vexation on her face, "and I won't; only remember, lass, that my love is always lying at your feet, if you will only stoop and pick it up. Now, are you angry because I have broken my promise so far?"

"Not angry," said Miriel, standing still a moment, and looking up at the crescent moon—Iago looking at the two little moons in her eyes—"not angry, indeed, but sorry, Iago, and unhappy I am that some things can't be, and that is one of them. We cannot force our hearts, or else I would indeed!"

"No, true," said her companion, "we cannot, and that I know too well."

They turned and walked thoughtfully at the water's edge, and there was a long pause in their conversation, during which both followed the bent of their own thoughts.

"Well," he said at last, in an altered tone of voice, "I have not yet asked you my question. Will you come with us to the fair at Tragarreg next week? Phil and Betta are going."

"No," she said, shrinking a little, "I would rather not go to Tregarreg."

"I thought you liked the old town so much, Miriel, and the castle; we could spend half the day there if you liked."

"I don't know, indeed, what I like, and what I don't like, Iago. There's foolish I am!—I want only to be quiet at home, and yet it is lonely at Doloer sometimes."

"Yes, it must be lonely sometimes; but you are not foolish, Miriel. There are times when life seems dull and uninteresting."

"I will be at Merthyr several days. Phil and Betta will come to meet me at Tregarreg on the fair day, and I did not like to feel you would be left here alone all the time."

"You are kind, Iago, oh! so kind to me!"

"Nonsense!" said Iago. "I think Phil's illness and all the storms we have had this spring have shaken you, and you are not well, Miriel. Perhaps you are right, and the old sea and the quiet shore will be best for you. I will come down and tell you all about the Eisteddfod as soon as I come back. Will I call at Hendyrafon and tell Doctor Dan to come and see you? Indeed, I think you are not well."

"Iago!" said Miriel, frightened. "No, no, no! *Promise* me you will not do that—oh, promise me!"

"Caton pawb! I promise," he said, laughing, and Miriel

joined in the laugh with such light, ringing tones, that Iago himself thought he had made a ridiculous proposal.

"Oh, dear—dear!" she said, laughing again and again. "Miriel Lloyd ill, and sending for a doctor; oh, indeed, there's silly it would be!" Then, becoming suddenly serious, she said, "No, Iago; I am quite quite well, and you won't see me so bad-tempered again; as Stivin says, 'Jar i, not me!'" and from that moment every trace of disturbance disappeared from her, and she was as charming and bright a companion as a beautiful girl can be, who is endowed with a full share of natural good sense and refinement of feeling.

"The night is getting more and more beautiful," she said.

"Yes," said Iago, "one need not be much of a poet to see how the soft greys are turning to blue and silver! And those languid wavelets! don't they seem to whisper, Peace! Peace! Peace!"

"Yes, indeed; and they make us ashamed to be cross and restless."

"Cross and restless! You, Miriel!"

They continued to walk slowly backwards and forwards on the shore, until the advancing tide drove them nearer the slope, where, seeing a light in the window at Doloer, Miriel said,—

"Betta and Phil are there, and she has lighted a candle. Let us go in and sing, Iago, that pretty new glee," and, turning homewards silently together, they left behind them a scene of beauty and calm, the memory of which one of them, at least, was to carry with him as long as life should last.

CHAPTER XXIV

COUNTRY GOSSIP

It was market day at Tregarreg, and the whole scene spoke of life and movement. Had you been carried there with your eyes closed and been deposited in the market-place, you might have known that you were in a Welsh market as distinguished from an English gathering of the same nature. The clattering of tongues, the unconstrained laughter which mark a concourse of Welsh country people, were at their height, for it was spring-time, when the buying and selling always seems to partake of the awakening zest and energy of the season. The seed stalls were crowded, and the live fowls, tied up by the legs in pair or bunches of three, added much to the din by their shrieks and scuffles. Even the snow-white clouds above them were alive and moving, chasing each other across the fields of vivid April blue, but no one noticed them in the busy street, so absorbed were they in their chaffering and bargaining.

"'Tis a fine day whatever," said Tim Scrivenwr, standing at his door and looking round in search of someone with whom he could converse in English; but seeing no one, he contented himself with muttering in his native tongue, "Never saw such weather. One day 'tis summer, and the next 'tis winter, but mostly winter."

Winter or summer, storm or sunshine, King Dai never failed to appear in the market-place at his accustomed time and to deposit his little crooked burden at the usual corner.

He had done so this morning, and she was sitting on her oak stool, surrounded by her usual array of pincushions. A red-haired countrywoman was standing beside her, taking advantage of the bit of news which she had to impart to sort over the pincushions before she expended her penny. She would have been called to order long before had not Peggi Doll been more than usually interested in her gossip.

"Well, tell again," she said, "did you see them yourself?"

"Yes, b'tshwr, I saw them with my own two eyes, and I asked a man whose wedding it was, because I wasn't very near, and he told me. He said 'twas full time for them to marry, too, for people had been giving them to each other for a long time."

"Aren't they afraid of Matti Lloyd's ghost, I wonder?" said Peggi.

"Ach y fi! I don't know," said the red-haired woman, "but they do say she walks."

"Do they! And no wonder!" said Peggi, with a chuckle.

"Yes, indeed. On Traethunig* in the twilight. No one would care to cross those sands after nightfall for fear of meeting her and Silvan Vone. And let me tell you! I was crossing at the top of the slope one night going to Pant-du I was with my shoes to be mended;" and holding up an impressive finger she finished her conversation in a whisper.

"Thou'rt an old fool," said Peggi, "to be frightened by a shadow, but the same time I wouldn't wonder if she *did* walk. Come, then," she added suddenly, seeing that the woman had no further news to give her, "which of them is it to be, the red or the green? Thee'st been long enough making up thy mind."

"The red," said the woman, startled into a sudden de-

* The lonely shore.

cision, which she repented of as soon as she had paid her penny, but too frightened to confess her change of mind she bade Peggi Doll a hurried good-bye and pocketed her purchase.

It was a pleasant beginning of the day for Peggi, and as a merchant looks about for a good investment for his gains, so she peered around in search of a suitable person to whom to impart the information she had gained.

"The very man," she thought as Doctor Dan came in sight round the corner, and she crooked her finger at him, and called, "Hey, doctor," as he approached, but he did not hear her, or perhaps was illustrating the truth of the proverb that "None are so deaf as those who won't hear," for he had a deep-rooted aversion to the spiteful little pincushion maker, in spite of the fact that he found his most interesting patients amongst the lame, the halt and the blind. It is affirmed by some people that every human body is surrounded by an "Aura" of its own, exercising a pleasant or unpleasant influence upon those with whom it comes in contact, and Doctor Dan certainly felt as if his Aura and Peggi's were not in accord. He would never have treated her unkindly, but satisfied himself with avoiding her whenever he could. She would not have succeeded in arresting his attention on this occasion, had not a burly farmer accosted him and stopped him exactly in front of Peggi's bright array. Here was her opportunity, and she did not hesitate to seize it literally, by clutching at his coat and tugging at it sharply, when she saw the farmer had come to an end of his complaints and the doctor was about to pass on.

A decided and sharp expletive escaped him as he felt the sudden check to his progress, and he hastily shook off Peggi Doll's clawing fingers.

"What is it, woman?" he said impatiently. "You are well, I see, and King Dai the same. I have no time to waste."

"Stop a bit, did you see that woman that was speaking to me?"

"Not I. I saw no woman. And what if I did?"

"D'ye know why she was so late coming to town? She stopped on the road, idle hussy, and near Glanberi Church it was, and there was a wedding come out of church."

But the doctor was becoming restive. "Well, I can't stop to-day," he said.

"Only a minute," said Peggi. "Whose wedding d'ye think it was? Why, Iago Vone and Miriel Lloyd's. There for you. There's a nice bit of news Peggi Doll gives you this morning! Ho! ho! ho!"

For a moment Doctor Dan was stunned by her news, although he had long been expecting it, and thought he had schooled himself to hear it without flinching. He recoiled from it, however, and such a change passed over his countenance that Peggi was satisfied. He looked at her for a moment unconsciously, and then pulling himself together said as he turned away, "Well, next time you have something to tell me, say it without touching me."

"Very well, my lord," said Peggi, sarcastically, and salaaming with a wave of both hands as well as her crooked posture permitted, she sent after him another rasping "Ho! ho! ho!"

He heard the harsh laugh as he made his way through the market-place, but with a shrug of his shoulders dismissed Peggi from his mind, remembering only the words "Iago Vone and Miriel Lloyd," and although he could not boast of the accommodating sentiments credited to the ideal, unselfish hero, he was yet able to say as he reached Hendyrafon, "God bless her golden head; it is no fault of hers that I have been a fool."

When he entered the old parlour and looked out through the broad casement at the swift-flowing river a flood of thoughts and memories rushed into his mind. True, only twice had Miriel's presence shed its brightness over the

place, but what of that! Had not her image been ever after there? Had he ever entered the room without picturing her as he had seen her, sitting at the quaint oak table, the snowy cloth and the glistening silver before her, the glow of the sunset light entangled in her yellow hair, the shy, bent face and the grey eyes that opened wonderingly at the new scenes around her.

Dropping into his easy-chair he fell into a deep reverie, in which he recognised the bitter truth that for him henceforth a light would be quenched, in whose radiance he had sunned himself more than he had been aware of.

Two hours passed by and still he sat silently dreaming. It was well for him that Betti Luke had not entered the room, for she certainly would have reproved him for what she considered was a bad habit. Patients came and were admitted into the surgery, but Betti, believing him to be in the market, had bade them wait, and had not searched for him in the parlour, so he remained lost in thought while the surgery filled and the morning drew towards noon.

At length she came bustling in, and he started guiltily as if caught in a crime.

"Caton pawb! sir, what are you doing here by yourself, and me thinking you were in the market? There's John Jones with his arm that he broke, and Kitty Ben Hughes with her bad eye, and Jonathan the Mill's little girl, all covered with smots, waiting for you."

"Yes, I will come," he said, rising and looking round the room as if to make its acquaintance in its new dress of blank emptiness. Then he went into the surgery, and the arm and the eye and the spots were duly examined, and nobody guessed that under that quiet exterior the doctor's heart held its full share of bitterness and pain.

"Where's Deio?" he asked, as he afterwards sat down to his solitary dinner.

"Out in the market he has been all the white day," said

Betti Luke, "and now he has come in asking for his dinner as if the world was on fire; but I have given him a basin of cawl, that will keep him quiet for a bit."

Although it was rather an exaggeration of Betti's that he had been there all the white day, it was true that Deio had sauntered through the street; market day being the only day on which his master did not require his services for driving, he was accustomed on that day to take his pleasure in examining the stalls and looking out for old acquaintances. He had encountered Marged Lewis, the red-haired woman, at the seed stalls, where, after pocketing her pincushion, she was contemplating a further expenditure.

"Give me a ha'porth of carrots and a ha'porth of turnips and two penn'orth of leeks. Well, as I was telling, I am shocking late in the market this morning because I stopped to see a wedding coming out of Glanberi Church, Iago Vone and Miriel Lloyd of Doloer, pwr Matti Lloyd's niece, you know."

"What?" said Deio, who arrived at that moment. "What did you say?" And the whole story was told over again, Deio listening with more outward show of interest than he generally accorded to the country gossip. "Did you see them?" he asked, with a severely judicial air.

"Well, yes, of course I saw them. A girl with yellow hair she was, I saw the sun shining on it; and a young man with black hair and a pale face he was."

"Hm," said Deio, "there are scores like that about the country."

"I asked a man that was breaking stones on the road, and 'twas he told me their names. I was about as far as from here to that chapel," said the woman, conscientiously. "I was not *by* the church door, mind you, so I can't tell you what was her gown made of."

"Twt, twt, what do I care what her gown was like?"

said Deio, ungraciously turning on his heel, and hastening home to Hendyrafon to hurry Betti Luke's preparations for dinner.

Having given him a bowl of cawl to break the keen edge of his appetite, she was surprised to find that, instead of waiting patiently as usual for further developments, Deio started to his feet when his bowl was emptied, and thrusting a formidable junk of bread and cheese into his pocket, had followed her to the parlour door, where he was now peering over her shoulder.

"Oh, there you are!" said his master, "Jones Brindu is in town, and you had better see him about that hay."

"I have, sir, and we can fetch it when we like;" and here he looked round the room as if in search of something, then he drew his hand over his clean rasped chin, then he cleared his throat as if reluctant to break the spell of his usual silence.

"In Heaven's name what is it, man?" said Doctor Dan a little irritably, for that clawing encounter with Peggi had frayed him not a little.

"Shall you be wanting Samson sir, this afternoon?" said Deio at last. "If not, can I have the loan of him to go and see my sister? She has been ill and is wanting to see me shocking."

"Of course you can," said his master, rising from the table. "What's the matter with your sister?"

"Well, I dunno, sir, is it a fever, or the rheumatis or flammashwn or what;" and considering it was full six months since she had recovered from her ailment, it was no wonder he had forgotten its nature; however he had no scruple in using her name as a peg on which to hang his request for the loan of Samson.

"Tenky, sir," he said, tugging his forelock and retiring as quickly as possible to avoid being further questioned.

"Caton pawb! is that all you are going to eat, sir?" said Betti Luke, coming in to clear the table. "That comes of

thinking like you were before dinner—ach y fi! there's nothing worse for the appetite. You going down to the river?" she added, seeing him take his pipe from the rack; "oh, well, you'll be smoking there, I know, and there's no harm in that, but take you my advice, sir, and don't think."

"Not a thought, Betti," was his reply as usual; but had she seen him as he paced the path by the river for the next two hours she would have seen that her master had cast her advice to the winds, and had given himself over to the forbidden luxury.

Meanwhile Deio and Samson had crossed the bridge and were facing the moorland road which ran in the direction of the sea coast. About three miles from Tregarreg a narrow lane branched off from the road, and about a hundred yards up the lane stood a tiny cottage in which Deio's sister lived.

She was washing busily on the stone slab in the yard when Deio appeared, and seemed much astonished at his arrival.

"Dir anw'l! where'st come from?" she said, wringing her hands from the soapsuds and drying them on her apron.

"Well, going a message for misteer I was, and as thou wast so near I thought I would turn in to see thee."

"Well, indeed, and that's a wonder," she said, "considering thou art by here so often, and never turning in to see thy sister, born of the same mother; but there! we won't quarrel to-day whatever—come and have a cup of tea."

"Oh, no," said Deio, "there's no time for that, 'merch i. I'm in a hurry, and misteer will be expecting me back."

"What, not a light for thy pipe even?"

"No, in my deed I have no time; but I'll come again soon. Good-bye, Shan fach, I am glad to see thee well. Good-bye till I see thee again."

"Next year, I suppose," said Shan, scoffingly; but Deio was out of hearing, riding fast along the road towards the

sea. He had reached the spot where Miriel had startled Samson on the day he had first made her acquaintance, and riding a little further he breasted the gap in the bank which still formed the only approach to that lonely shore. A little further on he would have reached the road leading to Hafod, but it was out of his way, and short cuts came naturally to Doctor Dan's driver. He rode slowly down the slope, and tying Samson to the little gate, passed round the garden hedge, behind which he heard Miriel humming as she gathered her daffodils, for once more they were standing in golden groups all over the slope and the gardens. She heard his step in the porch and soon appeared herself, her hands full of the pale Lent lilies.

"Deio!" she exclaimed, when she saw him alone, and a flush rose to her cheek and a little flutter in her breath.

"What is it, then?" she asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong? Oh, no; only I was going to see my sister, and Doloer being so near and we not seeing you for a long time I thought I would turn in to see how you were."

"I am glad to see you indeed, Deio," said Miriel, relieved of her fears, and delighted to have the opportunity of showing hospitality to one of her old friends from Hendyrafon. "Sit down, Deio bach," she said, pushing the rush chair towards him on the hearth.

"Stop a bit while I put Samson in the shed," said Deio, more with the idea of gaining time to settle his "plan of campaign" than with any anxiety for Samson, who was accustomed to wait at many a gate.

He had enumerated upon his fingers as he rode along the road the four different points upon which he was determined to be definitely enlightened before he returned to Tregarreg, but it would not have suited the astute Deio to ask a plain question and so show his anxiety at once. "I'll go round about a bit," he thought, as Miriel poured out his tea. She, too, had her plans for blinding her guest to the eagerness with which she sought for news of Hendyrafon.

"If I ask him about the sick people he will perhaps tell me about—about—oh, all about everything," was her simple expedient.

"How is Betti?" she began. "I am often remembering her kindness to me!"

"Yes, she can be very kind when she likes, but wilful, she is—shocking wilful sometimes! The weather is very bad this spring," he said, "so many storms I don't remember."

"No, I'm sure. And so much sickness they say," she answered.

"Oh, sickness," said Deio, who was easily drawn on the subject of his master. "The mishteer has been nearly killed with work, pwr fellow; going from one house to another from morning to night, and driving miles and miles every day. There's Doctor Jones with nothing to do, but d'ye think they'll send for him? *No;* 'tis 'Doctor Dan' is wanted everywhere!"

"Well, indeed!"

"Many funerals about here lately?" asked Deio.

"Funerals? No, indeed, not any—"

"Some weddings, perhaps?"

"No, indeed!" said Miriel. "There are not many to be buried or married here!"

"Oh, come you! There was a wedding in Glanberi Church this very day!" said Deio, looking into her face, and noting with satisfaction that she wore no wedding-ring. But even this was not conclusive evidence, as he knew that shy country girls sometimes hid their wedding-rings for days.

'A wedding!" she exclaimed, surprised and interested. "Whose was it, I wonder?"

"You wasn't there, then?" said Deio.

"No. I've been at home all day."

"Well, well!" said Deio, bringing his horny thumb down on his knees. *His first point was settled.*

"How is Mrs Jones Bryndn?" asked Miriel again.

"Oh, better. Mishteer was there three days ago, but he's not going there so often as he was; and how are all at Hafod? Philip Vone—is he quite well now?"

"Pretty well he is, but he's having bad headaches sometimes since the shipwreck."

"Well, I'm thinking he wouldn't have a head at all if it wasn't for mishteer!"

"No, indeed. He must always be thankful to him. Iago is not at home. He is gone to Merthyr, and won't be home till Saturday."

"You are missing him shocking, I suppose?"

"Well, yes. He is so kind and so clever, and his poetry, Deio bach, is beautiful!"

"Well, well, you'll have a wonderful husband when you marry him!"

"Marry him? What are you saying, Deio?" said Miriel, opening her eyes to look at him over her tea-cup. "I told you once before I am not willing for people to settle who I am going to marry. I tell you I'll never marry him."

"Never?"

"Never!" said Miriel, and Deio brought his first finger down beside his thumb.

"Well, come now," he said, "you mustn't be angry with me, because I'm a stupid old fellow, and I'm hearing it everywhere, so I was thinking 'twas true."

"It is not, then," she said indignantly.

"Well, well, you are very wise, 'merch i. 'Tis nice to be your own mistress, and when you get up in the morning to feel you can do what you like all day—no one to call you, or bother you, or walk on the shore with you. There's nice it is! and you are never feeling dull and lonely in Doloer, like some foolish girls would be?"

"I'm foolish enough, Deio, and I'm finding Doloer more

lonely than it used to be;" and Deio's second finger came down with the others.

"Oh, that is natural," he said, his face brightening considerably, "but you've got Mali and Stivin."

"Oh, yes, and I don't know what would I do without them. They are gone to Porthlidan to fetch 'siccan' from the mill."

"That's it," said Deio; "they'll be having fine bwdran for supper. I'm always begging Betti for a bowl of bwdran for my supper, and mishteer likes it too, and there's easy to please he is! never a cross word to Betti nor me, and never a frown on his face."

"Oh, well, indeed, Deio," said Miriel, laughing, "they say he's looking black enough sometimes."

"Black! The mishteer looking black! Not at you, 'merch i; I'll take my oath of that."

"Oh, yes, at me as well as anyone else. Why not, Deio?"

"Why not? Well—" and after this he was profoundly silent.

Miriel's face had flushed as if the sunset light had reached her through the little window, and her heart beat fast. "What did he mean?" and she waited for some further remark, but Deio remained silent and inscrutable.

At last the Sphinx opened his lips. "Mishteer is thinking you're going to marry Jago Vone."

"I can't help what he thinks," she said, with a toss of her head, and the colour ebbed from her face as quickly as it had flowed. "I'm thinking it's very unkind of him to expect me to marry anyone just to please him," and the keen-eyed Deio detected a suspicious glistening in her eyes and a tremble in her voice, and he brought his third finger down with the others.

"Are you thinking then, Miriel Lloyd, that *that* would please mishteer? Ts-ts! I knew there was one blind bat in the world, but now I see there are two. Well, well, but

I must go. Jar i, I've been sitting here as if I was on my own hearth."

In vain she pressed him to have another cup of tea.

"Not a drop, not a bit," said Deio, who all of a sudden was in a desperate hurry to return to Tregarreg.

CHAPTER XXV

DEIO'S FIFTH POINT

ARRIVED in his own stable yard at Hendyrafon, Deio exhibited the most unusual signs of excitement. While attending to Samson's requirements, he 'hss'ed and 'commopped incessantly, and at last crossed the yard to the back door with determination even in the set of his hat.

Having stepped for once out of the regular grove of his daily routine, his morning's ride seemed to have developed in him a sudden access of energy and spirit.

He muttered to himself as he crossed the yard, emphasising his words with a side nod, "I'll soon settle *this* job," and on entering the kitchen door he buttoned up his coat, squared his elbows, and plumped himself down on a chair, placing his hat on the ground in front of him.

"Caton pawb! what's the matter with the man?" said Betti Luke.

"Nothing's the matter," he said, looking at her defiantly. "There's nothing in the world the matter with me!" for he was much annoyed at feeling that there *was* something the matter; a curious catch in his breath, and a strange fluttering in the region of—shall we say his chest?"

"Oh, I thought thee wasn't well, going away without thy dinner like that. Come! here's thy supper, good bwdran it is too."

"I have a question to ask," said Deio, "and an answer to that I must have before I touch my supper. I have been thinking all the way home that the best thing for thee and me is to get married. Dost agree to that?"

"Married!" said Betti, in blank astonishment. "Did ever man hear of such a thing? What's the man thinking of?"

"Oh, the man know's what he's about well enough. He's asking the best woman, and the best cawl and bwdran maker in Tregarreg, to marry him. And thou'rt a 'cute woman too, Betti Luke, and I don't believe thee'lt refuse such a good offer. Come, wilt marry me or not?" and he stamped his foot impatiently.

"Well, Bendigedig!" said Betti, flattered though flustered, "I never heard such a thing in my life. Look at thy bwdran getting cold. Come to supper, man, and don't talk nonsense."

"Yes, it is getting cold," said Deio, with a side glance at the basin, "and bwdran grown cold is spoiled."

"Come, then, sit down."

"Not a bit nor a sup till my question is answered," he said, holding up his little finger; "the other four are settled to-day—now this one!"

"Hast asked four before me then?" said Betti, indignantly.

"Not wan, Betti Luke! Never in my life wan before thee, so take me or not before I move from here."

"We'll see after supper."

"No, *now*," said Deio, not even adding the alternative "or never."

"Well, yes, yes, then," said Betti, "only drink thy bwdran before it gets cold," and without further ado Deio sat down to his supper, and satisfied his hunger before he carried his courtship any further.

Betti, having made the first plunge, seemed to take to the new state of affairs with great equanimity, and they sat in the cosy, warmly-lit kitchen until nearly midnight settling their future plans and prospects, in which their determination never to leave mishteer and Hendyrafon was a point on which both were in perfect accord.

Meanwhile the said mishteer was smoking his last pipe

on the moonlit bridge, quite unconscious of the interesting events which his two middle-aged domestics were introducing into his household affairs.

There is something in the sound of a flowing river not only soothing to the senses, but that exercises upon some minds a drowsy, almost a hypnotic influence, bringing before them forms and scenes of the past with a vividness that makes a "river reverie" an insidiously pleasant indulgence.

This Doctor Dan had known from long experience, and he had often contemplated breaking himself of a habit which had grown upon him year by year, namely, that of spending the last hour of the day in solitary musings, leaning over the bridge that adjoined Hendyrafon, and letting his thoughts flow on with the rush of the waters; back into the bitter past, forwards into the unknown future, sometimes down to the depths of doubts and fears that lie in wait for such hours of solitude, and sometimes upwards to high and noble aims and aspirations; for that little embrasure on the bridge was often his study, his counting-house and his oratory.

"'Tis a foolish habit which I must leave off," he soliloquised as he tapped the ashes out of his pipe on the night of the market day on which Peggi Doll had imparted to him her item of country gossip. He had said this a hundred times before, but still to-night he lingered, lighting yet another pipe and continuing to ponder and to dream.

Under the arches of the bridge the river flowed in dark shadow, catching, further on, the broad shine of the moonlight, until it was lost again in the gloom of the elms at the bend round the meadows. Looking down at the swirl and the rush of it, how many forms and pictures chased each other through his mind! how many memories of bitter and sweet! Oftener than any other, a pale sweet face with a crown of golden hair passed between him and the brown foam-

flecked waters, until he lost count of time; and it was long past midnight when he was aroused by a sound familiar and yet strange. It was like the clump, clump, clump of Peggi Doll's stool, and yet it was impossible, he thought, for her to have crawled so far as the top of the street, where the sound seemed located, and he strained both eyes and ears, gazing up the street, down which the brilliant moonlight streamed, unbroken, except on one side, where the uneven houses cast the shadows of their gables and chimneys.

Out of their shadow came the clump, clump, clump which had disturbed his dreams.

Every light was extinguished, every door was closed, and no sound broke the stillness of the moonlit street, except the music of the river, and the mysterious tapping which drew nearer and nearer.

For a moment Doctor Dan doubted the evidence of his senses, as Peggi herself emerged from the shadow and stopped in front of him.

Here she cleverly slipped on to her stool, and so overcome was she by her unwonted exertions that for a minute or two she could not speak.

"Peggi!" he exclaimed in astonishment, "what in Heaven's name has brought thee here? How didst manage to get so far?"

"I don't know," she gasped.

"What is it, then? What's the matter?"

"The old monument has fallen at last," she said, holding her hand to her side.

"Dai? Ah! I expected it," said the doctor, and, forgetting everything else in his medical instinct, he turned and began hurrying up the street, but before he had gone may paces a sound caught his ear that made him turn and look at the crippled woman he was leaving behind him.

She was still sitting on her stool, as if too exhausted to move, and the bright light of the full moon fell on her bowed head.

Again he heard the sound that had arrested his attention, and he saw that Peggi Doll was crying, a short, smothered sob, as of pain or fatigue, probably of both, for she kept her little hand pressed to her side.

A wave of pity surged through the strong man's heart, and he turned back at once. "If you have been a fool, Dan Griffiths, you need not be a brute!" he said under his breath, and disappearing for a moment into the open doorway of Hendyrafon he returned quickly, bringing with him a stout walking-stick.

"Come, Peggi, woman!" he said, with a tone of pity in his voice. "You will never get home again at that rate."

"I will be home some time before the morning," said the cripple, drying her eyes. "Never mind me, go you to Dai and see can you help him!"

"I will not leave you to spend the night in this empty street," he said; and without further parley he lifted her bodily up to a horse block which stood near, and, turning his back to her, he said, "Now, hold fast!" and Peggi crouched on his broad shoulders, and clutched hold of his coat collar. Then passing the walking stick across his back, and through his crooked elbows, to support her, as he had often seen King Dai do, he caught up her little stool and turned up the broad street once more.

His rapid strides soon brought him to the lane where the Pwrhouse stood, and as he turned its corner his shrinking dislike of the spiteful little cripple whom he was carrying returned, and he was glad enough on reaching her wretched tenement to slip off his burden as best he could. Peggi crawled to her corner of the hearth, and Doctor Dan looked round the room for King Dai. He was lying upon the bed, as he had fallen, his feet still resting on the earthen floor.

"Going to bed, I suppose, when he fell?" asked the doctor of Peggi, who still sat panting and gasping on her stool by the fire.

"Yes, of course! as you see, 'twas a good thing he did not fall on the floor, because I couldn't help him to rise, and Biddy next door is from home to-day, but she ought to be home by now, the gadabout. There she is!" she added, as a step was heard in the court, and Biddy looked in at the door, wondering what meant a light so late at Peggi Doll's house.

"Come in, Biddy, and help me," said the doctor, and together they lifted the heavy feet up to the bed, and did all that was possible for King Dai. There was not much they could do, for the long-threatened "stroke" had fallen, and this was but the beginning of months of living death for him.

"Dai is not going to leave you yet," said the doctor, Peggi peering up at him anxiously as well as she could from under the frill of her cap. "Who is going to nurse him?"

"Biddy will. She'd better!" she added, as the woman did not answer at once, and she looked at her with a threat in her bright black eyes.

"Canst, Biddy?" said Doctor Dan. "I'll see that thou'rt paid."

"That she's paid?" said Peggi, fiercely. "Who by, I'd like to know? Do you mean the parish? Take care, man, or I'll throw my stool at you!"

"Well, aim straight if thou dost, Peggi!"

"Oh, I can aim straight!" said the little witch, and she was right, as many a child in the market-place could testify, for she was in the habit of keeping stones tied up in her patches, and throwing them deftly at anyone who annoyed her.

"I did not mean the parish," said the doctor, "I meant, if you could not afford it, to help you out of my own pocket."

"Oh, I can pay her!" said Peggi. "Let her look well after Dai and I'll pay her, and be silent into the bargain,

but if not I won't pay her and I won't be silent," and she again looked at Biddy with a meaning glance; but the latter was profuse in her promises.

"Caton pawb! I'll do all I can for him, midnight or mid-day," and Peggi nodded approval. "And what's more, I'll take you to the market in Jim Gipsy's donkey cart."

"That's well," said Peggi.

"Will I go home for a minute to take off my best gown, and snatch a bit of supper?" said Biddy, obsequiously.

"Yes, go," said the doctor. "I will stay here till thy return;" and left alone with Peggi he looked around for something to do to while away the time. The sick man lay like an image of stone upon the bed, the dim rushlight scarcely revealed the bare walls, which had never known anything more decorative than whitewash, and that had now flaked and fallen away in patches, but Doctor Dan was at home in such scenes.

"A cup of tea would not be amiss for thee, Peggi," he said, and, setting the kettle on the tiny culm fire, he soon had the meal ready, though only in a man's awkward fashion, and setting it before her on a round stool, which he had often seen her use as a table, he sat down on the other side of the hearth and watched her eating, with satisfaction.

"Dan Griffiths," she said suddenly, and screwing her head round to look at him, "do you ever say your 'pader'?"

"My pader?" said Doctor Dan, startled. "Well, yes, such as it is! I say my pader to the river;" and he rose as if to do something for Dai with the natural shrinking of a reticent nature from such personal inquiries.

"The river?" said Peggi, with a puzzled look into the fire. "Well, if it will do for you, it will do for me, and next time you are saying your pader, there would be no harm if you just mention me. D'ye hear, man?" she added impatiently, finding that the doctor did not answer.

"Yes, thou'rt right, there would be no harm at all; but thou shouldst pray thyself, or ask some *good man* to pray for thee, not me!"

"Oh, you're good enough for me," said Peggi, "so remember! I have something else to say before Biddy comes in with her long ears. This morning I gave you a bitter morsel to swallow, and you said, 'Don't touch me again,' but to-night you said, 'Catch hold, Peggi,' and you did for me what no one else at Tregarreg would do, so I will give you some comfort."

"Twt, twt," said the doctor, brusquely, "it was dark, and there was no one to see. If it had been daylight I would not have done it."

"Oh, yes, you would," said Peggi, with a chuckle. "You would have done it if the market had been full, and everybody was laughing at you! I know you better than you know yourself, Dan Griffiths. Here's Biddy coming. Well—although Miriel Lloyd and Iago Vone are married to-day, 'tis *you* she loves, man! Take that from Peggi Doll!"

"And dost think that would be any comfort if it were true?"

"'Tis all I have to give you, whatever," said Peggi, as Biddy entered, and when they had done all that could be done for King Dai, Doctor Dan left the house promising to come again early next day.

Startled and astonished at Peggi's words, though incredulous, he hurried down the silent street. It was two o'clock in the morning, the coldest, dreariest hour of the twenty-four, and a change had come over the night, the moonlight was dimmed, and as he reached Hendyrafon a soughing wind came up the river, a brown haze was creeping over the sky and the silent moon had turned to copper.

"Another storm coming, I suppose," he thought, but he did not stop to note the signs of the weather, for he was

both fatigued and sleepy, so, turning the key in the heavy front door, he went straight to bed. He had, however, been more affected by Peggi Doll's words than he was willing to confess, and the night was further spent before he at last fell asleep.

Next morning his gig stood at the door at the usual hour, and Deio and his master were soon after driving rapidly over a good broad road, leading in an exactly opposite direction to the hilly coast road across the bridge.

"The market will be strange without King Dai, pwr fellow," said Deio, at last.

It was seldom that he took the initiative in opening a conversation, and the thought crossed the doctor's mind that he had grown more communicative of late.

"Yes," he answered; "we shall never see him there again."

Deio cleared his throat, coughed several times, and looked about him as he always did when he had something to tell.

"What is it, man?" said his master, at last. "I know the news, if that is what you are bursting with."

"What news?" said Deio.

"Why! that Miriel Lloyd and Iago Vaughan are married."

Deio was never heard to laugh, but now he chuckled wheezily into his fist, his nearest approach to a laugh, then, with a sudden change of expression, he said, in a solemn voice, "Mishteer, 'tis an odd thing! You are a clever man, and I would trust my life to you, but, in my deed, there's soft you are."

Doctor Dan burst into a fit of laughter.

"Well, in *my* deed, Deio," he said, "I believe you are right, and I must open my eyes and see myself as I am, though 'soft' is an epithet I never thought I should hear applied to me. But *why* am I soft?"

"Well, look you here now! You and I hear the same bit of news in the market. How do we act? You take it all to your breast and believe every word of it, and I ride off upon Samson and go straight to Doloer with four questions to ask, and I come home with the truth, mind you."

"Well," said his master, "allow that you are right, Deio, and that I acted like a fool and you like a wise man. But what did you find at Doloer?"

"I found my four questions answered plain, and here they are"—and he held up his five fingers and began to count—"Number *wan*—the lo's fach is not married; she was at home as quiet as a lamb, and didn't know nothing about the wedding at Glanberi. Well, number *two*—she will never marry Iago Vaughan, *never*, she said; and number *three*—she's not so contented as she used to be at Doloer. Now, number *four*—she would give Iago Vaughan's head for your little finger, sir!"

"Is the man mad?" said Doctor Dan, turning round to look at him.

"No," said Deio, with a shrewd wink, "not this man, whatever; perhaps the other man is."

He had now laid hold of his little finger.

"Well, number five?" said the doctor, quietly. "Have you any other wonder to tell me?"

"Yes, mishteer, the most wonderful of all—I am going to be married!"

"What?" said his master. "Good heavens! what do you mean, Deio?"

"Just that 'tis true, mishteer. I'm going to be married." And Doctor Dan fairly burst into a long and hearty peal of laughter.

Deio did not laugh, but the twinkle in his eye and the turned-up corners of his mouth required no sound to show his appreciation of the joke.

He was not at all offended at his master's hilarity

Indeed, it was long since Doctor Dan had indulged in such hearty laughter. It was curious how easily it rose to his lips this morning.

"But where is the woman?" he asked, at last.

"Why, Betti Luke, of course!" said Deio. "She's the only woman I ever see, and the best maker of cawl and bwdran in all Wales."

"Betti Luke! And how long have you been courting her?"

"Never, mishteer, on my honour; never till yesterday coming from Doloer! I thought how foolish you were, sir, and then I thought perhaps I was a fool too, and I made up my mind on the spot. I asked her slap off as soon as I got home. She wanted me to wait a bit for an answer, but I refused to sit down to my supper without it, so she said, 'Well, yes, then,' and so 'twas settled, and there is an end of the matter," and Deio relapsed into his usual silence.

"'Pon my word, you are a wise man, Deio," said his master. "'Tis the best thing you could do, and the funniest, too, I have heard for a long time;" and as they drove home he laughed again and again, and Deio chuckled in company.

On reaching Hendyrafon, Doctor Dan sprang out of the gig. "I must go and see Betti at once," he said; but, on looking round the kitchen, she was nowhere to be seen, and he was about to give up the search when he caught sight of her behind the door, bashfully hiding her face behind the roller towel.

"Betti, woman, come out and let me wish thee joy," said the doctor, laughing; but she would not be persuaded to leave her hiding-place until Deio came in and, not without some force, tore her from the roller towel. Doctor Dan's laughter seemed infectious, for the affianced pair joined in it, and it was long since Hendyrafon had echoed to such merriment.

CHAPTER XXVI

"'TIS AN ILL WIND," ETC.

NEXT door to Tim Scrivenwr's shop stood an old lop-sided cottage, exhibiting in its front window a fine array of worsted stockings and rolls of scarlet and blue flannel. In the cramped living-room at the back, where a bedstead filled up nearly all the space, sat Doctor Dan.

The blue and white curtains of coarse linen were drawn aside, revealing a little white face just awakening from a long and critical sleep.

A little hot hand clutched the doctor's finger, and the young mother, who had watched with him while her darling's feet stood on the edge of that bourne from whence no traveller returns, was weeping with joy and gratitude as she realised that the crisis was past and her child had been restored to her arms.

Doctor Dan said nothing until he had held the cup of milk to the parched lips, but let her sob on until the overfull heart had relieved itself; and, turning to him, Nance Powell, in a calmer voice, began to thank him.

"Oh, sir, how will I ever thank you? Sitting here all night and watching with me. I can see a different look on my beauty boy's face. He will live, sir, thanks to you; but you are worn out and tired."

"Twt, twt, no!" said the doctor; "a night's watching is nothing to me. I will go home and sleep a few hours. Ah, that's right! a cup of tea will set us both up," and as she

prepared it, he drew the window curtain and looked out, while the little one fell into another quiet doze.

It was no wonder he drew the blind aside with curiosity, for during the night a gale had sprung up, and in that ramshackle house the sound of it was increased by the rattling of slates on the roof, under which there was no ceiling except in the front shop.

It roared round the gables and whistled through the ill-fitting doors and windows, until once or twice in the night, he had feared that the whole tenement would be blown into the river, which swept through the meadow below. It was now early dawn, and in its pale pink light the river looked swollen and ruffled by the strong wind.

"What a day for the fair!" he said as he drank his tea. "Now, milk only for the child, and plenty of that, and I will come and see him again in the afternoon before I go into the country. Good-bye! cheer up and thank God; you have every reason to do so."

Outside the house the wind was having it all its own way, sweeping the stray straws and rubbish into sheltered corners, rattling the shutters and doors, and whistling as it rushed up the empty street.

At Hendyrafon the signs of the storm were no less evident, for its proximity to the river gave the blast full play over the old house; but Doctor Dan was too fatigued to notice it much, and in less than ten minutes was fast asleep.

When he awoke the day was far advanced, and he heard Betti Luke laying his dinner downstairs. The storm had not lessened, and when he looked through the window he saw that the fair had dwindled away, though it was only noon, and that the street had been delivered up to the boisterous sway of the wind.

"What will you do about Bryndu, sir?" said Deio, meeting him at the bottom of the stairs. "We'll be blown out of the gig, I'm thinking."

"Well, we must try it. Bring the gig round at four o'clock. There are two or three people to see here before I go. Perhaps the gale will have gone down by that time," said the doctor; and after gladdening Betti's heart by making a good meal, and declaring that no one could beat her at frying trout, he made his way through the storm to the upper end of the street, where, having made sure that Nance's darling was making good progress, he turned in to see Tim Scrivenwr, who had been laid up with an attack of jaundice, brought on by his son John's "carryings-on" with the slatternly beauty to whom Tim objected so much.

He had almost recovered, and the doctor's cheerful greeting put fresh spirit into him at once, but he looked a little less pugnacious than of old, and he was less anxious to air his English.

"You are quite well," said Doctor Dan, "and I need not come to see you again. What a day! No customers for you, I fear."

"No," said Tim, shaking his head, "the fair has gone flat, the tilts have been blown to gibbets, and the shows didn't try to open!"

"But who are these?" and, turning in astonishment, Doctor Dan recognised Mali and Stivin Storrom, the latter calling in a voice that even the roaring wind could not drown, "Hello! Tim Scrivenwr, can we have lodgings here to-night?"

"Yes, yes! come you in," said Tim.

"Doctor Dan! Well, indeed, is it you, sir. Here's a day!" said both at once, and they began to relate how they had driven the pig in the Bryndu donkey cart to be sold, and, beginning their way home, had been fairly beaten by the storm, and were now seeking for lodgings where they might stay the night.

"One donkey and cart have been blown into the river already to-day," roared Stivin, "and we thought we were going too, when we were crossing the bridge!"

"And there's vexing we are about the lo's fach!" said Mali; "left by herself in the storm, and the thatch so bad at Doloer."

"Alone?" said the doctor, startled.

"Yes; Iago Vaughan is away, and Phil is ill, and Betta tending him with brown paper and vinegar."

"I am going to Bryndu," said the doctor, "and will tell them how you have been detained. I will see to Miriel too;" and scarcely waiting to bid them good-bye, he hurried home to Hendyrafon to find Deio ready, but full of evil forebodings.

"Yes, yes, I know all that," was his answer, "but we've got to go," and in a short time they were crossing the bridge, trying to make headway against the wind, which threatened every moment to overturn them or tear them from the gig.

Thus they made but very slow progress, and the grey, lowering day was darkening as they drove into Bryndu clos.

The mistress of the house was a confirmed sufferer from rheumatism of a severe type, so that the doctor's visits to her were very frequent, though it was little he could do to ease her malady, but, "In my deed, there!" she would say, "it is doing me good to hear his voice;" and he had said, "Oh, well, send for me when you like," and she had not scrupled to take him at his word.

To-day, however, she had not expected him, and great was her delight therefore, and many her ejaculations, when the gig drove into the clos.

"Well, bendigedig! Who would think such a thing? Doctor Dan bach! I am glad to see you. A glass of hot beer at once, Mari, and one for Deio;" and then began a recital of her ailments, to which the doctor listened as patiently as he could, and found that Deio had heard an exaggerated account of her illness.

When her pains and aches had all been detailed and

prescribed for, he expressed his intention of proceeding on his journey as far as Doloer.

"What! go out again in such weather? No, sir, I beg of you! There's your bed ready, and to-morrow it may be calmer. There hasn't been such a storm for thirty years!" But Doctor Dan was firm, and, calling to Deio, explained to his patient and her daughter why he must leave them at once.

"By herself in that lonely place?" said the girl. "Ach y fi! I wouldn't be in her shoes for the world. Bring her here, sir, if you can; she shall sleep with me."

"Sleep with thee!" said her mother, indignantly. "No, we have plenty of beds at Bryndu, whatever! and she's one of the Lloyds of Tygwyn, mind thee!" Armed with this invitation and chafing at the delay, Doctor Dan got into the gig, which Deio had with difficulty brought round, and they drove out of the clos into the high road, where, between the high hedges, they were able to make a little progress. The night had fallen in inky darkness, occasionally illumined by vivid flashes of lightning.

"The wind will not last much longer," said Doctor Dan. "I have always noticed this silent lightning comes at the climax of the storm."

Deio made no answer, but his master was accustomed to that. Thus battling with the high wind and frequently halting in the shelter of some friendly bush, they reached the highest ridge of the hill above the slope, and here Samson stopped and backed a little as if he said, "This is beyond a joke."

"We can't go further," shouted Deio. "Samson won't go."

"No," said his master. "Take him back to Bryndu, and see they have a good fire and a hot cup of tea ready when I come back."

Deio only nodded as he took the reins and turned Samson's head round. He seemed to have stepped into his

old taciturn groove again, but there was the upward screw at the corners of his mouth and a twinkle in his eyes which with him did duty for a smile, as he drove back alone, Doctor Dan proceeding down the slope.

Here it was a struggle indeed, but a fierce joy seemed to fill his heart as he battled with the fury of the elements.

He was continually obliged to take refuge behind the furze and thorn bushes while some blast more than ordinarily strong rushed by him, then, taking advantage of the alternating lull, he advanced more rapidly, and thus at last reached the garden gate at Doloer.

Looking up towards Hafod he saw a light in the window, and wondered if, after all, Miriel was there safe in the warmth of her friends' hearth.

He almost hoped she was, as he felt the full force of the gale that rushed up the shore, and saw the vivid flashes of lightning that darted through the gloom, disclosing for an instant the scene of strife around him. "The storm-fiends are out to-night for certain," he thought, and the memory of how Miriel was affected by a thunderstorm added to his uneasiness as he entered the porch at Doloer.

To her the day had been one of varied feelings. She had begun it with a happy song upon her lips, for ever since Deio's visit a strange new joy had been seeking admittance to her heart.

"What had he meant by his question, 'D'ye think *that* would please the mishteer?' Surely Deio knew," for she was well aware, that though the connection between him and Doctor Dan was one of master and servant only, still the latter looked upon Deio and, in a lesser degree, on Betti Luke as his truest friends, for between them existed the old strong bond, born of faithfully-performed service, and a warm appreciation of such fidelity. Therefore the simple serving-man's words had been caught up and pondered over by Miriel, until they had borne fruit in a strong

reaction from the restless aching that had thrown its shadow over her of late.

What did it matter that the storm raged if in her heart a bird of joy and hope was singing? What cared she that there was no one to cross the threshold through the whole grey day? The sun would shine again to-morrow, the orchard would be white and pink with blossoms, and the primroses would look up at her from every mossy mound. So she closed the door and sang at her work with a happy forecasting of she knew not what, for life was beautiful once more and full of all sorts of possibilities.

But as the day wore on, and the storm increased, her spirits flagged a little, for surely it could not be solitude alone that made her think that never before had the sea looked so black nor the blast roared so furiously round the old house.

She wished she had gone up the slope to Hafod while it had been possible to do so, for well she knew that Betta would be too much absorbed in her care for Phil to remember she was alone.

Mali and Stivin, too, had gone to Tregarreg, and the complete solitude of that lonely shore began to tell upon her nerves.

When nightfall came she piled the fire with logs, lighted her candle, and tried to knit, but it was impossible, and, dropping her work, she began pacing up and down the room, anxiously waiting for Mali and Stivin's return, but hour after hour went by without bringing any sign of them, and as, moreover, there had been several vivid flashes of lightning, her nervousness increased, and as she paced backwards and forwards she spoke aloud her inmost thoughts.

"Oh, I am very lonely," she said; "but God is over all, and I will not be afraid," and in the strength of this assurance she called her usual courage to her aid, and sat patiently waiting in the rush chair on the hearth. At last, when her courage was almost exhausted and her nerves

strung to painful excitement, her ear caught the sound of a step in the porch.

In a moment every instinct, every sentiment of her nature sprang into life, and she knew that this step was neither Mali's nor Stivin's, but one that she had longed to hear once more at the door. She started to her feet as Doctor Dan entered, with a familiar "Miriel" only for greeting, and while he turned to fasten the door and hang up his cloak, she had hard work to still the throbbing of her heart and to steady her voice, so great and so sudden was the rebound from the loneliness and terror of the past hours to the flood of awakening joy that was rising within her. "Oh, Doctor Dan! through this dreadful storm!" she said at last, taking the hand which he was holding out to her.

"Miriel! you have been frightened," he said, seeing her paleness and hearing the unsteadiness of her voice.

"Yes, indeed, it is a fearful storm; but I am not frightened now. I only wanted someone to be with me."

"Someone. Will I do, then?" he asked gravely, and still standing on the hearth before her.

To this she made no answer. "I heard," he said, "that Iago Vaughan was away, and that Betta would be unable to be with you. I saw Mali and Stivin at Tregarreg, where they will stay until to-morrow, so I could not bear the thought of your being alone here. Is it any comfort to you that I have come?"

Even yet Miriel did not answer. She could not trust her voice to speak, but bending her head lower and lower she at last said, "Oh, yes."

Doctor Dan was silent, too, for a few moments, looking at her in the blaze of the firelight with eyes in which passionate love strove with the fear and uncertainty which her words had failed to dissipate.

What if this girl should tell him the simple fact that she was glad to see him, and *no more?*

He felt, strong man as he was, that he could not bear it, so it was with a nervous tremble in his voice that he said,—

"Miriel! I want to understand you—I want to put an end to the unrest that has poisoned my life latterly;" and he held out both his hands, while into her face the hot blood returned, and into her eyes there came a light which awoke a thrill of joy within him.

She placed both her hands in his. "Unrest?" she said, "about me, Doctor Dan?" And the grey eyes which looked into his could no longer be misunderstood.

"About you? yes, yes, about you. Don't you know that I have loved you all this long time?" And he drew her nearer until the golden head was leaning on his breast.

"Miriel!" he said suddenly, holding her at arm's length, "is it possible that this great happiness is coming to me? that you love me, a man so much older than you, a grave, stern man they call me, and you so young, so fair?

"Tell me, is the desire of my heart to be granted me? Do you love me?" And for answer she loosened his hands and pressed closer to him, leaning her head again upon his breast, and saying, "Oh, yes; oh, yes, indeed!"

Now he clasped her to his breast and kissed her face, her hair, her eyes, while the old clock ticked in the corner and the storm raged fiercely round the house.

At the little side window a hand which neither of them saw was clearing away the foam flecks, and a man was looking at them with sad eyes that took in the whole scene, and *understood.*

It was Iago, who, finding on his return to Tregarreg that neither Betta nor Phil were there to meet him, had walked all the way home with the same intention as had moved Doctor Dan, namely, that of cheering and lightening Miriel's solitude.

He had been *fêted* and flattered in the distant town, but had returned home to see a sight which turned his

pleasure into pain and his hope to ashes; and he turned silently from the window towards the wild darkness of the shore.

Next morning he arrived at Hafod in time for the early breakfast, and no one ever knew that he had left Tregarreg early in the evening of the preceding day.

On the hearth at Doloer the fire crackled and blazed, and in its fitful light Miriel and Doctor Dan were beginning to realise the great joy that had come to them.

"And so my sweet white clover is coming to me after all," he said, "and no one else is to gather it and wear it on his heart. Ah, Miriel! I had put that happy dream away from me, and now it returns as a bright reality."

"Oh, Doctor Dan!" said Miriel, "did you care for me so much as that?"

"As much as that! Only the years to come can show you how much that was. But *Doctor* Dan, Miriel? No, no, child, never again let me hear that word before my name from your lips; say Dan, darling!"

"I will try, but very soft at first, because it will sound so bold."

"Bold!" he laughed. "What, to be so familiar with the bearded dragon?" And Miriel joined with the merry, ringing laughter, the echo of whose music had haunted the old parlour at Hendyrafon.

"And that happy laugh, Miriel! I thought it had gone out of my life for ever."

"Oh, no, indeed," she said, "laughter is never very far off where I am whatever!"

"Come, tell me, sweet clover," he said, "how came you to love a silent, uncouth man like me?"

"Tell *me* then, strong oak, how came you to love a little white clover?" said Miriel.

"Because it is the sweetest flower that grows, f'anwylid! Its creamy white turning to pink at the heart, its exquisite

scent, its hardy, healthy staunchness, its faithfulness through storm or shine, and with all its lovely qualities, its humility and modesty. Yes, I have always loved it, Miriel, and now I can press it to my heart and treasure it as I have longed to do."

Miriel sighed and gazed into the fire.

"Sighing and pondering so deeply?"

"Well, indeed I was thinking what a happy world this is!" And while outside the strong winds held high revels, sweeping the sand and foam before it, scooping the sea crows from their nests and tearing the bay into a foaming field of strife, inside that old thatched house there was light and warmth, and love and laughter, for Miriel, though supremely innocent and inexperienced, was not slow at repartee, and in the new atmosphere of full content and doubt dispelled the hours passed unnoticed until the old clock struck eight.

"Eight o'clock!" said Doctor Dan, startled, "and I have not said half of what I have to say."

"What then?" asked Miriel, opening her eyes. "I thought we had talked a lot, and oh! I must always laugh when I think about Deio and Betti! Indeed, indeed it is funny! After living thirty years together, then all at once to make up their minds to get married!"

"Yes, I cannot help laughing myself whenever I think of it. Fortunately they do not mind it in the least, but seem to see the joke of it themselves. But now, Miriel, we must turn to business."

"To business?"

"Yes. Now listen, f'anwylid, and bring your clear, sensible little head to the consideration of the matter. I did not tell you sooner because I wanted nothing to disturb our meeting. When I reached the garden gate a clump of thatch flew by me like a great black bird. Do you hear that flapping, soughing sound? In an hour the house will be roofless!"

"Oh, poor old Doloer," she said, now thoroughly frightened. "What will I do? Where will I go?"

"Where will you go, indeed? Oh, Miriel, what a question. Isn't Hendyrafon waiting for you, darling? Isn't every room and every passage calling for you? The river is calling to you and my heart is calling for you. Come then and sit in the sunset with me again and watch the river flowing by, and make the tea for me at the little black table."

The picture was irresistible to her, for she had lived that sunset hour over and over again in her dreams and musings. So enthralling was the vision that she bent her head to hide the happy tears which filled her eyes.

"That evening is like a dream to me," she said at last.

"But we are going to turn our dreams to sweet realities, dearest. Now listen to all my plans."

"Never grieve about the roof. Stivin Storrom shall re-thatch it at once, and you will be able to return to Doloer in a few days. In three weeks we will be married. I have waited long enough, so say yes before I go further. Make haste, love; we have no time to lose, for the storm is reaching even this bright hearth. Listen how those boards tremble;" and while the roaring sound increased in the roof Miriel whispered a hasty "Yes."

"Right, then. You will trust me entirely?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Then listen again. This is no place for you to-night. Then come with me to Bryndu, where they are waiting for you. Watch that board, and when it lifts you will see the wild night sky. At Bryndu you will have every comfort till you can return here in a few days. We will waylay Mali and Stivin to-morrow, and give him the order to re-thatch Doloer at once. Mali and he shall keep it warm and dry, and *we* will come and stay here a few days whenever you like. Does that please my darling?"

"Oh, Dan!" was all Miriel could say, and even while

she spoke the roof opened, revealing the sky of night with its myriad stars.

In a moment the light was blown out, and Doctor Dan, flinging a can of water on the hearth, extinguished the blazing logs, for the wind having once gained an entrance, was rushing through the house and carrying the thatch in clumps and sheafs up the slope.

In the inky darkness he led Miriel out to the porch, where there was a moment's shelter.

"My cloak is wide enough for us both," he said, and Miriel passively allowed herself to be wrapped in its folds —and together they began their way up the slope.

Breathless and panting, and somewhat frightened, yet Miriel could not restrain her laughter as they were driven on their way, as if by some mighty giant who was carrying them away to his stronghold.

Up through the furze and the heather; sometimes in complete darkness, sometimes catching a glimpse of the moon between the driving clouds. Past Hafod, where the light in the window shone like a glow-worm in the darkness, and where a thought of Iago threw a moment's shadow over her happiness. Up over the crest of the slope, where they rested a moment in the shelter of a thorn bush. Always that strong arm around her; and in spite of the wind and the darkness she felt safe and happy.

"How my little white clover is buffeted!" he said, as he saw her long hair loosened and streaming on the wind. "But we will say nothing against the storm, f'anwylid, for surely our happiness has come to us 'on the wings of the wind.'"

On one of the brightest of May mornings the door of Glanberi Church stood wide open.

The old vicar sat waiting in the vestry in his newly-washed surplice, while Ifan, the sexton, stood in the doorway.

No storms or winds prevailed that day, but golden sunlight laved the world, and gentle breezes whispered in the trees, carrying into the empty church the scent of the lilacs in the churchyard hedge and the cowslips in the field beyond.

A noisy bumble-bee flew in through the open door, buzzing round the pulpit and over the pews, but no other sound was audible except the soft sweep of the sea breeze that came over the brow of the hill.

Suddenly there was a click of the gate, a firm tread up the path, and Doctor Dan entered with an air of breezy freshness about him that seemed to bring a sense of life and energy into the dim old church.

"You are early, ser," said Ifan, and the vicar came out of the vestry to shake hands.

"No, just punctual," said the doctor, looking at his watch, "but I am prepared for the usual fate of the bridegroom."

"First lesson, ser," whispered Ifan, who was fond of his joke, and Doctor Dan laughed, with a whole-hearted absence of the look of sadness that had shadowed his face in the years that were passed—past and gone! like the frost of a winter's night.

Presently there were more footsteps and voices on the path, and the vicar took his place inside the altar rails, while Ifan marshalled the bridegroom to his place, and in from the spring sunshine came Miriel, leaning on the arm of Iago Vaughan.

He had asked to be allowed to "give the bride away,"

and she had consented, though not without a throb of pain as she realised what her marriage would mean to him.

Mari Jones of Bryndu followed as bridesmaid, Phil and Betta came next, and quite in the background Mali and Stivin Storrom sat still and nervous at finding themselves in a church.

Deio, too, crept in on tip-toe, and, as he seated himself beside the latter personages, he looked around with a self-satisfied air, and thought, "They'd never have opened their eyes if it hadn't been for me."

Here was no sweeping train of satin, no flowing veil or orange blossoms, but a simple country girl, who, as she walked up the aisle, was bringing her whole heart and unadorned beauty to her bridal.

One timid glance at the bridegroom, one reassuring smile from him, and Miriel stood beside him waiting for the words which were to unite them for ever, and it was pure happiness that brought that mist of tears upon her eyelashes, as, the service over, her husband drew her arm within his own and led her away.

She had searched through the Tygwyn coffers for a gown that should do honour to her wedding, and had fixed on one of dark blue corded silk, which Mali declared could "stand alone." It required but little altering, and Miriel's deft fingers had soon accomplished all that was wanted. Her white hat and gloves alone gave the necessary bridal effect to her quiet costume, but Doctor Dan was not alone in his thoughts that no fairer bride had ever entered that or any other church. 'Tis true she wore no orange blossoms, but, fastened on the bosom of her bodice, was a bunch of white clover, which much disappointed Mari Jones, who had prepared for her a bunch of white artificial flowers; and she was doubly confounded when she saw that the bridegroom also wore a spray of white clover in his buttonhole.

In the vestry, Phil, who had recovered his fun and good

spirits with returning health, insisted upon a kiss from the bride.

"Come, Iago, lad," he said, "and claim thy right!" But Iago had not heard, or had pretended to be absorbed with the registry book.

"There," said Phil, triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you in the orchard I would have that kiss some day?"

Miriel, laughing and blushing, was glad to escape with her husband, and, as they sat together in the gig, Samson pawing to be off, they missed nothing of grandeur in their bridal, but drove away perfectly content with their sprays of white clover.

No one, not even Miriel, had known what a painful ordeal Iago had gone through except, perhaps, Deio, who, as he mounted Stamper to follow his master and mistress, shook his head and muttered, "Pwr fellow, bach! 'tis sour work counting other people's sweets."

THE END

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