## PROGRESS, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16 1899.



## CHAPTER I.

10

I gave a little cry of sudden ecstasy as I opened my window on the first morning of our holiday in Mull, for it had been almost dark when we arrived the night before, and I had seen only dim outlines of rocks and hills, and a vague suggestion of beauties in store tor us.

Now, in the early morning light, with a glorious August sun rising redly from the hills, the beauties of earth, and sea, and sky burst upon me with an overwhelming force, that left me awed and breathless.

'And there are people who are blind enough to prefer London to the countryto this,' 'I reflected, with contemptuous pity of their folly, as I turned from the window and began to dress quickly, determined not to waste even a moment of my precious holiday time.

The faces that presently met mine at the breakfast-table seemed already to wear a more agreeable aspect than usual.

My step-mother's eyes relaxed their cold keen vigilance, and Isabelle, her daughter, looked almost pretty in her fresh, new frock, and with a little unwonted flush on her rather colorless face.

In the bright morning sun, and with the air of general amiability, I forgot the thou sand-and-one little worries of our life in the shabby London square.

Forgot the poverty and loceliness, and the fact that I was, at the present moment, in dire disgrace with everybody; forgot even Sir Robert Crawford himself, and ceased to wonder at what had hitherto seemed inexplicable to me, namely, the fact that we, who, in former years, had been barely able to afford a fortnight's stay at some cheap seaport near, should, this year, have been enabled to rent this large and beautiful old house for two whole months in tar off Mull.

My first wondering questions on the sub-

The old woman had always a welcome for me, and told many strange tales and legends of the country round about, that made the hours spent in her cottage pass very quickly.

The afternoon had halt slipped by with-out my knowing it, as I left her, one bright clear day in early September, and, moun-ting the hill between her cottage and Ardnavach, stood for a moment to enjoy the view before going home.

Looking seawards, I was reminded of what I had already noticed more than once that the cluster of steep rocks that formed an island about a mile out from the shore was an island only at high water, and at the present moment there was a distinct and perfect roadway of solid looking sand leading to it from the mainland. I had long wished to explore these rocks

but had been told to row there in our ltttle boat would be dangerous for such an inex perienced oarswoman as I, and I must wait till someone could make it convenient to

take me. The temptation to walk there now, while the tide was still low, proved too strong for me, and I ran quickly down the hill. across the little beach, and along the ridge of sand.

It felt not quite as firm as it had looked, but I walked quickly on, and soon found myself climbing the steep crags of the little island

It was larger than I had imagined, and I had decided that it would take a week at least to explore all the caves and crannies, and exhaust the interest of this little seagirt wilderness, which seemed to be given over to the sea-birds that wheeled and circled peacefully about it.

I was growing a little tired of climbing, and though that I would rest awhile before going home to tell the others of my discov-

what am I to do ? 'I will take you across later on in my boat, if you will let me.'

'Then you have a boat here !' I exclaimed.

'Yes,' he said, smiling ; 'if you can call it a boat, when old Dougald has been tinkering at it for a week, and is still doing so.' "Oh!' I said, feeling very crestfallen at the prospect of the delay; 'but how then

did you get here ?' 'I ? I live here.'

'Live here ' I repeated, wondering. 'But saw no house.'

'That is quite likely,' he answered, 'there is not much of it to be seen from this side, tor the rocke, and it is so old and grey that it locks like one of them; but if you will let me I will show it to you now, and we will see what can be done to the boat.'

I had no choice but to do as he suggested.

He led the way over rough steep rocks, where I was grateful for his helping hand, and at last we stopped at a little sandy cove where lay a small boat, evidently in a sad state of dilapidation.

An old Highlander, so wrinkled and brown and weather stained that his face resembled parched up leather, sat nodding in the sunshine, with the tools still in his hands with which he had been working on the boat.

He started up awake as we came near. and eyed me with considerable astonishment, but took off his bonnet, respectfully.

His master began to question him in Gaelic as to the state of the boat, and, from the gravity with which old Dougald pointed out its many weak places, and the ominous shaking of his grizzled head, I concluded that it must be in a bad state ndeed.

'Dougald has no English,' said his master, half apologetically, to me, 'and he tells me that there will be three hours' work required to the boat, before it can be used.' 'Three hours before the boat is ready !'

repeated, aghast, 'and the sun is setting! It will be quite night before I reach home.' 'Indeed, I am very sorry,' said my com-

panion. 'I wish there were some other way, but there is none.

recklessly, to myself. 'I shall not let you try that,' he return- master got in and helped me to a comfored, quietly, 'but if it is important that your | table seat, then the old man jumped in | triends should be told at once, I shall try to go over myself and tell them. I turned to him, with a sudden flush of shame. 'Please don't think of such a thing.' I said. 'I will wait patiently until the boat | lyis ready, and I am very sorry to give you all this trouble.' He smiled courteously. 'The trouble is all yours,' he said, 'for us it is a good thing to be oblighed to get the boat finished quickly; and now, will you come and rest a little in the house ?' I consented, and he led the way round a great spur of rock, on the other side of which stood a large, but low and very quaint-looking building, which was, as he had said, so old and grey and hoary, as to seem but a part of the rocks themselves.

'and they would never think of it. Oh ! place wore an aspect of simple homeliness and solemn beauty that touched me, I could not tell why, with a teeling of rest and peace.

My host replenished the fire with a block of peat, and then disappeared into another room, while I lay back in the depths of a comfortable chair, luxuristing in the rest. tul quiet of the beautiful old room.

Presently he returned, carrying a jug of milk and a plate of oat-cake which he set on the table and begged me courteously to eat and drink.

Ian Macquoid stood by, looking well pleased at my appreciation of his hospitality, and then my simple meal being finished he prepared to go out.

'I shall go and hurry old Dougald with the boat.' he said, 'if you do not mind being here alone; and shall I bring you candles, or do you like the glooming better?'

'I like this much better,' I replied, 'and please don't let me give you any more trouble.'

He went out and seemed to be gone a long time.

The twilight faded, and the first star shone soitly through the small leaded panes of the old-fashioned window and a great sense of peace and rest stole over me.

Then my eyes grew heavy, and I was soon fast asleep.

When I awoke, my host had come in. 'You are very tired,' he said; 'I am orry to have roused you.'

'No, I am not really tired,' I said, feel ing half ashsmed of myself, 'but it is quiet and restful here. I do not think I shall ever forget this beautiful old hall.'

A gleam of sudden pleasure lit up my host's face and he answered eagerly-'It will be very good of you to think of

it sometimes. I, to, shall remember all my life the ---

He checked himself abruptly, and grew gravely quiet again.

'And now the boat is ready,' he went on and you will be anxious to go home.' 'Yes, I must go now,' I said, feeling

truth to say, far less eager to arrive there than he imagined.

The glorious September moon, that was almost tull, shed a soft and lovely radiance over the great dark rocks and the smooth 'Except the sands,' I murmured, half sands of the little beach.

Old Dougald held the boat while his that " himselt, and we pushed off into the broad track of silvery moonlight, that stretched shimmering across the gently heaving sea.



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and listening to the quaint talk of the little, brown old woman who sat beside me, rapidly knitting.

I had come alone to-day, for though Isabelle had accompanied me there on my last visit she had not found the entertainment so great as to tempt her to repeat it.

We had been speaking of her, however, and Mary's thoughts seemed to be still busy with us and our concerns, for, after looking at me quizzically, though kindly, for a moment, she suddenly startled me by asking-

'And which of you young ladies will it be that's to become the lady of Ardnavach ?'

'I don't understand you,' I said feeling puzzled. 'How could either of us ever be

Mary laughed knowingly.

'Oh,' she said. 'it's all vera well to pretend to know nothing; but it's not likely that the master will have lent his house to a lady with two bonny daughters, and not have a mind to make one of them his wife."

ject had been met with cold evasion, and I knew my step-mother too well to persist in my enquiries, while Isabelle either knew, or pretended to know, no more than I did.

There remained only Violet and Dolly, who were too young to have been let into the secret of the unwonted extravagance; and Dick-dear old Dick-who would have told me all he knew, but whose ignorance was equal to my own.

Now my wonder all imerged into keen delight, as I revelled in the prospect of eight long delicious weeks to be spent among the rocks and hills and by that glis tening sea.

Only once in all my twenty years, could I recall such a holiday as this; when a small motherless child of six, I had been taken by the dear old dad to Iliracombe.

After that the step mother had come, bringing with her a tair, small image of herself, who was about my own age, and who, I was told, was to be my sister.

I had accepted the fact wonderingly, and tented myself for the moment with the remark that "she didn't seem liks one," a remark that I often found myselt tempted to repeat in after years.

Dad had died soon after Dolly had been born, and a life of dull monotony and genteel poverty had been ours ever since.

No wonder then, that when Sir Robert Crawford-whose father mine had knowncame with an offer of marriage to me, the promise of a career to Dick, and a good time generally for all the rest, they never for a moment doubted what my reply would be, and were quite horror struck at the news that I had retused him.

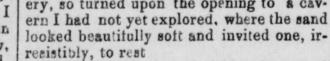
My explanation of the matter, being no more than the simple fact that I did not care for him, seemed quite insufficient to excuse such wanton toily, and a storm of reproach and abuse broke over my devoted head.

I was told that, as I was still so absurdly childish, in spite of my years, Sir Robert had decided not to consider my foolish answer as final', but to give me the chance of altering it in a lew months' time.

But I had given them no promise to think better of my decision, and that is why I had felt myself ever since to be in disgrace; but I determined to think nothing of all this as I ran out, after a hasty breakfast, to explose at once the beauties of this enchanted land.

Ardnavach, as our house was named, was a large, old, and to me, a beautiful building, with an air of solemn, lonely grandeur, well in character with the wild and rugged scenes around it.

There was no other house within miles of us, and Isabelle seon began to find the lack of congenial neighbors decidedly mot otonous, and did not care to join me when I sometimes paid a visit to our nearest neighbour, old Mary Faa, whose cottage lay beyond the nearest hill.



I went into the cave quickly, but stood still to listen, as something stirred within, and a short, half smothered bark, told me that a dog was there.

A large and beautiful collie lay sleepily stretched out. his handsome neck encircled by the arm of a man who lay beside him

fast asleep. The man's left arm made a pillow for his head, on which the fair, short hair grew thick and curling.

His face was bronzed with sun and wind. and the Highland dress he was wearing was old and shabby, but the brown hand that lay half buried in the dog's soit coat, was fine and beautifully shaped, and the face had an indescribable air of belonging to someone out of the common.

I had remarked all this in the moment while astonishment held me motionless, and the dog, as it fearing to wake his master, lay quite still watching me.

Then I turned to steal away, but the sleeper awoke, and sprang up, and the collie, glad to be released, came bounding forward, with an excited bark, to examine the intruder.

I seemed to meet with his approval, however, for, after an enquiring look into my face, he sprang up to me with such exuberance, that I almost fell, and his master called him sternly away.

'I ask pardon for him,' he said to me. Visitors are so rare in our solitude here, that he is quite unused to them. I hope he has not hurt you ?'

'On, no !' I said, laughing, and caressing the great, soft head. 'You see, he has torgiven me already for my intrusion,' I added.

'And you must think yourself honored by it, for Collie does not make friends easily,' said Collie's master.

I suddenly remembered that the sun was almost setting, and I must go home.

'You have come from Mull to see the caves,' he went on, 'and you will have lost your triends among the rocks, perhaps? May I help you to find them ?"

'I have no friends here,' I said ; 'I came across alone."

'That is a little dangerous,' he remarked, 'unless you know the rocks well; and where is your boat ?'

We were outside the cave now, and he looked curiously around for the boat in which I was supposed to have braved alone the many sunken rocks that lay between us and the mainland.

'I did not bring a boat,' I said. 'It was not necessary, for the tide was low, and I walked here.'

'Walked across the sands ?' He turned to me with such sudden amazement that I was startled.

'Yes,' I said, 'of course. It was quite easy. Why should I not walk ?'

'Because the sands are not safe,' he answered, 'and it is a wonder you were not

The door stood open and as we reached it the owner of the strange dwelling took off his bonnet, and bowed, with grave old fashioned courtery,

'This is my home,' he said. 'I am Ina Macquoid, and I bid you a thousand welcomes.'

'And I am Agatha Freers, who is very grateful for your kindness,' I answered, smilingly, as I stepped from the ruddy sunset glow outside into the cool half light within, and then I could hardly repress a little cry of surprise and delight at the unexpected beauty of the place.

The door opened directly into a long, wide hall that was evidently used as an ordinary living room.

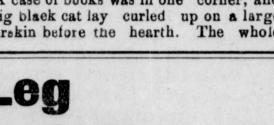
The walls are panelled in dark oak and some very old benches of the same, but richly carved were ranged along the sides chair that would have been considered an acquisition to any museum.

A collection of guns of all ages and fishing tackle of all kinds hung over the high chimney shelf, beneath which yawned a huge open fire place where a tew logs were burning brightly sending fitful gleams of warm red lights over she sombre dark ness and beautiful carvings, and reflected brightly from a few tankards and dishes of old silver, that stood on a wide oak Macquoid.' dresser at the far end of the room.

A case of books was in one corner, and a big black cat lay curled up on a large bearskin before the hearth. The whole

A Solid

Sore.



When it comes to healing up old

running sores of long standing there

'You have not told me yet where you are staying,' said Ian Macquoid, present-

'We are at Ardnavach,' I answered. 'My step-mother, her children and I.' 'At Ardnavach?' he repeated, with a

look of wondoring surprise that rather puzzled me.

'Yes,' I answered. 'My mother has rented the house for two months.'

The wonder grew deeper in my companion's dark blue eyes, but he said no more, and I remembered that I had not heard the name of his own house yet.

'It is Currachmore,' he told me, in answer to my question.

'That is the name of the island. too.' remarked.

'Yes,' he said, 'the island belongs to it.' 'Then I trepassed on your property when went there this alternoon ?'

'No; but you paid a short visit to my home, which I shall like to remember,' he answered.

The short crossing to the mainland was soon over, and we landed at the little beach about a mile from Ardnavach.

'It is so late that you must let me walk there with you,' Ian Macquoid; and we started, leaving Dougald to take care of the boat, and await his master's return. As we neared the house I noticed that the door was already fast shut, and we were obliged to ring the heavy, clanging

bell, to make my presence known.

We waited some time, and at last the of the room, while at one end of the mass- | door was opened by my step-mother herive table s ood an antique highbacked | self, for, as I attewards learnt, all the servants had been sent out to search for me, and Isabelle's face appeared behind hers.

'Both wors an air of wrathful disapprovat at the sight of my companion, and began at once to demand an explanation of my 'disgraceful conduct.'

I explained the situation hurriedly, ending up rather pointedly with the remark that "I should certainly not be safe at home now, were it not for the kindness of Mr.

Isabelle raised her eyebrows, and bestowed a stare of impertinent curiosity on my companion in his shabby plaid, and my step-mother's eyes gleamed coldly in the dim, soft light.

'A most fortunate meeting, certainly. she said, icily; 'and are we expected to remunerate this .---- '

A hot flush of shame rose to my cheeks. with a sudden rush of angry tears, as Ian Macquoid drew himself up, while his face darkened, and his eyes flashed proudly for a moment, then softened strangely as they met the pain and shame in mine, and

he bowed gravely. 'I am Ian MacQuoid, ot Currachmore,' he said, quietly, 'and I am glad to have been able to help Miss Freers '

My stepmother looked, I thought, a is no remedy equal to Burdock Blood little shame struck as she returned the bow

'Oh, you are quite wrong, Mary,' I laughed, easily; 'your imagination has run away with you. We have rented the house and I, at least, don't even know who it belongs to.'

It was Mary's turn to look puzzled now. 'Rented it !' she repeated slowly. 'Has the house of Ardnavach come to that? And you say you do not know Sir Robert Crawford ?

I thought old Mary was losing her wits. 'Of course,' I said, 'I know Sir Robert Crawford ; but I cannot see what that has to do with our having taken Ardnavach.'

'But if you are acquainted with him, you will surely know that the house belongs to him.

I opened my lips to contradict such an absurd assertion, but remained silent as I remembered that there was nothing absurd or unlikely in the idea at all, that, in fact, it accounted for much that I could not otherwise understand, and certainly explained the fact of our unwonted extravagance in coming here.

I felt my cheeks flush with annoyance humilitation, and old Mary eyed me curiously.

'It's str nge that you shouldn't know,' she said presently, 'and, maybe, I oughtn't to have told it to you. But I couldn't tell it was a secret from you.'

'I am glad you told me,' I answered, as carelessly as I could.

And she went on-

'Then it will be Miss Isabelle, most likely, that's to be his lady? Well, though it will be a great position; and there's plenty of wealth for her, I'm glad it is not you, my bairn.'

There was a soft and loving light in the old woman's eyes as they rested on my face, and she gently stroked my hand.

'Tell me about him,' I said suddenly. 'I have known him slightly for a long time, but never heard him speak of having property here,"

Mary looked a little scornful, I thought as she replied-

"And it is little wonder that he likes not to talk much of it, or to come here often himself, fos even he will be feeling that he has no righs to it whatever, and it is a cold welcome he gets when he does come."

"No right, Mary ;" I repeated. "What can you mean ?"

"Well, Miss Agatha, it's a long story, and I have maybe, no right to tell it ye. But I have a mind that you should know the truth, whether you tell it to Miss Isabelle or no."

"Please go on," I said, beginning to feel a deep interest already. Aad Mary continued-

"All my life I have known the house of Ardnavach, and love every stone of ii; and I remember well the time when the old master-who is dead now seven yearstrigidly, and he turned to go, but 1 step. kept his coming of sge, and the country

|--|