CHAPTER III.

The Island of Enlargement.

We left behind us a port which, originally entirely attractive, has, with the passing of the years, permanently changed this characteristic at the hideous hands of an alien modernity.

Thoroughly in keeping with the new aspects of the port is the influx of strangers - servile followers of every foolish freak of fashion from the south. Men in startling garments of gaudy hues, or in effeminate bloomers half-way down an imperceptible calf. Others - Grimes from Gravesend, and Gammie from Glasgow - tricked out in kilts of any or no recognised tartan, to which kilts neither has any stronger claim than that of payment for them. On such grounds the famous "old school tie" might with equal propriety be assumed. Then the hybrids - women undecided whether to appear as male or female, and "registering" a compromise. Faces crudely daubed with pigments: lips out of drawing with scarlet smears: corrugated hair. Feet semi-shod in high heeled shoes slashed about the uppers, as though to ease enlarged joints, toes protruding. The top-half clad in garments of distinctively feminine wear, set off by pearl or other necklaces, the legs emerging in grotesque unnecessary trousers: the whole delirious effect crowned by fantastic headgear where cruelly tortured hair has any covering.

From the sight of all this revolting combination of artificiality and ugliness, we were set free as soon as our feet touched the ground of this true island of enlargement. For we were at once released from the stifling confines of town life, and from country, which, caught up in its clutches, in its loss of rural character, is rapidly becoming suburban.

No transit from one extreme to the other could have been more complete. Immediately on landing we were transported to the most primitive life, that of the tinkers, whom English readers must not confuse with gipsies. For though tent dwellers of confirmed wandering habit, the tinkers, unlike the Romany, are not a race apart, having its own nomenclature and language. Too often they are very unwelcome, as importunate beggars and sometimes thieves. But the islanders spoke very highly of these tinkers, as thoroughly worthy folk, and the men splendid workers in helping with the harvest, etc.. It was surprising to notice their encampment in a very exposed

position and so near the sea that in rough weather, so I was told, the waves would reach it. Against these, the channels cut all round the large tent to carry off the rain, could be of little use.

Whilst I was very sorry indeed for the poverty which denied these tinkers weatherproof material for their tent, I could not sufficiently admire the ingenuity which had contrived a covering for it out of many small and some unlikely materials. They had even a chimney in the centre of the higher portion. True, this, an old oil drum with the bottom knocked out, was cunningly fixed, and must have been most securely fitted to withstand the gales, in a square of double-proofed mackintosh. But apart from this, the only other waterproof material in the covering was a few small pieces of canvas, used with others of bed-ticking and sacks for the lower section of the tent. An old piece of fish netting over this, the end where were the beds, kept this patchwork together. The larger and higher part of the tent had a woman's long tweed coat spread over the front and more sacking around it. The whole tent, stretched over a framework of bent hazels, was well weighted down all round the base with large stones.

One of the men, of beautiful manners, very courteously allowed me to look within the tent. It was necessary to stoop low to enter the opening, and the floor of beaten earth allowed the pot hook to be stuck in aslant to reach over the fire, burning clearly and without smoke, in another oil drum, brother (or sister) to the chimney above. I was glad to be assured that the tidy and cosy tent resisted even the deluges which had for so long been the island's portion. Much washing was spread out on the rocks about the encampment, and a long orderly pile of well-washed bottles, and a modest collection of small scrap iron, gathered by the tinkers from the islanders, to be sold on the mainland.

But the most arresting feature - in a double sense - of the encampment was a perky little terrier, plump and bright-eyed, just emerging alike from puppyhood and from his little kennel, where he was tied up with rough rope to a peg in the ground. For his snug-looking home was a tiny tent made from an old brown coat fastened over hoops, and his warm bed was of dry bracken.

The natural features of this island are so distinctive - and distinguished - that one sighs for more than that a mere nodding acquaintance with geology consisting of an ability (sometimes doubtful) to distinguish between aqueous and igneous

rocks, with which to describe them. In default of the requisite scientific knowledge, one can only say that what is suggested by an island giving a general impression of a switchback, is some violent convulsion of nature which has thrown up masses of aqueous rock, contorting and twisting some, alternating with long slabs, often in serried rows side by side, with here and there intrusions of igneous matter.

The most striking and uncommon feature of the whole island is the predominating clusters of small pillars and pinnacles upthrust from the turf-covered masses of rock. Most of these are starkly naked, but others are completely clothed in thyme, or in fine and lovely grass. These curious outcroppings of the rock are seen from end to end of the island, and to sacrifice a picturesque to a more exact simile, suggest jagged teeth, some snapped short, and broken stumps of tooth abristle on mound after mound. This peculiar feature over and over again creates the delusion of indications of those antiquarian remains, notably of hill forts, in which the island abounds.

Like most human beings, the island has its ups and downs, and to every height, whether it be of rocky masses or, as here and there over the island, isolated cliffs, succeeds some hollow. In some of these are small lochs, the margins thick with reeds: another is a short glen in miniature, and others are small valleys or smooth stretches of grassland. Everywhere are to be found small dells, affording complete shelter from every wind that blows, and in one quarter of the island there is some woodland, though for the rest, the trees for the most part are isolated or clustered in the shelter of the cliffs.

Along the shores, parts of which have high escarpments, often broken by little gorges through which dash down small /is waterfalls, ~~are~~ a succession of lovely little sheltered bays. Everywhere the island is coursed by narrow streams of water, their beds thick with luxuriant watercress and issuing from springing wells. Only one of these, however, bears a saint's name, and not one of them is a wishing-well, both so commonly found in the Highlands and Islands, where now, in the latter case, in mockery of the offerings seriously made in past days, frivolities such as pins, nails, buttons, etc., are left.

Dotted round the coasts of the mother island are her fairly numerous offspring, alluring islets, many in clothing of russet red, for this is the colour assumed in winter by the heather which, except in rare patches of stunted growth, is hardly found on the main island.

But as our Nation finds its noblest earthly expression in the Monarchy, so, too, our island of enlargement gains its greatest inspiration from the royal ranges of mountains which are its distant outlook in every quarter. And just as one feels our King and Queen, and the beloved Queen-Mother, are dear and familiar friends, so, too, it is with these mountain heights. The sight of each well-loved ben recalls some historical, or personal incident, or both, all intimate treasures of memory enduring while life lasts. As with our Royal Family, when hearing daily of incidents touching most closely the national life, so too, with the sight of these mountains, the heart swells with affection and the spirit exults.

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Amongst the numerous cattle which find rich grazing on the island, may be seen some of the little shaggy black Galloways. These are now the nearest approach left to the famous old "black cattle" of West Highland history. For the now rapidly decreasing herds of the handsome "West Highlanders" have, through particularised breeding, coats of brown, tawny, fawn and cream, but rarely any of the once all-prevailing black. The reason for the decrease in the breeding of these magnificent beasts is that, though they yield richer milk than common cows such as, e.g. Ayrshires, and though their beef is superior to that of any other cattle, they take longer in coming to maturity, and most surprising, they are delicate, probably because they are no longer "black" as Nature made them.

The sight of one of these Galloways floundering in a marsh called a halt to see if he would be able to extricate himself. He did, unlike an unfortunate little calf in similar plight last year on the mainland. She was found struggling deep in a bog by two young Englishwomen of our company who told us of its exciting rescue when they returned after a walk together. The animal was too far distant from the farm to which it belonged for help to be obtained at once from there, and there was no more time to be lost. So the younger, a sturdy Yorkshire woman, at once took command of rescue proceedings by virtue of her familiarity with farm life. Acting on her instructions the elder, a Kentish rival, divesting herself of a thin woollen scarf, threw it over the calf's head and secured it round its neck. Then when her partner, seizing the front legs of the animal, gave the word, they tugged together for all they were worth and at last succeeded in dragging the poor little creature out of the mire. But it was so exhausted by the experience, and, as they subsequently heard, chilled by the length of time it had evidently been in the bog that it could

not keep its feet and fell helpless to the ground. Again the voice of Yorkshire spoke, and the pair fell to massaging the calf vigorously. But soon the Kentish woman regained her wonted ascendancy, for she had studied first-aid and her partner had not. So the North listened to instructions from the South as to the method of applying artificial respiration, but scornfully enquired how it could be adapted for use on a calf. We gathered that, whilst Kent maintained that it could be, and attempted to demonstrate, Yorkshire, with scorn unabated, continued the massaging. When the stage was reached of both agreeing nothing more, in either line, could be done for the calf, still unrevived, they left it - to report on its whereabouts and condition to the farm. They called the next day, morning and evening, to enquire after the victim, only to hear, on the second occasion, that they had laboured in vain to save its life.

This would be an incomplete chapter were it to end without remarking upon the absence of some natural features usual throughout the Highlands, and of others almost universally found throughout Scotland and England. Of the first class is all game: in the second, moles, foxes, rabbits, and a police constable. Of an unnatural feature, elsewhere ubiquitous, there is on this island, incredibly and mercifully, not a single example - of an advertisement.
