THE

BAN OF THE GUBBE

BY

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BRITISH MUSEUM

THE BAN OF THE GUBBE.

CHAPTER I.

Of course I would accept his invitation. Had not Janson for many months been my friend and constant companion? Notwithstanding his subsequent behaviour, I would not give way to a vulgar spirit of retaliation. I would go.

Yet I hesitated. Janson's behaviour, as I said before, had been extraordinary. In fact, it had affected my whole life — my future. Staying in his house would be anything but pleasant. And then there was his

mystery. I hate mysteries, especially when they upset my matrimonial arrangements. And his mystery had certainly done so. Or was it madness rather than mystery?

Janson's message was too peremptory for my liking. I was under no obligation to him; and still he wrote—

"Please come here *at once*" (the italics are mine). "You *must* help me" (the italics are his). And then he calmly proceeded to tell me how to get to Kinlochie, as his place is called, taking for granted that I would obey his bidding. As far as Tain his instructions were pretty clear. Getting into Sutherlandshire, the journey became more complicated. The latter part necessitated a coach-journey of many hours, and no doubt a long drive in Janson's carriage.

Is the game worth the candle?

How can any man live in so remote a place?

This would to some extent account for Miss Janson's air of sadness.

Under the circumstances I call her Miss Janson.

Still she used to tell of the place with affection. The wild coast scenery. The shoal of small islands amongst which one could fish, but only out of flat-bottomed boats and with a smooth sea on account of the extraordinary formation of the intervening rocks. The mysterious caves. The wild-fowl.

No, it could not be the loneliness of the place which lent that sadness to Miss Janson's face. It was more probably Janson's crankiness. Or the mystery. I hate mysteries.

I began to examine the situation.

Was my friendship for Janson, of such short duration, sufficient excuse for him to summon me, at a mo-

ment's notice, to the end of the world merely to serve him? Would a man with any self-respect have asked this favour of me after his peculiar behaviour?

But these questions and conjectures are becoming wearisome. Let me rather recount the history of my acquaintance with Janson.

My doctor had ordered me to a German watering-place. This was a year and a half before the time of my present narrative. I had been unable to go there till late in the season.

People were beginning to leave. I decided not to strike up any acquaintances. It was not worth while. A casual conversation with one's neighbour at luncheon and he was gone. They would all go before I did. I had arrived so late. But as day after day went by I began to bore myself, and to look out for a probable companion.

One man had particularly attracted my attention. Indeed this was not surprising. At the *table d'hôte* he sat opposite me. The first thing that struck me about him was his great size. He must have been a good foot taller than his table-companions, and proportionately broad in the shoulders. I suppose he was a handsome man. He had fair hair hanging in peculiar locks with the appearance of being chiselled. His beard was equally peculiar. I fancied he must be a North German or a Scandinavian. The first day I particularly noticed the formation of his hands. These were very long, but narrow, and the fingers were all of nearly the same length. They were attached to arms singularly short for so tall a man, and he appeared to have no indication of wrist. His broad forehead and kind, pale blue eyes made one forget what was almost a deformity.

A young girl sat next to him—his daughter. In her features was reproduced the kindly open expression of her father, the same wavy golden hair; but her figure was not marred by misshapen arms,—on the contrary, her delicate hands were full of refinement.

I was somewhat surprised to hear the two converse in English. Both of them, however, had a slight accent, which might have been Scotch.

As one by one the other visitors dwindled away from the *table d hôte*, I was prompted to make overtures to Mr and Miss Janson—for such I found by the hotel-list was their name.

I began by addressing a few words to Mr Janson. I confess these were not very well received. I do not mean to say that the man appeared ill-mannered or surly, but shy rather. His daughter, seeing my second attempt

treated in the same way, hastened to take up the answer.

As she spoke, the sadness which characterised her face as well as her father's seemed slightly lifted, as though she were glad of the intervention of a stranger.

"Yes, it is rather late to be here still. But the fact is we have nothing better to do, and it is more comfortable to stay in one place than to wander about from pillar to post."

Then ensued the usual hotel conversation, and although I could but be fascinated by Miss Janson's manners and appearance, I was puzzling to remember where I had seen a face just like Mr Janson's, and of what his peculiar hands reminded me.

Were they like a monkey's? No! they had no wrists. A frog's feet, a bird's claws? No, that was not it. But tax my brain as I would, the doubt remained unsolved.

CHAPTER II.

It would require a far more subtle writer even to attempt to conceal the fact that I was at all events "interested" in Edna Janson. From the moment one introduces the heroine to the public she is doomed, and a pretty shrewd conjecture may be made as to her fate. In this case, however, a series of unforeseen events occurred which would defy the skill of the wisest seer. Most men of ordinary sentimental capacity and orthodox views with regard to the opposite sex will be attracted by a pretty girl who has no mother, sympa-

thetic manners, and a sad expression of countenance.

If to this be added an atmosphere of mystery, I could not be blamed for taking a more than ordinary "interest" in Edna Janson. For when it exists, although I dislike mystery, I accept the inevitable and endeavour to unravel it.

Mr Janson was evidently devoted to his daughter, and no wonder, seeing that she was charming, and he had no other children. But he was so taciturn, so ill-matched a companion for a young girl, that it was not in his power to make her life a happy one.

Yet later on he made the greatest sacrifice for her that a man can make.

In the meantime circumstances threw me a great deal with Miss Janson, and in a few days, as is usual under

such conditions, our friendship made as much progress as in two London seasons. Janson seemed pleased that his daughter should find a companion. He raised no objection even to our taking long expeditions together. I flatter myself that he saw from the first he could trust me to take charge of Edna. He himself preferred sitting in the garden poring over old books and papers which seemed to have no end.

It was during one of our long walks together that Edna first touched upon the mystery.

It was in response to a suggestion of mine, made innocently enough, to which I hardly expected an answer.

"I wonder," I remarked, "that as, from what I gather, your father is in easy circumstances, he should have chosen so remote a spot for a country place as Kinlochie. You tell me he

only purchased it some fifteen years ago. Therefore there can be no family interest in the place." Edna seemed rather disturbed, and as she opened her mouth to speak I added, "I am afraid I should not have spoken about it. It was tactless, I——"

"No," she interrupted; "it is most natural that you should be surprised. I should like to tell you all I know. This is perhaps not very much. But there is a mystery. When we first went to Kinlochie I was of course too small to reason. It was years afterwards that a woman who had been my mother's nurse, and who is still with us, told me that for many years, ever since she had been in our service, my father had devoted himself to some researches. She, poor ignorant thing, said she believed it was the black art which he was studying. Nobody who knew my father could suspect him of

anything so foolish. Old Mrs Gregory, however, tells of how mysterious visitors have been to see my father, bringing with them old documents for which he has paid fabulous sums. My father has a regular museum of things he has collected, none of them of any apparent value except as relics of some past age or race. Mrs Gregory remembers well when and how my father made up his mind to come to Kinlochie. Some Esquimaux were in London connected with an exhibition which had attracted people of all sorts and nationalities. My father used to go to the exhibition every day and converse with these Esquimaux. My father speaks all sorts of Northern languages and dialects."

"How did he come to acquire his knowledge?" I asked, interrupting Edna for the first time.

"Well, you see, we are of Scandi-

navian origin, and that is as nearly as I can explain to you, for my father has told me that we are of a distinct race. And, indeed, therein partly lies the mystery."

"Oh, of course your name is Norwegian."

"Well, it is the conventional anglified form of a very Scandinavian name—but even then it is far from its original form. So father tells me. But whenever I want to push my inquiries further into our origin, my father 'shuts me up.'"

"But what about the Esquimaux?" I inquired.

"Well, he used to go and talk with them whenever he got a chance. One day, to Mrs Gregory's surprise, she heard him ask the servants whether an Esquimaux had not called? Only imagine Esquimaux in their native costume coming to the door of a house

in London! He repeated his query day after day as though he were very anxious about it. For some weeks before this my father's visits to the exhibition had been less frequent. At last one evening a cab drove up to the door, and in it sat (so says Mrs Gregory) the funniest little dwarf all dressed up in furs. He jumped from the cab and asked for Mr Janson, but while he was still on the doorstep my father ran out and excitedly asked the Esquimaux a question in his native tongue. On receiving an answer my father seemed delighted, and asked his strange visitor into the study. Here the two remained closeted for a considerable time, the door only being opened once to admit a servant bearing whisky and glasses. The servant afterwards told Mrs Gregory that what the Esquimaux had brought my father was

a map or chart evidently taken from a flat box which lay on the table. Some bank-notes lay near the Esquimaux' elbow. These he had probably just received from my father. Mrs Gregory's impression is, 'putting that and that together,' as she expresses it, that my father had sent this Esquimaux to get the chart, probably in his own country; that during the man's absence my father had ceased to care for the other Esquimaux' society, and that this map was some clue to the mystery in pursuit of which my father made up his mind to come to Kinlochie. And all this seems probable enough from what has occurred since," concluded Edna, for by this time we had reached the precincts of the hotel.

Now, every time Edna mentioned her father there came to my mind his

image, his really noble head and shoulders, and the dreadful blemish of his hands.

Hardly had Edna left me than I set about wondering what those fantastic hands were like.

Before the next morning dawned I was to know.

CHAPTER III.

Mr Janson and his daughter occupied an apartment in the *succursale* of the hotel. They had arrived at a moment when the house was full of visitors, and preferred having comfortable rooms in the annexe to being crowded into the front of the building.

The *succursale* was divided from the main body of the hotel by a courtyard, through which they had to pass to come to *table d'hôte* or to go out walking.

It was but a step across the open space, but they must have sometimes found it inconvenient.

On the night in question, or rather

at about two o'clock in the morning, I was awakened by a furious rapping at the door.

I hastened to open it, when my servant hastily explained that a fire had broken out in the hotel, and that the visitors were rushing out in great fear. I hastily put on a dressing suit, and telling my servant to look after himself, I ran down-stairs and attempted to cross the courtyard. This was not so easy as I anticipated, the flames already forming a barrier to the principal exit. By the way the rooms on the ground-floor were laid out I judged that there was probably a side-door for the use of the servants. In this my judgment proved correct.

Passing through some offices, I was met by a number of panic-stricken servants and visitors. And these further impeded my progress. I looked in vain for the Jansons. In vain I

asked for tidings of them,—nobody knew, nobody cared. Most, in selfish fear, refused to answer. I had but to force my way through the little crowd, and gain the *succursale*. Of course I knew the Jansons' number, and tore up-stairs to the first floor. As I got nearer their rooms I began shouting "Janson!" so that by the time I got there Miss Janson was already looking out of her room door anxious to know what was happening. I implored her to come out with all possible speed, as there was danger of the flames spreading along the side of the building. She retired hastily to put on some clothes, and begged me to go and look after her father.

"He sleeps so soundly," she exclaimed, "you must thump at the door and shout."

In a moment I had dashed down the passage to Mr Janson's room. Al-

though I kicked at the door, for fully a minute I received no response. Then I heard Janson jump out of bed. Even at that moment of excitement I was struck by the peculiar patter of his feet on the parquet floor. When he opened the door I mechanically looked down. It was then I understood what had puzzled me so about his hands.

They were like fins. How did I know? For a brief moment one of his feet appeared in the doorway. The moment he saw me looking at it he drew it back. Too late. *I had seen that his foot was webbed.* Need I pause to describe it? It had the same uniformity in the length of toe as his hands in the fingers. The foot, like some huge sea-bird, widened out fan-shaped from a narrow heel, and between each outspread toe was a membrane.

"What on earth is the matter?" ejaculated Janson.

I explained in a moment, and his next inquiry was about his daughter. At this moment Edna joined us. Mr Janson threw something over himself, and we three hurried into the courtyard. By this time the place was entirely deserted. Shouts and excited exclamations reached us from the front of the hotel, and above the roar of the flames and the noise of crumbling masonry could be heard the hissing of water as the firemen turned the hydrant on the burning house. I of course had given my arm to Edna Janson, and of course she clung to me. It was no doubt pleasant for me to have her clinging to me, but I do not attach the importance to such an action that many historians have done, as under such circumstances clinging was inevitable.

Fortunately, the side-door to which I have referred was still untouched by the flames. I was able to get the Jansons

safely through this and the intervening offices, and in a few moments we found ourselves with a crowd of onlookers in the hotel garden. Here for the first time I perceived, notwithstanding the perturbation he must have felt on learning of his danger, that Mr Janson had found time to possess himself of a portfolio and several bundles of papers.

I have already explained that the hotel was nearly empty of guests. Although the fire did considerable damage to property, there were none of those harrowing scenes or loss of life by which a conflagration is so often attended. The firemen worked with a will, so that in a comparatively short space of time the hotel people were able to return to their different duties, and we knew we were safe.

By this time the day was dawning. Edna declared she could not go to bed again. We decided to go to our apart-

ments and dress properly, and, having breakfasted, she and I would go for a walk in the fresh morning air.

At all times I was ready enough to comply with Edna's requests, especially when involving a *tête-à-tête*. Never was I more anxious for a talk with her than on this occasion. It may not be quite conventional to talk to a young lady about her father's feet. But that is what I intended to do, relying on Edna's kindness of disposition and our friendship as an excuse for what might otherwise seem an impertinence on my part. I knew there was a mystery about Mr Janson. That Edna had admitted. Was it not likely that the mystery would be in some way connected with Mr Janson's peculiar individuality?

A man with fin-like hands and webbed feet should have a tale to tell, if not about himself, at all events about his ancestry. I would talk to Edna.

It was half an hour before we could get any of the servants to attend to us, so busy were they in putting things ship-shape again. But in the meantime Edna and I had dressed ourselves, and our breakfast was the matter of a few moments.

We were well on our walk, and had passed the few early risers who hung about the town, and still I could not make up my mind to broach the subject.

It was an awkward one. In the first place, my desire to know all there was to know about Mr Janson could only be construed into curiosity, and although this curiosity might be attributed to the interest I took in Edna, might it not also upset to a certain extent our relations with one another? In short, I was disturbed by a thousand qualms which deterred me from putting the question point blank.

Strange to say, it was Edna who first

referred to the matter. There had been silence of some moments on either side when she said—

"I have been thinking that you must have had an opportunity of discovering something very extraordinary about my father—about the way he is made, so to speak. It is not an easy subject for me to discuss, but you have been so kind and sympathetic throughout that I always like ventilating my woes with you, and now you as good as saved our lives."

"You were in no danger," I interrupted.

"Perhaps not actually," she rejoined; "but that you could not foresee. Practically you have saved our lives, and we should in any case have few secrets from you, for my father, poor man, is devoted to you. I say 'poor man,' for he has much to bear. I think his deformity, for such the peculiarity of his

hands and feet must be admitted to be, is a grievous burden to bear, all the more that it is evidently much mixed up with the mystery which has spoilt the career of a clever and charming man."

"I confess," I answered, "that I accidentally saw Mr Janson's bare feet, and was much struck by their peculiar formation. Connecting them with the corresponding singularity of his hands and arms, I was so mystified as to seriously think of questioning you about them. Regard for your feelings held me back. Now, by approaching the subject yourself you have overcome the difficulty. For this I am grateful, Edna, not merely because it relieves my curiosity, but because it indicates the confidence you have in me, and which I prize so much."

Edna was too simple-minded, too serious a girl, to make any coquettish

rejoinder to my mild compliment. She probably knew I had grown fond of her, and she accepted the situation simply as making the present time a pleasant one. Instead, therefore, of any silly remarks as to why I should appreciate her confidence, or not believing that I did, Edna proceeded to tell me all she knew.

"I have already told you that my father's idea of purchasing Kinlochie was the apparent result of his becoming possessed of certain documents.

"Mrs Gregory, whom I have already mentioned, has often told me that from the moment he took up his abode at Kinlochie my father's behaviour became erratic to such an extent that fears were often entertained for his safety. He would disappear for days together. Then he would turn up again as though nothing had happened and refuse to answer any questions. He would often

carry off some object with him, sometimes chosen from his secret museum, at other times ordered expressly. Mrs Gregory noticed that the latter usually took the form of water-tight or air-tight vessels, but often also of sporting gear or wearing apparel.

"On one occasion when such an article as I have described had just arrived from London, Mrs Gregory felt certain my father would carry it off with him. She determined to watch his movements. Sure enough, late in the afternoon, about an hour before twilight, Mrs Gregory saw my father leave the house as she had anticipated. Under his arm was a parcel carefully enveloped in oilskin. He looked round cautiously as though fearing observation, then made rapidly for a private path which leads down to the sea.

"My father is a splendid swimmer. Indeed, with his peculiarly formed

hands and feet, it could hardly be otherwise. On arriving on the sea-shore, without divesting himself of his clothes, Mrs Gregory, to her horror, saw my father plunge into the sea and swim off. The parcel was evidently attached to his person. Poor Mrs Gregory did not know what to do. She knew my father's swimming powers, and his habit of absenting himself for days together. Surely, unless he were mad, he would be safe enough. But was he mad? His action seemed to justify the suspicion. Yet at other times he was sane enough. Mrs Gregory would wait. But a few hours later she had changed her mind. A terrible storm arose. The old lady's nervousness got the better of her. She told the other servants. They set out in all directions, searching the coast with particular care. But no trace could be found of my father. This continued

for many days. My father had never been away so long. Mrs Gregory was inclined to think he would not return.

"Yet the faithful servant paid a daily visit to the sea-shore. On one of these occasions she pushed her walk along the beach to a spot where a group of huge rocks jutting out to sea from the cliffs formed a barrier which could not be passed by the wayfarer.

"Mrs Gregory was about to turn homewards in despair, when it seemed as though voices in loud altercation rose above the noise of the breakers proceeding from amongst the rocks. Mrs Gregory, in considerable trepidation, stole nearer and listened. During a lull in the noise of the surrounding elements, she distinctly heard the voices again, and this time imagined she recognised my father's as one of them. They were conversing in an unknown language.

"Mrs Gregory had to wait for another pause in the hubbub, then with all her might she called my father, 'Mr Janson! Mr Janson! Is that you? Oh, is it you?' Instantly the voices ceased, and a moment afterwards a form appeared clambering over the rocks. It was my father. At the same moment there was a rushing of some body through the breakers, but so rapid that Mrs Gregory could distinguish no form. She noticed, however, a line like what might be caused by some great fish swimming just under the surface of the waves, and this track was prolonged far out to sea. My father's companion never appeared.

"Mrs Gregory, enraptured to see him, began volubly to describe the misery she had gone through during his absence. He, however, took the matter quietly. He even seemed annoyed at

being discovered, and begged her to feel no anxiety for his safety on a future occasion, at the same time admonishing her to tell no one of what had transpired. It was not till years afterwards that, on the occurrence of a somewhat similar event, she told me this story in order to allay my fears."

"Will you tell me what the event was?" I ventured.

"Well, one summer's day I got up early, having arranged with my father to go and bathe with me in the sea. I went to his bedroom and knocked, but received no reply. I knocked again louder, but with the same result. I then tried the door, for my father always slept with the bolt drawn. The door yielded to my pressure; to my surprise the bed was untouched. Then Mrs Gregory told me she had heard him go out the evening before

when every one was in bed. I was accustomed to my father's eccentricities, but on this occasion was surprised and somewhat put out, as I had never known him to break an engagement with me.

"Proceeding to the hut built on the beach for the purpose, I put on my bathing-clothes and rather disconsolately began swimming about alone. I had not been engaged thus many minutes when I descried a speck on the smooth surface of the water—a mere speck a long way off—moving, and in my direction. Alarmed at first, I speedily perceived that it was a human being swimming. A few minutes later a familiar call showed it to be my father. On his reaching the spot where I stood in the water, I perceived he was not wearing his bathing-dress, but a light costume he often wore when he went out alone. He offered no ex-

planation of his absence, but expressed a hope that I had not been kept waiting.

"Nor did I venture to make any observation. It is not easy for a daughter to question her father's conduct, nor is it her place to do so. Don't you agree with me?" she concluded, trying to shake off the melancholy which reference to this mystery always brought with it.

"Certainly I do, but I wonder at your sense of duty being strong enough to resist the temptation. Now, what is your own opinion on all this?"

"I have hardly been able to form one. The only suggestion I can make is, that when he disappears he goes to meet some one whose whereabouts he has discovered at last through the papers he has collected. Who this being is, or what attraction there can be for my father, I cannot guess. It

would seem as though this person *lived in the sea.*"

"How so? you have told me of the hundred islets which bound the coast; you have even told me that these extend so far as to make that portion of the sea impassable to ships. Could not the object of your father's visits dwell on one of those islets for some reason best known to itself?"

"Well, the fact is that, although we call them islets," replied Edna, "they are in reality a curious formation of rock. I once went with Mrs Gregory to spend a few days at the house of some relations of hers who lived at Margate. There I saw almost the same formation of rocks, but in a modified form. At Margate the rocks stretch far out to sea like ours at Kinlochie. Like ours, they are only partly uncovered at low tide, and, like them, they are hollowed out into every con-

ceivable shape. Here deep pools, there little caves or model bridges, or again long clefts which form paths or streams.

"The chief difference lies in the size of the rocks. Where at Margate there are tiny streams in which one can hardly stand both feet at once, at Kinlochie there are wet tracks through which, were it not for the sudden pools of unknown depths, a cart might travel. Where at Margate a child will put its hand into a submarine hollow in the rocks, at Kinlochie you would find a cave capable of containing a hundred horsemen.

"But all these caves and cavities are, as far as one can see, half full of water—even at low tide. So you see it would be difficult for any one to live there."

"It is true," she continued, after a moment's hesitation, "that stories are rife in the country-side of strange sights witnessed by fishing-smacks which have

ventured too near the dangerous spot. One old story has it that a father and his son whilst fishing were driven in amongst the rocks by a hurricane. That never expecting to escape from the watery labyrinth, they gave themselves up for lost, when of a sudden a little band of strange men of enormous stature apparently springing from the rocks surrounded the boat. These uncanny beings appear to have been kind-hearted enough, for they seized the boat among them and brought it safely out of danger. Then they plunged into the water and disappeared amongst the rocks.

"But," added Edna with a smile, "owing to the never-failing habit the fishermen round these parts have of taking a quantity of whisky in their boats, the story has been accepted with reserve. Still from time to time weird tales crop up bearing some similarity to the one I have told you."

CHAPTER IV.

I THINK my readers owe me a debt of gratitude for having entirely kept out of these pages the element of so-called "love-making." And this I will continue to do as far as compatible with the thread of the narrative. The time has come, however, when I must propose to Edna Janson. Owing to the recent fire the hotel had for the moment lost some of its former comfort. The Jansons had decided to leave on the following day. If I did not speak now, we might be parted for ever.

Nor was the proposal of marriage a difficult task to perform.

Edna and I had become such fast friends that it seemed unnatural that we should go back to the ordinary routine of our existence, and that the sea of life should wash over us both, leaving no traces of a great friendship and something more.

Our conversation had lately turned almost exclusively on the mystery connected with her father's life.

On this occasion I remarked how lonely it must be for her spending so much of the year at Kinlochie. To this she replied that it was so, and that it was rendered doubly irksome by the uncanny behaviour of her father. She was so devoted to him, however, that it atoned for a great deal of the disagreeable part of life to know that she was able to make things pleasanter for him; that Mr Janson was equally attached to his daughter, and was frequently saying he wished he could

give his life for her. She did not see the necessity for his doing any such thing.

I asked her, was she not afraid that her father might come to grief during one of his mysterious journeys. She replied that although he had hitherto always returned unhurt, and as though nothing had happened, she could never entirely overcome her anxiety for his safety.

I said it would have been better for her if she had had a brother, "or somebody of that sort," to look after her and comfort her.

She replied that she had often wished for such a companion, but added that her father had frequently expressed his satisfaction at having no other children.

Then I proposed.

Edna was too simple-minded to evince any surprise. She had probably made

up her mind as to my feelings towards her. Still, although she did not hesitate to accept the proposition, she was beset by qualms of conscience as to the responsibility of her action.

"Have you fully considered the disadvantages of the step you are taking? You propose to marry the only daughter of a man whose eccentric habits may bring trouble—nay, even disgrace—upon you."

"I have thought of all these matters, and they only make me the more anxious to have the right of taking care of you," I replied.

"You are not appalled by the terror of the mystery itself,—of the unknown touching you so closely?"

"Not in the least. It interests me more than I can say. I only deplore the existence of this mystery on account of the annoyance it must be to you. However, we will change all that, and

the remainder of your life shall be as happy as I can make it."

"But you will let me stay a good deal with my father, will you not? You know I am devoted to him, and it would be selfish to enjoy my happiness all alone."

"Of course," I answered, "you shall do as you like about that."

And thus one by one the few objections to our little scheme melted away, and for that day our happiness was only overshadowed by the prospect of separation.

. . . . . .

The train which the Jansons were to take on their homeward journey left Badenheim at six in the evening of the following day. Edna promised she would finish her packing by luncheon-time, so that we might spend the last few hours together.

In the meantime she would have told

her father about our engagement. She knew he would be delighted. He had taken a great liking to me.

I should have wished to travel with the Jansons, but Edna told me it was better not to do so. One of her father's peculiarities was that he objected strongly to his plans being in any way influenced by others, or indeed to being in the society of any one except his daughter.

There was perhaps nothing very remarkable about this desire on Janson's part to escape close scrutiny. His deformity was enough to account for this.

Needless to say, I would do as Edna wished. I would not start for a day or two.

I spent the evening writing a host of letters. I had neglected my correspondence of late.

When I had finished my writing,

I set me to thinking of the step I had taken. How unexpected it had been! How unlike what I should have thought of doing! If I had been told that I should propose to any one I had met at a hotel, I should have pooh-poohed the idea. Yet here I was, after a month's acquaintance, engaged to Edna Janson, and as pleased as Punch with myself.

In spite of his peculiarities and physical defects I liked Janson. His broad open visage was pleasing to behold, reproduced as it was to some extent in his daughter. I had at length discovered what Janson's face reminded me of. It was like the face of the Florence Neptune. His chiselled-looking hair, which one felt would not get out of curl in the water, and his fin-like hands and webbed feet, all bore out the idea. It would be interesting from time to time to go and stay at Kinlochie and try and

unravel the mystery. Or Janson might tell me all about it when he knew me better.

And I went on pondering on these things till late into the night.

. . . . . .

I awoke with the helpless and unpleasant sensation that I had overslept myself, and on looking at my watch found it was past nine o'clock. I immediately rang for my servant. Although I had made no appointment with Edna, I was in the hopes that accidentally we might meet.

Thus when my servant appeared, I immediately asked him, "Have you seen Mr and Miss Janson to-day?"

Imagine my horror (I can call it by no other name) when he quietly replied—

"Mr and Miss Janson left by the early train, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir; I saw them drive off."

Of course I wished to conceal my state of feelings from my servant, so I said no more. As luck would have it, the first person I met on going down-stairs was the proprietor of the hotel, an odiously familiar fellow, who said, I thought, in rather a bantering tone—

"So you have lost your friends. A pity they could not stay a little longer as you are to go so soon. Such a pleasant gentleman, and so charming a young lady too."

I cut him short, and went out to mope until luncheon-time. It seemed to me I had enough to mope about. Here had I been getting on like wildfire with the Jansons. I had been on terms of friendship with the father such as his daughter declared she had never known before. I had become fond enough of Miss Janson to propose to her, and she had accepted me.

Then, when I had reason to hope that

everything was happily settled, from one moment to another they disappeared, leaving me in the lurch. My one hope now was that, when they got home, one or the other would write to my London address and explain this erratic conduct.

A few days later found me back at my lodgings in town. No letter from the Jansons. As week after week went by and no news came of my friends, a great bitterness filled my heart.

There could be no reason for this silence, I thought.

There were no considerations of social inferiority or inadequacy of fortune to render the match undesirable. We were neither of us, Edna or I, what could be termed very well off, but the financial advantage was decidedly on my side. It seemed to me to be one of those cases of rank injustice which occasionally wreck a man's life. And it was in this frame of mind that, months afterwards, I

received the extraordinary message from Mr Janson which gave rise to the indecision and conjectures which I have explained in the opening chapter.

Still, lingering affection not unmixed with a certain curiosity turned the balance, and I now thank Providence that it did.

I made up my mind I would go to Kinlochie, and having done so, the only course open to me was to delay my departure as little as possible.

The next evening found me on my journey northward. As I had anticipated, the journey was not a pleasant one. As far as Tain, indeed, there was no room for complaint. As I got farther north, however, there was frequent changing of trains; and wishing to get to my destination as quickly as possible, I had occasionally to spend several hours at some secluded station waiting for the connecting train. The

coaching was by far the pleasantest part of the journey. Now I had an opportunity of watching the wild scenery through which we passed, the expanses of moor and the rocky streams. But even this mode of travelling is fatiguing when prolonged many hours, and on this occasion we started at an early hour of the morning, only to arrive at the last stage of my journey late in the evening. Sitting on the top of the coach, I entered into conversation with an old man who seemed to know everything and everybody. From him I learned something of the opinion in which the Jansons were held in the country-side. That Edna was held in great esteem, especially by the poor, I was not surprised to hear. She had, indeed, told me of the work she did amongst the poor peasantry and the pleasure it gave her.

With regard to her father there appeared to be some uncertainty.

"He's a guid man enow," explained my old informant; "but he shouldna do it—he shouldna do it."

What he "shouldna do" referred to his strange goings on. The indignation at his erratic behaviour seemed to be heightened by Edna's popularity. He was blamed for causing her anxiety, and for neglecting to make her life and surroundings more pleasant. Perhaps this aspect of the question was the right one; but knowing Janson as I did, and his great affection for his daughter, I was loath to condemn him without a hearing. When, however, my old Scotch friend hinted that the object of Janson's mysterious journeys was "some lass o' no mickle account," it was my turn to become indignant, so certain was I from all I had seen and heard of Mr Janson that there existed no foundation for such a charge.

"Weel, maybe ye'll be singing another

tune when next we meet," said the old man, as we alighted at the door of the inn.

I was the only stranger to the landlord of the hotel, so he immediately identified me as being the intended guest of Mr Janson. The latter had sent word that, as the coach arrived so late, I should spend the night where I was. He, Janson, would come over the first thing in the morning and fetch me.

Although the landlord treated me with every consideration, I could not help remarking a lurking look of curiosity not unmixed with amusement. I should have liked to question the man, but on second thoughts decided it would not be good taste.

The landlord volunteered the information that Kinlochie was a goodish way, but that Mr Janson had good horses, and that we should do the distance in

less than two hours. He in no way referred to Mr Janson's peculiar habits, no doubt deeming it possible that I might be a relation or a great friend of Janson's.

I was hungry and tired, so was glad soon to partake of a genuine Scotch meal.

I retired to bed early. The next morning I was awakened with the intimation that Mr Janson had arrived. He sent me word not to hurry, as he was glad to have a little time to rest his horses.

I had been devoured by curiosity ever since I received his strange summons. It did not take me long to dress myself, and on going down-stairs I found Janson calmly awaiting me in the parlour. He greeted me with a smile, sad but cordial, and extending his misshapen hand—

"It was really good of you to come,"

he said, "really good. I knew you would overlook anything that may have occurred—for friendship's sake—for both our sakes."

It struck me that this was an unexpected greeting after what had happened, and I was unable to respond, contenting myself with the remark that as soon as I had breakfasted I should be ready to start.

Would he have some breakfast? To this he replied that Edna and he had risen early as they always did, and that they had breakfasted together. This casual mention of his daughter filled me with renewed hope. Janson was not so tactless as to mention any subject which would be disagreeable to one. I therefore took it that he considered I should be glad to meet his daughter. I could not but accept this as a good omen.

There was still a certain restraint

between us. It was difficult for me to know what to say or what to talk about. Of course in a dog-cart driving along country roads one is not called upon to keep up a running conversation. For some time, therefore, we rattled along, neither of us caring to take the initiative, except so far as was embodied in a casual remark.

I on my part expressed my admiration of the wildness of the surrounding country. Mr Janson pointed out the limits of the different properties, drawing attention to their great extent, the scarcity of vegetation, the rolling moors.

As we drew nearer the sea-coast the soil became sandier, and the road consequently heavier, and at the merest suggestion of a hill it was necessary to walk the horses.

It was on beginning the ascent of a more than usually long hill that Mr Janson vouchsafed what in parliamentary

parlance would be termed a "personal explanation."

"I see you are still annoyed at what occurred at Badenheim. You have every right to be, and I owe you an explanation."

Here I mumbled something about "no explanation required, but still——"

"I should like to give you some explanation, and as we have not very far to go now it is better I should speak before we reach Kinlochie—before you see Edna," he added, in a lower voice.

"You met my daughter and myself at a hotel. You knew nothing about us, but you took us as you found us.

"I am always touched at any show of friendship or disinterested kindness I may receive from a fellow-man. I am very sensitive on the subject of my personal defects. This, combined with certain other matters of which you will presently become cognisant, has led me

to shun society. In its turn society has shunned me. It is only by chance I make an acquaintance. When I do, and find that tact and superiority of character which does not deign to notice peculiarities of manner or appearance, it is to me a very pleasant surprise. This is what occurred in your case."

What could I do but bow and smile?

"Then, why on earth——" I began. But Janson interrupted me.

"I know what you would ask. Why did I not strive to keep the friendship I had been so lucky as to obtain? Why did I disappear so suddenly, leaving no word of excuse or explanation? My dear friend, you shall know all, but not to-day. Let me go on with my recital.

"I appreciated your honest friendship more than I can say. Then happened what was inevitable. You were thrown a great deal with my daughter. I encouraged the intimacy because I trusted

you, because your society made my daughter happy. Edna is all I have in the world to care for. I am devoted to her. Fate has decreed that I cannot make her happy. You would perhaps be inclined to think that it is pure selfishness on my part to keep a young girl of Edna's age cooped up in the wildest nook in Scotland. You will think differently when you have heard all I have to tell you, but not to-day. For years, ever since her poor mother's death, I have been engaged in a great work — the task of providing for my daughter's future happiness. Neither want of money nor any ordinary worldly consideration stood in my way. The obstacle I had to contend with *was almost of a supernatural character.* This also you shall know. Until I had achieved my one aim in life, it was better we should both lead a secluded existence. Indeed, for me it was neces-

sary I should live where we are—for Edna it was better.

"I hardly expected that in the few weeks we were at Badenheim more than ordinary friendship would spring up between you and her. Still, looking back now, I see it was inevitable. Nor would I have you think for a moment that I was in any way displeased so far as worldly considerations are concerned. I could not wish for a better fate for Edna than to be your wife.

"Yet I had not accomplished my task, and till I had done so it was better for Edna to remain single.

"It was after a more than usually anxious period of my endeavours to bring about a happy solution of the difficulties which stood in the way of Edna's independence that I decided to seek a change of scene. Edna, too, poor girl, had been fretting a good deal at what she must have put down almost to

madness on my part. She has told me she confided to you some of her cares and troubles in this respect."

"Perhaps," I replied; "but I can assure you never once did she speak with anything but tenderness and affection of you."

"No, poor child, her conduct throughout has been admirable. It is only lately I have been able to reveal part of the real state of affairs to her. But not all. Well, to continue where I left off. Broken down in health, we decided to spend a few weeks in Germany. There we met you. You know the rest.

"When poor Edna came home that evening and joyfully told me you had asked her to be your wife, it was as much as I could do to refrain from giving her my blessing then and there, and wishing you both all luck and happiness. Instead of which it was my duty to act like the most heartless of

individuals. To steel myself to do the very opposite of what I above all things wished. To do this Edna must know part of my gruesome secret, of which I had hitherto kept her in complete ignorance, as far as was compatible with the necessities of my own strange life.

"I think the atmosphere of gloom which circumstances had thrown around her young existence had to a certain extent prepared her mind for the shock. She did not seem so appalled as I had expected. It is true that even at that period I had begun to hope the ban might be removed from her, and I explained to her my reasons. She at once saw that it would not be honourable to accept your proposal, thus of her own freewill throwing away the one glimpse of happiness of her life.

"She asked how she should explain the apparent change in her feelings towards you. She was in favour of seeing

you, and, by reasoning, prove the impossibility of the marriage. I pointed out to her the inadvisability of the step. You would be sure to stick to your point in spite of all obstacles. What would you care for a little mystery, for an old-world legend? The only way was to go at once and leave you without word or letter. She could not make up her mind. There was a protracted struggle between duty and inclination. The former prevailed. The plans we had already made favoured our flight. I can imagine what you must have thought of our conduct. But you now see we were not actuated by wrong motives."

"I quite believe," I answered, "that your actions were influenced by the highest motives; but until you have revealed to me your secret, it is difficult for me to imagine anything, however dreadful, which could make the slightest

difference in my desire to obtain your daughter for my wife."

"I am, indeed, glad to hear you speak thus," cried Mr Janson. "In a few days things may come right—for you and her at all events. But let us leave further discussion to the proper time. Not now, not now."

By this time we had reached the top of the hill. Janson stopped to rest his horses a moment. We had a splendid view of the sea, which to-day was calm as a lake.

"There is Kinlochie," said Janson, pointing to a long low house which lay in a hollow of the cliffs quite close to the sea. It was a gloomy house, but not unpicturesque, possessing in its immediate vicinity the few trees discernible in the landscape.

"And there are the rocky islands I have heard so much about," I exclaimed.

"And of which you will hear so

much more," rejoined Janson, but sadly, not as a joke. These islands, or masses of rock, were of every size and shape, and stretched from the mainland away out of sight.

"You see them very well to-day," remarked Janson; "they look like islands, do they not? But they can hardly come under that category. They are in reality the prominent points of one great bed of rock. This sheet of rock is twisted and turned into every conceivable shape, sometimes rising, as you perceive, above the level of the sea, sometimes worn down to the level of the sandy sea-bed.

"Where the breakers have worn away some of the rougher excrescences a flat-bottomed duck-boat can find its way about in smooth water. Edna and I have had some fine days' line-fishing there. Farther out this becomes impossible. The danger to a craft of any size

is so great that even the fishing-smacks give these rocks a wide berth. There is only one man who knows every corner of them. I am that man."

I should have liked to question Mr Janson further, but at this moment he turned in at an open white gate.

"Here we are," he exclaimed, as a servant relieved him of the reins. At the same moment a girl's figure appeared at the top of the steps. It was Edna.

She greeted her father with as much affection as though he had been away for some time. Then, turning to me, she held out her hand, and said, with frank simplicity—

"I am so glad you have come."

CHAPTER V.

"If you will look after our friend," said Mr Janson after luncheon, addressing his daughter, "I will go and get some papers ready for him."

"And you," he said, turning to me, "will perhaps give me your time from dinner till you go to bed; for I have much to go through with you."

"I will do just as you wish," I replied.

"Then let us go out, and I will show you the place," said Edna. "It is too fine to stay indoors."

The garden immediately round the house consisted of lawns carefully kept,

flower-beds and narrow gravel paths. A very orthodox garden. A little way from the back of the house were kitchen-gardens and orchards. These we did not visit. I was more interested in that part of the grounds on the side towards the sea. Beyond the lawns appeared a dense mass of shrubbery, of rough growth intermingling with fir-plantations. Here and there patches of heather had been allowed to remain.

"Father would never allow this bit of ground to be turned into anything. The gardeners were always wanting to cut it up, but father would not hear of it. Personally I like it rough like this; don't you?"

"I do, indeed," I replied. "It is so placed as to give one the impression that the sea comes right up to the confines of this plantation. It does not, I suppose?"

"Well, not quite. At the end of this

ground there is a steep cliff, about half as high as the house. At the foot of this there is a wide beach. But certainly in very rough weather the sea washes up against the cliffs. Would you like to walk as far as the sea-shore?"

I replied that I should, and Edna led the way, turning abruptly towards the heath-covered hills on the left. "You see, what with the young firs and the heather, the rabbit-holes and the sand, it would be very hard work going straight down towards the sea. Then when you got to the cliff you would still have to turn off in this direction. For the only path which leads down to the sea-shore is this one, which you will see presently is naturally formed by a chine or ravine which runs at the foot of the hills."

"Yes, I see," I exclaimed, as we resumed the direction of the sea. "It

forms a very sheltered path, and one which one could not miss even in the dark, for there is no means of leaving it except by climbing up the sides."

Edna laughed, then suddenly grew serious.

"Exactly. Now you see how easy it is for my father to get away from the house at any moment. Has he told you all about it yet?"

"No, indeed," I replied; "but to-night I am to know everything. And then, I trust, Edna, that nothing may stand in our way."

"Oh! so do I," she exclaimed, with her usual frankness. "My only fear is that our happiness may be only attainable by the loss of my father's. He has told me a good deal, but it is impossible to conjecture what he will disclose to you to-night."

"It will no doubt depend upon us whether we allow him to sacrifice him-

self in any way, and of course we will not."

"I am so glad to hear you say that. And yet I feel that in some way our future must affect him. It seemed such a struggle for him to make up his mind that we should meet again. For some time after we got home he would not refer to you or to anything which had occurred in connection with you. Then he saw me fretting. His absences began again. When at home he would constantly ask me whether I really cared for you. Once or twice he upbraided me for wishing to leave him. You must understand that until we went abroad and you met us, I had no wish to alter my state of life. We were happy enough together, my father and I. Of course that dreadful mystery cast a certain gloom over one's existence. As you know to be the case, my father has told me a great deal of

what this mystery consists in. Were it not that I have already argued the point with you when we were abroad, pointing out the disadvantages to yourself in the arrangement, I should still urge you to give up all idea of marrying me. But you were so stanch notwithstanding everything that I will not go on fighting against happiness if it is to be."

I was about to answer, protesting against any further objections to our arrangements, when Edna exclaimed—

"Here is my seat. Does it not look as though it had been made on purpose?"

We had now emerged on to the beach, and Edna was pointing to a natural arrangement of rocks which formed a low bench with higher rocks forming a back.

"Let us sit down and watch the sea while we talk. You caught a glimpse

of the islands, I suppose, from the top of the hill?"

"Yes, indeed I did; what an extraordinary conformation! From the high land it looked as though we could step from one rock to the other and go right out to sea."

"Practically we can, for they are all joined together—all one mass. But if you wanted to go from one point which appears above the water to the next, you would have to swim a good long way. The people here call them the 'Moving Rocks,' because in rough weather first one point appears and then the other, giving one the impression that the same rock has swum under water and come up in a fresh place."

"I see that the arrangement of the rocks alters somewhat farther to sea," I remarked, "or so it seems."

"That is so," replied Edna; "the

rocks divide into two arms as it were, leaving a smooth bit of water in the middle. And in that smooth stretch of water I once saw a very wonderful thing. I suppose I may tell you now——" and then she paused.

"Oh, please do," I ejaculated; "you know that now it matters little what you tell me, seeing that this very night I shall know all."

"Very well, I will tell you. Once my father had been very quiet, and had not left home for much longer than usual. I had been ill—not very, I confess, but a little feverish, and uncomfortable enough to make it an excuse to beg my father not to leave me alone. He, good soul, always does what I ask him to. He said, 'I will stay as long as I can.' Well, one evening, just at the moment when the light was leaving us and it was too dark to read or sew, I was looking out across the sea, watch-

ing the last pink tinge of the sun upon the quiet ocean. Suddenly the smooth water there, between the lines of rock, became agitated, and although it was too far for me to see *by what*, I could see that *something* was splashing about making the water white and frothy. Of course I attributed the disturbance to large fish, for sharks and even whales have been known to come into our bay, but usually when there has been rough weather—not when the sea is as smooth as a mill-pond.

"Curiosity prompted me to run and get an old telescope we kept in the hall.

"On the way up-stairs I met some one coming hurriedly down. It was my father, dressed in that peculiar costume I have described to you.

"'My darling,' he said hurriedly, and in a voice almost of despair, 'I have lingered too long; I must leave you, but only for a little while.' With that

he rushed on and ran out of the house. In his haste he did not perceive that I was carrying the telescope, or I now feel sure he would not have allowed me to make use of it. As it was, I ran up to my room again, and hastily adjusted the glass to the proper focus.

"It was now getting dark, and it was only the shimmer on the sea which enabled me to distinguish anything. At first the commotion appeared to be caused by a quantity of shapeless, greenish masses; gradually, however, my eyes became accustomed to the strange light, and I saw that whatever the monsters were who were lashing the waters, their heads and shoulders were those of men.

"The beings appeared to be systematically beating the waters with their arms, as though their object were to work the element into fury. All details were blurred by the increasing darkness. I

had seen enough to know more than I had ever discovered before. As the last ray of light died away, a long shout—a kind of unearthly bellowing—seemed to float across the sea. Then all was still. I turned away from the window with a heavy heart, for I felt sure my father's mysterious behaviour was in some way connected with these uncouth beings, and I feared some harm might befall him."

"And was this the only occasion on which you caught a glimpse of the uncanny people?" I inquired.

"The only one. A few days later my father turned up as usual. But he never stayed at home quite so long."

"It is evident that the man Mrs Gregory found talking to your father amongst the rocks was one of these. What is the connection between him and them? I wonder, I wonder."

"Well, you will know everything

to-night, and my father did not wish me to talk to you very much on the subject, as he will tell you far better and more completely. Indeed, I doubt whether he has told me all the details of the story. These he will unfold to you. And now," she added, "let us talk of pleasanter things. If father reads half his old papers to you, it will occupy you far into the night. I am so afraid you will begin to regret ever having met us. However, we must hope that this is the beginning of the end of all this mystery and trouble, and that our future may be as happy and free from secrets as I feel it will be."

And, turning to wend our way down the now dark ravine which led up to the house, we entered upon the final discussion of a future state of things which, by my undertaking to the reader, I am debarred from reproducing.

CHAPTER VI.

"I HAVE brought you into this room," began Janson, "although it is by no means the most comfortable in the house. It is what Edna calls my 'museum.' Poor girl! At one time she used to think the collection of odd things you see all round were the result of a hobby, a fad, a mania. She was partly right. But what she never knew till I told her was that these were the relics of a race from which I am sprung. Let me explain some of them to you, or you will not be able to give me your undivided attention. See these snow-shoes, for instance. In structure they

are not unlike those in use amongst the Esquimaux, the Lapps, the Finns. Yet notice the socks made of the skin of the common seal — not the fur-seal. See how wide they are. Narrow at the heel — almost fan-shaped at the toe. My ancestors had to wear them like this because their feet were webbed. Whoever saw gloves like these? The wrists would fit a young lady's. Yet the length is enormous. These peculiarities are, alas! reproduced in myself. You have seen my foot—by accident. It is webbed. Look at these hands, these deformed arms. Do you wonder that I have shunned society? Of course by intermarriage with ordinary beings these defects have become modified. In the old *Fiskmann* race, for such was the generic name of the tribe to which I can trace my origin, these traits were much more marked. You will see it in everything they used.

Look at these paddles for propelling their canoes. The stems are scooped out for their hands, the oars bent because they had no elbows.

"There I have the advantage of them," added Janson with a smile, half sad, half satirical; "I have elbows."

"They were a race who depended almost entirely on the pursuit of fishing," he continued; "hence their appellation, Fiskmann, or Fishman. You will see that almost everything I collected relates to fishing. Here we have harpoons, spears for spearing fish, hooks made of fish-bone, knives, forks, spoons, bowls,—all are furnished with a contrivance to suit their fin-like hands.

"Their clothes appear to have been of the scantiest. The skin of the common seal seems to have supplied most of their wants in this respect. These somewhat lighter garments, probably for the women and children,

were manufactured from coarse grass or phormium which grew on the shore. From all accounts they were indeed a hardy race."

"And how did you manage to collect all the information you appear to possess in such abundance?" I inquired; for although I had gradually been getting an inkling of the truth, I was overwhelmed with surprise now I was face to face with the secret of Janson's life.

"Some of it," he replied, "has been handed down from father to son, but until I really took up the question and devoted my life to its elucidation the details were scanty. When I was old enough to go through the papers left me by my father, for both he and my mother died while I was very young, I discovered scraps of old print and manuscript relating to a strange race. These were annotated by several of my ancestors, and subsequently by my father himself.

Have you seen enough of my collection to satisfy your curiosity in that direction?"

"I think," I replied, "I am sufficiently convinced that a strange people existed, probably in the far north, allied to the Esquimaux or some such race; that they lived chiefly by fishing, as is demonstrated by the various objects you have shown me; that either as the result of ages spent in this pursuit, or by interbreeding with some lower caste of humanity, they had acquired limbs adapted to their mode of life; that——"

"Ah! there you get to the beginning of things as far as I know them," Janson interrupted. "If you like we will begin examining these papers. Make yourself comfortable in that arm-chair," he continued; "light your pipe, and I will mix you a drink. I will then commence reading you those portions

of the manuscripts which bear on the history of this uncanny race, and will fill up the hiatus where necessary with my own explanations.

. . . . . .

"Amongst my father's papers I found by far the oldest allusions to the existence of the Fiskmann race. He evidently had collected those not handed down to him by his father with a far different object than mine in adding to them. His chief idea was evidently to trace the origin of the Fiskmanns. Were they originally animals, some cross between fishes or seals and a human being? or were they rather a deteriorated caste of a superior race? For in certain respects the Fiskmanns were superior to the more Northern races. From the earliest scraps of manuscript of which I came into possession in that way, it would seem that the Fiskmanns claimed to be

prophets, or to have amongst them one — who is always referred to as *Gubbe* (the old man)—who practised the art of divination.

"Indeed it would seem to be this supposed gift which later proved the destruction of the race.

"These three small sheets of parchment, which look more like cowhide, are evidently part of the description of the wonderful cure of a burgomaster of the Norwegian town of Storjem.

"Notice this passage :—

"'And these remedies failing' (I translate literally from the somewhat obsolete Norwegian dialect), 'he was to journey to that part of the coast where dwelt the Fiskmann. And he should bear with him presents for the people. Gold ornaments for the women, and knives and steel instruments for the men. And he should beg humbly that the Gubbe should

advise him, telling him how he should rid him of his disease.' (Here follows a somewhat tedious description of the symptoms of that disease, which appears to have been a sort of scurvy.) Geyer appears to have done as he was told, and was allowed to approach the Gubbe, who offered to give him the remedies he sought if Geyer would present him with his 'great boots like stockings wherewith he walked in the sea and was dry.' The Gubbe must have been fond of a practical joke, for it would seem that the Fiskmann dwelt amongst the rocks, 'being everywhere surrounded by water,' and poor Geyer, who had probably provided himself with the long boots for the occasion, 'sate him down and drew off the boots forthwith and gave them to the Gubbe.' Then a rather curious thing took place. The old seer tried to put on the boots, 'but his feet being of a

different shape to the Norseman's, he could in nowise put them on himself.' This seems to point to the odd formation of the feet.

"The Gubbe was a good-natured old man, for he gave back the boots; nor would he accept any present, but gave Geyer certain unguents, and promised him he shall shortly be cured. And sure enough he returned to his friend with a skin 'like unto a new-born babe's.'

"In these older documents there is an occasional resemblance to stories of the Scriptures. In fact it is difficult to tell where tradition begins and true history ends.

"In the next MS. there is the tale of a king who is constantly at war with another king. He undertakes a journey to consult the Gubbe, desirous of knowing whether he will vanquish his enemy; for he would fain marry Hedwig, whoever that may be, and he

will not do so till he is at peace and prosperous. The Gubbe receives him with kindness, and tells him that 'three times he must fight and three times be vanquished.' But the fourth time he will be victorious, and may take Hedwig and be happy. And this takes place, and there are descriptions of the battles which remind one of tales of the Cid. And when the king is in possession of his enemy's lands besides his own, he sends presents to the Fiskmänne, with decrees that his people should not molest them.

"It is about this time—that is, in the twelfth century, no earlier—that there appear to be signs of the Fiskmann beginning to be in disfavour with the rest of humanity.

"The Gubbe, who seems to be the same through all ages, has apparently become intoxicated with success and the favour of kings.

"Having obtained grants and privileges from certain monarchs, he seeks to maintain the rights of his people from the succeeding sovereigns.

"Instead of the benevolent Gubbe who returned Geyer his top-boots and cured him of a loathsome disease without remuneration, we find him described as a 'lawless depredator, swimming with his people far out to sea, drawing under water the boats of those who traded in the skins of seals, taking their booty from them.'

"His followers are referred to as 'that loathsome people, more like fish than men, a terror to all the coast.'

"From this period they become the butt of persecution.

"They are driven from their homes amongst the rocky stones.

"They are proclaimed outlaws.

"Whenever one is caught, and this, owing to their knowledge of the danger-

ous reefs, is not often, he is tortured, burnt at the stake, or killed like a dog. For the most succinct history of the decline of the Gubbe and his people we are indebted to a Spaniard.

"In 1417, at the beginning of the century, the end of which, thanks to the spirit of enterprise of the Spanish people, witnessed the discovery of America, a Spaniard of the sonorous name of Señor Don Isidoro Sanchez, Marques de Villamanca, obtained from his Government three well-equipped vessels with which to explore the northern seas.

"On his arrival in Norway an expedition was about to start to dislodge the unfortunate Fiskmänne from some rocky islands where they had taken refuge. Don Isidoro offered to join the expedition, and suggested the formation of a line of vessels which should drive the Fiskmann

south, cutting off their retreat if attempting to reach the rocky shores, and compelling them to take to the open seas.

"The idea bears some analogy to the game of fox and geese on our draught-board, and is not unlike the celebrated line which was organised to drive the Red Indians of America towards the west, and which resulted in their almost entire extirpation.

"Thirty vessels of all sizes and description, amongst which figure Don Isidoro's three, assembled off the southern coast of Norway at a point opposite the islands where the Fiskmänne were supposed to dwell. These creatures had chosen some outlying rocks so dangerous to navigation as to make it impossible for a vessel of any size to approach within a certain distance.

"The line of ships arrived near these rocks, but was at a loss how to proceed.

They lowered their small boats, but even these could not get near the centre of the rocks, which form an impregnable fortress. They descried the Fiskmänne, and occasionally shot one or two, but that is all. On their side they did not get off scot-free. The half-monsters seemed to spring up unexpectedly round the small boats whenever such a craft was momentarily isolated. They hung on to one side of the boat whilst the stronger of them battled with the crew, dragging them out and drawing them under water.

"Still the hard skin of the Fiskmann was often pierced by a spike or cleft by a hatchet. A number of these weird people found a watery grave.

"Thus the battle went on, and the shades of evening were gathering round, when of a sudden a sailor on the look-out sang out that he descried a man swimming out towards them from the

shore. The Fiskmänne, who had constantly been gazing in that direction, now evinced the greatest excitement. They were evidently expecting the return of this Fiskmann, who had no doubt gone to the mainland to find out what he could of the intentions of the enemy. For although the tribe by its depredations had incurred the anger of those who were affected, it still counted a number of allies, some of whom would no doubt keep the Fiskmänne informed of any fresh movement against them.

"The strife was momentarily suspended, both Fiskmänne and assailants pausing to watch the approach of the swimmer. As he came nearer the Fiskmänne raised a great bellowing mingled with cries of 'Jan! Jan!' and the swimmer was recognised as the most dreaded leader of the piratical Fiskmänne.

"A shot from a matchlock was fired

at him, and he raised himself half out of the water to see which course to take to escape being intercepted. His chances were scanty. The belligerent party had for the moment entirely abandoned the remainder of the Fiskmänne tribe in order to secure the new-comer.

"Jan's name was a byeword along the whole coast.

"While all interest was diverted into this new channel a clever move was made by the Fiskmänne.

"The Marques de Villamanca thus describes it :—

"'I was some little way behind the fleet, farther out to sea. It grieved me that so many armed men should be pitted against one unfortunate. Of a sudden something huge appeared upon a prominence in the centre of the Fishmen's sea-camp. From descriptions I had received I recognised the far-famed

Gubbe—the old man, the sorcerer, the seer. He passed almost unnoticed in the confusion among the fleet who are in pursuit of the luckless pirate. He assembled his people for a brief moment by the blowing of a horn. They appeared on all sides, many as it were from the depths of the sea. They remained silent and attentive while he addressed a few words to them in a voice not loud but far-reaching.

"'With a grand gesture and a blessing he dismissed them, and they disappeared amongst their rock-dwellings. A few moments later they appeared to be joined by many others, women and children, and there was a rushing of the waters as they swam well covered by the wave.

"'They had left their refuge for the open seas.

"'The Gubbe remained on his rock a few moments, then slowly and with-

out fear descended into unknown caverns.

"'At the same time a shout was raised by the sailors of the fleet. After a desperate resistance Jan was disabled, and his huge form lay bound at the bottom of a boat.'

"It would appear that Jan was not so easily taken prisoner, and was only overwhelmed by the number of his assailants, of whom he disabled several before he himself was knocked insensible by a blow from a truncheon.

"He had witnessed the exodus of his kinsmen, and this desertion probably disheartened him. It was then he allowed himself to fall a prey to his enemies."

CHAPTER VII.

"When Jan came to, he speedily remembered all that had occurred, and cursed his tribe for deserting him.

"A consultation was held as to what should be the fate of the chieftain.

"The Marquis decided the question. Noticing the bitter feeling aroused against his kinsmen in Jan's breast, he gave him two alternatives. If he would show the attacking party the way into the Fiskmänne's last refuge and deliver to his captors the treasures supposed to be there accumulated, assisting them to the best of his ability to discover the places of concealment

of his people, then Jan should not only be free to come or go as he pleased, but should also be guaranteed sufficient money to enable him to live in comparative ease without the necessity of rapine and pillage.

"The other alternative, needless to say, was torture and death.

"In his frame of mind, small wonder that Jan had little hesitation in choosing the former offer. But how should he lead them to the rock-dwellings, for there was but one entrance, and only men as much at home in the water as out of it could attempt to pass through it? Jan explained that in order to effect an entry it was necessary to dive some twenty feet below the surface of the ocean; that a narrow entrance to a tunnel was then discovered by those who knew the secret. The moment the entrance was passed the level of the tunnel ascended, so that the diver

immediately regained fresh air. The rest was easy. Half-a-dozen stalwart youths volunteered for the task. I find it necessary," said Mr Janson, interrupting himself, "to abridge the Marquis's recital as much as possible. Presently I have my own story to tell, and I fear you may be wearied."

Against this charge I protested, and indeed with truth; for the history I was listening to was far too curious to admit of fatigue, even if not so nearly affecting my own interests.

"Well," resumed Janson, "a few young men volunteer to accompany Jan.

"They strip themselves to the waist, arming themselves only with the knives which they carry in their leather belts.

"A boat is told off to convey them with Jan to the spot below which lies the entrance to the Fiskmänne's home.

Arrived at a point on the side of the rocks remote from the mainland, and apparently two hundred yards from the rocks themselves, Jan gives them final directions. He is the first to take a header off the bows of the boat. He is quickly followed by the six young men. The occupants of the motley fleet look on in breathless interest. Some minutes elapse, and no sign of the little band. Their friends begin to fear they have fallen victims to treachery. But right away among the rocks a great splashing is heard. In the midst of the commotion can be discerned the colossal form of the Gubbe.

"He is being closely pursued by the six sailors and Jan, but he easily eludes them.

"With wonderful agility the Gubbe scales the highest rocks, then turning round on his pursuers, raises his arms.

"The bellowing sound already de-

scribed reaches the spectators in the boats. Then they hear no more, but the Gubbe by his gestures appears to be addressing his foes.

"We afterwards learn that he was, in reality, putting a curse on Jan—and the nature of his curse is this :—

"'Jan, because of thy treachery, in that thou wouldst betray thy people into the hands of the enemy, thou shalt be a wanderer, nor ever return to thy people, thou and those that come after thee. And the first-born shall live in sorrow and die childless. Go, the Gubbe curses thee.'

"I want you to take particular notice of this curse," remarked Janson, "for it unfortunately concerns me very closely.

"The sailors seem to have been but little impressed by the Gubbe's wrath. One of them, indeed, hurls his knife at the old man, but the weapon glances off the Gubbe's skin as though he had worn

armour, and the aged seer plunges again into the waves not to reappear. Jan is much grieved at the curse put upon him by the high priest of the Fiskmänne, and will not take any part in the sacking of the cave-dwellings. He tells the sailors where to find the Gubbe's sanctum, informing them at the same time that the Gubbe has a chart which was to be given to his people showing where the new place was to be found to which they might flee. For they had information of the proposed attack on them from the earliest moment. Not a Fiskmann is found in the whole rock-village. Nor have these queer people left anything of value. A few curious implements or articles of clothing are collected by the looters. The supposed treasure has disappeared. Down a dark passage they find their way to the Gubbe's sanctum. Again they are disappointed. The only thing they find

worth taking away is a small flat box found on the ground.

"Here it is," said Janson, taking from amongst his papers what appeared to be a small pocket-book bound in parchment. "On examining it more closely, I found it to be a very carefully made little case having a close-fitting lid. So tightly did this lid shut into the lower portion of the case that the whole would be air-tight or water-tight. A minute hole in the lid might have been taken for the socket of a handle of some sort, had there not been a tab by which this could more conveniently be lifted. Inside, lying at the bottom, was a small map, which seemed to be incomplete. That is to say, there were letters indicating the north, south, east, and west, and on the carefully drawn outline a portion of, probably, the south-west Norwegian coast. The rest appeared to be all sea, at all events it was blank."

"Not a reliable chart to sail by," I remarked, as I handed it back to Janson.

"The Gubbe might have turned out something better than that."

"You think so now, but when I come to my own story you will see what an ingenious device it is.

"To return to the Marquis's narrative.

"Jan led his companions back to the boat. Since the Gubbe's curse he was exceeding sorrowful, and evinced not the slightest desire to leave his captors.

"Don Isidoro and his mixed fleet immediately returned to the coast, taking Jan with them.

"On landing in Norway the Spaniard was received with great honours, was given a high rank in the Norwegian navy, and decorations, and was highly praised for capturing the pirate Jan and driving his people from their retreat. The Marquis's wishes with regard to Jan were carried out, and he was in-

stalled in a fishing village and given a small pension.

"At this juncture, I am sorry to say, the Marquis's account of the Fiskmänne, the only succinct narrative I have ever been able to obtain, comes to an end.

"Don Isidoro continues his explorations in Arctic regions, and no more mention is made of Jan the Fiskmann.

"For the remainder of his history I have to depend on a collection of fragments.

"But before I go any further I wish to tell you one thing which perhaps you have already guessed.

"*From this Jan the pirate I am descended.*

"I have sufficient evidence to prove that.

"My ancestors collected many proofs. My father and I have added to them. Jan, whose daring exploits in the past endeared him to the most respectable

of womenkind, speedily found a Norwegian wife in the daughter of a well-to-do farmer.

"The blow which delivered him into the hands of his captors seems to have knocked a lot of nonsense out of him. His wife's money purchased a substantial homestead near Fœde, a village on the coast not far from the Fiskmänne's old abode. Jan's pension helped to keep it up.

"Two sons were born to Jan and his wife—Jan, hereafter known as Jan Janson, and Erik.

"Erik, from what little I can find out about him, was a man of respectable habits holding small positions in the State.

"Jan, on the contrary, took to roving, was fond of the sea. After many adventures of a not very creditable character, he ran off to sea and was not heard of again.

"The curse of the Gubbe probably wrought its fell work.

"Erik married and had a numerous family. His eldest son also turned out badly. Following in the footsteps of his uncle he took to roving habits, and one day left Fœde never to return.

"In each case we learn more of the quieter members of the family, as they usually obtain unimportant situations. Thus a question is raised whether Hugo, Erik's second son, is entitled to serve the Fœde Council, being descended from the Fiskmänne, who were outlaws. It thus comes out that our old friend Jan Janson had been naturalised Norwegian, entitling his family to all the privileges of that nationality. These references to obscure people are necessarily tedious, and we may dismiss them. What I wish to point out is the uniform way in which all the eldest sons of Jan Janson's descendants of

whom we have been able to obtain any record come to nothing, whereas the second or third sons grow up comparatively free from vice, and become respectable citizens. It was one of these whom, two hundred years ago, we find purchasing a business in London where he comes to settle, and it is about this time that the small family estate at Fœde is sold.

"Under the name of John Janson he carries on the business of an oil-merchant, with a warehouse in Holborn.

"To him we are indebted for many documents throwing light on our genealogy, as also for the moderate fortune which has been somewhat increased by his successors.

"Amongst his private correspondence there are several letters from his elder brother.

"In one, this brother — Cedrik by

name — tells of a successful journey. Somewhat less wild than the first-born of his ancestors, he has undertaken the transport of grain from Norway to England. In giving his brother a lively account of his adventures and the smart way in which he managed the journey, he uses this phrase, 'So you see, dear brother, the Gubbe did not get me this time.'

"But his exultation is shortlived. Later on we find a letter describing his death. The news had probably preceded it by some little time. It appears to be written by a great friend of Cedrik's, probably a partner. It is signed, rather appropriately, 'G Sturm.'

"'When the storm was at its highest,' he writes, 'Cedrik would not take my advice and stay below. We all told him his was the most precious life on board, but he heeded us not. He walked right forward, and standing on

the bows, bade us leave him and see to ourselves. I remained amid-ships watching my friend. Of a sudden the sea seemed lashed up as it were by a whirlpool. "Cedrik! Cedrik!" I shouted, "come aft, come aft." But Cedrik, looking over into the sea, seemed fascinated. Of a sudden, before I could move to stop him, he swung one leg over the top-rail. The next he was gone. And it seemed as though the ocean were appeased, for, as he fell overboard, there was a great splashing as of a thousand whales. But now the wind fell and danger was past.'

"My scraps of information," resumed Janson, "all tend the same way. The eldest son escapes for a time—rarely marries, never leaves children. John Janson—who, as I told you, settled in London and became naturalised English—had two sons. The second of them was my great-grandfather, an optician of

some repute, whose telescopic lenses are still famous.

"His elder brother was said to have been murdered on the sands near Stornoway. The suspected murderer was arrested, and in his defence told the following wonderful tale:—

"'I knew Janson for several years. It is not true that we both desired to marry Miss Mary Gorman. I have only met that lady half-a-dozen times. It is true that I owed Janson money. He had asked me to repay him, but we had no words about it. It was Janson who asked me to go with him to Stornoway. He told me he felt impelled to go there, and wished for a companion. Had I not been on the best terms with Janson, I should not have accompanied him to Stornoway. It was very inconvenient to me. We arrived there at a quarter-past four. I wished to stay at our lodging, but Janson said he must

go for a walk on the sea-shore. He begged me to go with him. When on the sands he insisted on walking rapidly, I had to ask him to walk slower. I have a stiff knee.

"'When within two or three hundred yards of the Black Rocks, so called, we distinctly heard a man's voice calling "Jan! Jan!" his name. The sound proceeded from the neighbourhood of the rocks. I could not say how many times the call was repeated. Janson began running towards the rocks. I shouted to him to stop and I would go with him. He continued running. When close to the rocks he paused a moment. Then he scaled the nearest one, which is high and steep, forming a kind of barrier across the beach. I hurried after him. Just as I got to the rocks I heard a scuffle going on behind them and a splashing of water. There was also a sort of growling and panting.

I tried to climb up the rocks but could not, and the sea was washing over them. The next moment Janson's body was literally hurled over my head as though thrown up by an explosion. Then there was a rushing out to sea, and something seemed to swim away. It was too dark for me to see. It might have been a man. My attention was called to Janson, who was making a rattling noise in his throat as though he were choking. I hastily bent over him and tried to undo his collar. It was at this moment the coastguard came in sight. By the time he got up to us Janson was dead.'

"This man was acquitted.

"The few extracts I have chosen from the bundle will give you some idea of the people from whom I am descended. My grandfather and father were both solid London City men. Their elder brothers came to an un-

timely end. I never knew my grand-uncle. I was too young when he died. Destined for the law, he preferred a life of adventure to a sedentary one. A South American state being at that time in a state of insurrection, Oscar Janson undertook to render assistance to the insurgents. Commanding his own cutter, he would run the blockade, bringing news and food to a beleaguered town, or enabling some of the besieged to escape. From that expedition Oscar Janson never returned. His cutter was seized by the Government party and he was shot. My uncle was the only one of the line of elder sons who met with a more prosaical death, poor fellow. He was drowned bathing."

CHAPTER VIII.

"It now only remains for me to relate to you my personal experiences.

"First let us fill our glasses and you your pipe.

"What do you think of all you have heard?"

"What can I think," I answered Janson, "except that it is the most wonderful narrative I ever listened to. I should like to ask you one or two questions if I might."

"By all means. For Edna's sake I would wish you to know as much as possible of our past history, that you may always be prepared for any emergency."

"Well then," I said, "how is it that no elder brother of the family ever took notice of the fate to which they were destined?"

"But they did so," returned Janson. "Is it not sufficient proof that not one of them ever married or settled down? At least we have no record of their ever even endeavouring to do so."

"No, that is true," I replied; "but did none of them ever try to reverse the verdict of fate?"

"Apparently not," rejoined Janson. "In fact I am the first who appears to have taken up the cudgels in defence of the family primogeniture."

"How so?" I inquired.

"In this way," he replied.

"*I am the only son of my father.*

"When I was still a mere youth, the collection of papers referring to this skeleton in our cupboard fell into my hands. At the death of my father,

which occurred when I was but twenty-one years of age, I recognised the fact that with me the family would become extinct.

"At first I felt no inclination to fight against the hand of fate. There was no particular reason why the family should continue. Born to sorrow, was it not better that it should be wiped out altogether? But the spirit of adventure which the elder sons of our family have ever possessed was in my veins. My mother by her jointure was well provided for. I had come into possession of the substantial fortune, which had increased with every generation of our family. I recognised the fact that the first step to be taken to overthrow the power of the malediction which seemed to pursue us was to marry.

"I was thrown together with a young girl whom my mother had more or less adopted. She too was called Edna, and

was the mother of your affianced bride. From the first I had reposed entire confidence in her, and made her acquainted with the family history, and had constantly asked her advice.

"She promised to assist me in every way in her power, and ever took the keenest interest in the unravelling of the mystery.

"I decided that this was the woman who must be my wife, and I proposed to her. She, good creature, overlooking the ungainliness of my figure, accepted me, and we were speedily married.

"I set to work to acquire fuller details of the strange Fiskmann race. My wife and I decided that it would be imprudent for me to undertake a sea-journey. It was always by the sea that we had perished.

"My only course was to employ agents. This I did with considerable success, getting hold of many valuable

clues, amongst others the history of the Spanish Marquis. We had always been brought up with a knowledge of Scandinavian languages. Owing probably to our extraction, these came naturally to us.

"I endeavoured to improve myself, becoming not only fluent in the use of these languages, but acquainted with many dialects.

"From the Fiskmann papers in my possession I noted modifications which went to form their dialect.

"To me the great question at issue was, 'When the Fiskmänne were half of them destroyed and driven from the Norwegian coast, and afterwards from the rocky islands in which they had taken refuge, what became of them?'

"Did the remnant of the tribe gradually die off—did they wander from place to place finding no rest? Or what? In order to solve this problem, the only

means which came to my mind was to seek for the chart which had fallen into the hands of their pursuers under the leadership of Don Isidoro.

"I was fortunate enough to discover a descendant of the Spanish Marquis. With him I entered into correspondence, and with native courtesy he presented me with many knick-knacks handed down to him from his ancestor. These assisted me a great deal, but the chart was not amongst them.

"It was this gentleman's impression that he had heard that the chart had been retained by Jan Janson, but that it had subsequently been sold to a Norwegian resident in Fœde.

"It was by the merest chance that this important object came into my possession.

"Edna has, I believe, told you about my meeting with the Esquimaux in London. This band of Norsemen were

in reality a professional travelling troupe, a mixed lot, of whom but few were real Esquimaux.

"Having occasion to visit with Edna the exhibition in which they were taking part, my notice was drawn to a member of the troupe whose hands and feet were misshapen, and bore a strong resemblance to the Fiskmann characteristics and to my own.

"I confess that my first feeling was one akin to alarm. It seemed as though, after years of security from the Fiskmann influence, I was at last to be discovered by them. Indeed this was to be the case as far as this individual was concerned. The moment he caught sight of me he seemed not to be able to take his eyes off me. But his scrutiny was not an ill-natured one. Presently, when he was disengaged, he approached the barrier which surrounded the enclosure in the

exhibition grounds, and coming close to me, addressed me in a dialect in which I could trace some words which also appeared in the Fiskmann papers.

"'You are of the same tribe as myself,' he said.

"'How do you know?' I asked.

"'By your hands and feet,' he replied, 'and by your hair.'

"'You are right,' I replied. 'I thought no other one existed.'

"'Oh yes, they do,' was the Fiskmann's rejoinder. 'I have met several in my travels, and there is a belief amongst those it concerns that the remnant of the tribe still exists.'

"'I am deeply interested in this matter,' I interrupted; 'can I return and see you after the exhibition is over?'

"'Certainly,' he replied; 'I shall have much pleasure in telling you all I know, and comparing notes with you. I am a poor man, can you spare a few shillings?'

"With alacrity I drew a sovereign from my pocket, delighted to learn that he was fond of money, for in this way I could draw from him all he knew. I then drove home with Edna, and at the appointed hour returned to the exhibition.

"Rudolf, as I afterwards found him to be named, was waiting for me at the entrance. He led me to a kind of canteen erected for the use of the persons connected with the exhibition, and invited me to take possession with him of a corner where we should not be disturbed.

"'If we are to talk, shall we not have a drink?' he asked. 'I like whisky.'

"Fond of money and whisky. With some satisfaction I made a mental note of his weaknesses, at the same time telling him to order a bottle and two glasses.

"Rudolf only made a casual remark

or two as to his having at once spotted me in the crowd, but after a few glasses of his favourite liquid his tongue was loosened.

"He insisted on telling me his history. This I must curtail, as it is getting late, and I have still much to say.

"His father was the direct descendant of the Fiskmann tribe before they were driven from the coast. He had heard all about the ban, and supposed that, as I was interested in the question, I must be a 'second son Janson,' as it appears they are called.

"I did not think it worth while satisfying his curiosity, so made an evasive answer.

"'There are very few who have the old Fiskmann hands and feet as strongly marked as yours and mine,' he said. 'The race is so mixed now. Sometimes it happens that a child is born with such members, but it rarely lives.'

"'Have you not found this deformity to stand greatly in your way?' I asked, for with me it had been a constant source of bitterness. At school I was the butt of all the bullies. As a young man a dozen nicknames were given me, and even now I cannot travel or move without attracting attention.

"'Not a bit,' was Rudolf's reply. 'It has helped me in the show business. I first of all went in for the swimming business, and gave representations all over Europe. Then I speculated, losing all the money I had made, and when I got a chance, joined the present troupe.'

"'Have you many relics of the tribe?' I asked,—'peculiar utensils in use amongst the old Fiskmänne? I have a good collection, but I am always glad to add to the number.'

"'I had a good many interesting things—spears, forks, bowls of whale-bone, and so on. When I went into

the show business I sold them nearly all to the proprietor of Lyndal.'

"'What is Lyndal?' I asked.

"'Lyndal,' he said, 'is the old Fiskmann house near Fœde which was sold by a descendant of Jan the pirate's. The owner took over nearly all the Fiskmann things it contained. These have remained there ever since. When I went to ask Murren, the present owner of Lyndal, to buy the articles which had come into my possession, he showed me a room full of things. Many of them, indeed, I recognised as being of the Fiskmann people; but many which Murren had added to these were of the Esquimaux and Finnish origin. This I knew, having travelled much.'

"'There is one thing I desire much to possess. I wonder whether it is amongst Murren's collection.'

"'What is that?' asked Rudolf.

"'It is the plan or chart which the

Gubbe left behind him when the Fiskmänne were dislodged from their last refuge.'

"'Ah!' exclaimed Rudolf, 'the chart which the Gubbe left behind, hoping that Jan would after all follow the others. They say Jan was the Gubbe's son, but that is not possible, for the old man was hundreds of years old, and nobody remembered him a young man. A marvellous being he was who could cure diseases, see into the future, and whose skin was proof against spear or dagger.

"'Jan either didn't care to use the secret or did not know how to, for he had been away watching the movements of the expedition which was to be sent against them. Yet he asked leave to keep the thing, and as no one could make anything of it, it was handed over to him. You wish to have it? Do you then think you will discover where the

Fiskmänne went to? You will be disappointed if you do, for it is just a map of part of the Norwegian coast, and all the rest is sea without sign or mark upon it. There may be some key to it, but that was never found. Yes, I have seen that, and it was with the Murren collection.'

"I was overwhelmed with this piece of intelligence. I had always had a fixed idea that if I could find this map I should make something of it. However, I said nothing more in case Rudolf should endeavour to interfere with my plans. Soon after receiving this information I said good night to my companion, promising to return and have further conversation with him."

CHAPTER IX.

"On returning home I immediately sat down and wrote to Herrn Murren, at Lyndal, near Fœde. I had repeated the three words Murren, Lyndal, Fœde, so often that I was sure I had them correct.

"The letter I posted at once, and had nothing to do but to await the answer.

"In the meantime I paid constant visits to Rudolf, deriving from him much interesting information, but studiously avoiding the question of the chart.

"As time went by and I received no reply to my letter, I began to despair of obtaining it.

"The time, too, for the band of Esquimaux to leave London was approaching.

"I therefore made up my mind that, as I might never find an agent so well acquainted with his subject, I had better employ Rudolf to go and obtain the chart. It would be a rather expensive job, but in my mind no expense was too great by which I might achieve the object of my life. I had been constantly feeding Rudolf with small sums of money, and he had begun to look upon me as a benefactor.

"'Rudolf,' I said to him one day, 'will you render me a service?'

"'Anything in my power,' he replied —'even my life,' he added, having had several glasses of his usual medicament.

"'Well, this is what I want you to do. You will start off for Norway. You will go to Fœde. You will call on Murren, and by hook or by crook bring me the Gubbe's chart.'

"'If you think it worth while,' he replied, shrugging his shoulders. Then it flashed upon him that here was an opportunity of exploiting me and making a little money.

"'After all,' he continued, 'you are a clever man, and it is possible you may make something of the thing. I will start off at once if you wish. But you will have to give me some money, besides the cost of my journey. There is caution-money I have deposited with the man who is conducting our show, which will be confiscated if I leave before my time is up. Then I have a few debts — small ones, it is true — but to the canteen I owe something——'

"'My good Rudolf,' I interrupted, 'you are not a bad fellow, but you know you are very fond of whisky, and rather a scamp.' Rudolf smiled sadly. 'I will pay your debts, but I

will do so personally. I will take your ticket and see you off, giving you sufficient for the journey. I will arrange with my banker that you should touch a further sum on reaching Norway, and that you should be sent back to London in the same manner when you have carried out your mission. When you come back with the chart, you shall receive a handsome reward.'

"A certain amount of haggling ensued, during which Rudolf endeavoured to obtain as much ready money as he could. At last, however, we came to terms, and we parted not to meet again until he had accomplished his errand. I was doomed to some disappointment. After waiting, I think, a fortnight, I received a letter written evidently from dictation, as the writing was that of a person in a superior station of life to the pseudo-Esquimaux.

"The letter informed me that Murren

the elder had recently died, and that although his son was still proprietor of Lyndal, stress of circumstances had compelled him to part with much of his movable property, amongst which was the bulk of the Fiskmann collection, and of course with it the chart.

"The news caused me some annoyance, but Rudolf informed me that he had discovered the names of the different persons who had purchased Murren's effects.

"If I would forward him some more money he would continue the search, and felt certain of success.

"My first impression was to refuse the demand, feeling that it would be throwing good money after bad, as Rudolf might keep up the ruse indefinitely, and squander the proceeds in drink or debauchery.

"However, it seemed to be my last chance of obtaining what I wanted.

The result was that I gave instructions to my bankers to have a certain amount paid to Rudolf through their agents, at the same time writing to the man to say that should he not succeed on these terms I was unwilling to proceed further in the matter.

"I heard nothing more for two or three weeks.

"One evening as I was finishing dinner a cab drove up to the door. Looking through the window, what was my surprise and delight to see my little friend jump out of the cab and run up the steps of the front door.

"Before he had time to parley with the maid, who I was afraid might send him away, I ran out into the vestibule, and seizing my friend by the arm, dragged him into my study.

"'I come straight from the station,' he said, 'and am thirsty.'

"Before I ordered the drink he was

so anxious to obtain, I questioned him as to the success of his mission.

"'I have it here,' he said, tapping his breast-pocket; 'but pray give me some whisky.'

"Opening the door of my study, I called out to the servants, who were standing outside all aghast with astonishment, to bring what Rudolf required.

"He seemed in no hurry to give up his trophy.

"For an hour he entertained me with a description of the difficulties which attended his search. Some of his narrative was no doubt true, but much I felt to be imposture intended to enhance the value of his success.

"Finding on visiting Lyndal that Murren the father had died, he obtained an interview with his son. The latter informed him that he had received a letter from me, but explained that as the object I desired to possess had

gone out of his hands, he thought it useless to reply. He, however, furnished Rudolf with such particulars as would enable him to continue his quest with some chance of success.

"Rudolf had to wait for my remittance. Then he had to make many useless journeys to different towns, often finding that the persons who had purchased furniture and household goods from Murren the younger had no knowledge of the article he was seeking.

"At last he obtained an indication from a man who had parted with it to a second-hand bookseller. Rudolf hastened to call upon the librarian.

"After a prolonged search, the chart was at last discovered in a dusty corner with rubbish for which there was not likely to be any present demand. The bookseller suspected that the chart was of more than ordinary interest to the would-be purchaser.

"He asked an exorbitant price. Rudolf remained in the town some days, pretending he had other business which kept him there.

"He gave his address to the shopman, saying that if he felt inclined to accept his offer, he might bring him the chart before a certain date, on which Rudolf would be leaving.

"Needless to say, the bookseller turned up the very next day. A compromise was come to, and Rudolf rushed off with his prize.

"Of course Rudolf exaggerated the price he had paid for the chart. I had no proof—he brought me no receipt. Had I raised difficulties he might have insisted on keeping his purchase, and more delay would be entailed. I have said that I had, almost immediately after making his acquaintance, discovered that this creature's two great faults were avarice and drunkenness.

A species of fencing ensued, which, had I not been so anxious to obtain the object of dispute, would have been amusing.

"I was of course ready to pay a fair —nay, even a high—price for the chart. But I felt that if I immediately gave in, he would have the advantage of me, and never come to terms. I saw that my best chance lay in spinning out the discussion, plying him with whisky the while.

"Going to my safe, I took out a bundle of bank-notes and piled them up in front of me on the table.

"I could see he watched them with greed.

"'Now, Jan,' I said, 'how was it you had not enough money with what I sent you?'

"'Well, sir,' he said, 'while I was waiting at Fœde I had to borrow from an old acquaintance. That had to

come out of the remittance you sent me.'

"'And how much was that?'

"'About four pounds of your money,' he replied.

"I handed him over a five-pound note, and his eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"'But then you must have had enough for current expenses?'

"'No, indeed, I had not,' he answered. 'I had no less than seven separate journeys before I discovered the whereabouts of that wretched map. I travelled as cheaply as I could to save you expense, but it runs into something. And all this time I had to live and pay for lodgings.'

"'Well, here is for that part of the transaction,' I said, handing him some more money. 'And now for the map itself. How much did you pay for that?'

"'The question is not what I paid

for it,' replied the rascal, 'but what it is worth to you.'

"'Of course,' he continued, gathering up the notes I had given him and putting them into his pocket, 'if you regret my having purchased it, I have nothing to do but to thank you and be off.'

"'No, you don't,' I cried; 'I have the key of the door in my pocket, and if I do not have the chart, you return me my money.'

"He now seemed afraid he had gone too far, for in a tone of complaint he argued that I had promised him a handsome reward if he brought me the chart, and now I did nothing but haggle about it.

"'Show me the chart,' said I, 'and I will hand you over all these notes.'

"There was a goodly pile, amounting to about a hundred pounds or more. This was probably more than he had

expected, for he accepted them with alacrity. The fact was, too, the whisky was beginning to go to his head and he was getting sleepy. I threw him over the notes. Out of his dirty coat he produced a small flat packet which he undid, handing me the contents.

"From Don Isidoro's description I saw that it was what I wanted so much to possess. I offered Rudolf one more glass, in which I joined him, and then hinted that he should leave me with my treasure. Nothing loath, he shook hands with me and withdrew, but not before I had exacted a promise that he would let me know his whereabouts. This promise he has never fulfilled. From that day to this I have never set eyes on him."

CHAPTER X.

"Once alone with the object of my desire, I lost no time in examining it minutely.

"The exterior answered exactly to the description in the memoirs of the Marques de Villamanca. A flat board furnished with edges to admit of a cover fitting closely in it, the remains of two tabs of some kind of linen cloth by which the lid could be lifted up. The two parts joined together by a pin running into loops forming a hinge, went to make as neat a little case as could be turned out by a Bond Street stationer.

"I prised up the lid and found the bottom of the lower case to contain what appeared to be a carefully designed map.

"I had already provided myself with many maps of that part of the world, and speedily identified the delicately traced outline in the north-eastern portion of the chart as part of the south-western coast of Norway. It was on a far larger scale of measurement than any I possessed, containing indentations and promontories which did not appear in my clearest maps.

"The remainder of the chart was blank, denoting that nothing but ocean was to be found in that space.

"Yet as I sat with the little plan before me, I thought I detected at the extreme south-western limit of the plate an irregular mark: it might be a smudge, for the map had evidently been sketched by hand in a dead black

ink, probably the fluid secreted by the cuttlefish. Lying on my table was a magnifying-glass which I sometimes employed for the purpose of reading small print.

"The mark along the edge of the parchment was indeed a smudge, but with the glass I could clearly discern a fine outline similar to the delineation of the coast-line in the opposite corner of the chart. What could this signify? A few minutes' meditation convinced me that the direction taken by the Fiskmänne under the guidance of the Gubbe must lie between a point on the Norwegian coast and a point on the coast which was marked on the corner of the map remote from it.

"I consulted my maps again. What could this other coast represent? Was it Denmark? In point of distance this was the most probable; but, twist it as I could, relatively to the portion of

the Norwegian coast already outlined, it must be far more westerly than Denmark.

"Were there islands in that part of the North Sea of which I knew nothing? I dismissed the idea, for I had studied those parts for so many years that I seemed to know them by heart. At length I traced a resemblance in the configuration of the coast. It was the most northern part of Scotland, but on the East Coast, and must not be far from Duncansbay Head.

"I describe these discoveries as though they were made in a moment, but every step took a deal of time and trouble. I returned to the chart again and again; I compared it with fifty maps.

"I have said that from the various clues I had in my possession to the former abode of the Fiskmann tribe, I was able to mark pretty accurately the

spot from which the direction towards the Scottish coast should be taken. But there was a vast expanse of ocean to be explored. In reality I was not much advanced in the discovery of their last refuge. I took a pencil and with a ruler lightly traced a straight line from the former dwelling of the Fiskmänne to a point on the Scottish coast. But many miles of coast were included even in this minute outline.

"Then it was clear they could not again venture to establish themselves on a main coast. Could I not discover a closer indication?

"I shut the case again to ponder in despair. As I did so my eye fell on the minute hole in the lid. It was hardly larger than a pin's head. Then why was it there? If there were tabs to pull up the lid, why should there ever have been a knob or handle by which to do so?

"Again the pin-hole was not half-way down the side of the case, as one would expect in the case of a handle of any sort. It was much nearer to the corner in which lay the Scottish coast. I set to examining the hole with the aid of my magnifying-glass. Although of such minute dimensions, it was carefully fashioned. The inside surface was smooth and polished. Might it not have been rough and irregular had it served as the socket of a handle? The colour of the inner surface was black and metallic. The knob, then, must have had a smooth steel stem—an unusual way of manufacturing such a thing. It then flashed across my mind that the pin which held the cover of the case to the lower part might have some connection with this little opening.

"I drew out the pin without difficulty, and found that at one end it was cut off straight, while at the other

it was pencil-shaped and ended in a sharp point.

"I thrust this point into the pin-hole, and on opening the lid, found it had naturally made a slight impression on the parchment. This speck was a little west of the line I had drawn in pencil from the Norwegian to the Scottish coast.

"I repeated the operation several times. The pin fitted so close into the pin-hole that the point inevitably found the same speck in the parchment. I was firmly convinced that I had discovered the place to which the Gubbe had led the remnant of his tribe.

"Drawing a fresh pencil line from the same point on the Norwegian coast, and carrying it through the speck made by the pin, I prolonged it to the Scottish coast. It brought me some distance farther west, nearer the Orkneys,

to a region which every one knows abounds in reefs and rocky islands.

"I have already said that I was devoted to my wife.

"For my little daughter Edna I had a more than ordinarily strong affection.

"Apart from the natural feelings of a father for his daughter, was she not the living proof of the destruction of the fatal curse?

"I believed I now had a clue to the home of the Fiskmänne. I would leave no stone unturned to discover their retreat, and at all events to ascertain 'where I stood,' so to speak, with regard to my own fate and that of my daughter. Oh, the difficulties I had before I came anywhere near the accomplishment of my task.

"Leaving my wife and child in London, I very soon started off in search of the most likely point on the coast of

Scotland from which to carry on my operations.

"Although I had a fairly accurate data to go upon, there was still a margin of many miles to choose from.

"The shrewd Scotchmen with whom I had to deal thought I was cracked.

"The winter was hardly over. In that northern latitude it was still bleak and cold. Most of the people who dwelt in that part of the coast did so because they were obliged to, making the best of a bad job by choosing the spots most favoured by nature and by their propinquity to a large town. Here was I in the early spring clamouring for a dwelling in the desert—in the part of the country most remote from other habitations. While others had chosen sites for their houses where the sea-shore formed a sandy beach, I, on the contrary, sought the most rocky places.

"At last, by mere chance, walking along the shore I came upon a group of rocks which immediately struck me by their peculiar formation. Those rocks you saw to-day.

"Taking up my abode with some honest fishermen, I began exploring the rocks, and at every visit became more and more convinced that into such a place and no other had the Fiskmänne fled. In this I was confirmed by the fables of the fishermen, who would talk of strange fish or strange beings seen far out at sea in places where the rocks made the ocean impassable to ships. I speedily found that to go far amongst the rocks in any kind of boat was impossible. True, later on Edna and I used to go fishing in a flat-bottomed boat which drew but little water, but for exploring purposes that would have been dangerous. I was also impeded in my self-imposed task by the constant

choppiness of the sea, at this point rarely quite smooth.

"I decided to wait before commencing any serious undertaking, until the end of the summer or early autumn.

"In the meantime I turned my attention to finding a suitable dwelling to which to bring my wife and child.

"The only habitation at all fulfilling the requirements was the coastguard station.

"Fortunately there was a row of cottages not far distant which would equally answer the purpose.

"I set to work to have the coastguard station removed.

"This entailed a voluminous correspondence with the authorities and the spending of a heap of money. But I gained my point. By mid-summer my wife and Edna were comfortably installed, and it was not long before the

dreary coastguard station was turned into the snug retreat it now is.

"Soon after occurred the greatest calamity which has ever befallen me.

"After a short illness my poor wife succumbed to congestion of the lungs.

"The grief in which I was plunged prevented my thinking of anything else. By the time I gradually became more accustomed to my solitude, for Edna was not yet old enough to be a companion, the best season for exploring the seas was over, and no good could be done till after the winter.

"I had, however, constantly bathed in the sea for the sake of Edna's health, to which it was beneficial. It was thus that for the first time I became aware of my marvellous swimming powers. Owing to a hardy temperament I could remain hours in the water, while the shape of my hands and feet enabled me to propel myself with a strength and

rapidity I felt sure would be impossible to any other human being.

"I was overjoyed at the discovery, aware that this quality would stand me in good stead.

"One day I wished to try my powers. Taking as my goal a distant rock, more prominent than the others, I threw myself upon the water, intending not to relax my efforts till I had reached it.

"I had not gone half a mile, however, when I found that to swim continuously to any point so distant would be impossible. The rocks spread out in every direction, and differed from each other so much in shape and size that one ran the risk of severe contusions, if not more serious wounds.

"This gave me the idea of establishing resting-places.

"Careful observation proved that although now and again a swimmer would find himself stranded on the

rocks, these prominent portions were not continuous. The swimmer would have the option either of scrambling across the higher level of the rock, an unpleasant operation, or of circumventing them at the cost of making his journey a little longer.

"Before approaching winter made the sea too cold for a human being to stay in it, I had established stations, so to speak, at convenient intervals, and had already gone to a great distance, being confident that I could go farther out to sea by the same system.

"Then as the days grew shorter and the weather colder, I occupied myself collecting what I might call my evidence and preparing my case.

"I had already partly broken the spell of the Gubbe's curse by the accident of my being an only son, by my marrying and having a child.

"I had found no record among the

scanty fragments of history I had collected of a daughter being the eldest child, even of a second son. It is true that my life had not been altogether a happy one. In early life I felt my deformity acutely, and was a butt for the chaff and ill-nature of my young companions.

"When I might have been perfectly happy with my dear wife, she was taken from me. Well, I might live a joyless life, and die a sudden death, but I was determined to save my child at all hazards from a similar fate."

CHAPTER XI.

"How anxiously I awaited the warm weather again! In the first days of April I already began bathing to inure myself to the cold water.

"I had invented a water-tight knap sack which would not incommode me in swimming, and which would enable me to carry food with me, and even a dry garment. By this means I should be as independent in the sea as I might be on land.

"As the sun grew stronger, I began swimming out to my old resting-places, the first day to the first stage, the second a little farther, and so on. I also began

making a closer examination of the lower level of the rocks. I found them to contain, as you know, numberless coves so formed as to be completely dry, tunnels or covered passages which might have been fashioned by man, but that no human agency could have accomplished so perfect a work.

"One day I had succeeded in settling upon several resting-places farther than those I had already fixed upon. It was a beautiful day, and I lay on my back on the flat rock basking in the sun.

"I might have been in that position more than half an hour when I happened to turn my head. I was impelled to do so by the sensation every one may have felt of not being alone.

"At this point the rocks diverged, forming that fork you can see from the windows. I had stopped there to rest, uncertain which branch to follow up first.

"There were several other flat rocks a short way off, not unlike the one on which I reclined. My eye fell on the rock next me — not ten yards off. Something was there which had not been there when I arrived. I looked again, it twitched its huge frame. The sun was gleaming on it as it lay there wet and dripping, and the olive-green of its skin was so like the surrounding rock that I could ill distinguish its form. But I knew what it was. *It was a Fiskmann.*

"His back was turned towards me, and hardly daring to breathe, I stealthily slipped off the rock into the cold water in the shadow of my rock.

"As luck would have it, I was unaware of a shelving ledge a few feet under water. Striking against it, the shock made me splash the water. When I recovered myself sufficiently to look round the corner of my hiding-

place, the other rock was bare. Extremely upset at the mishap which had befallen me, I nevertheless consoled myself with having discovered the ledge of projecting rock against which I had struck. I was sure the Fiskmann had not seen me, so after he got over the scare of the noise he might return to the rock. The ledge would support me while I watched.

"Sure enough at the end of a quarter of an hour there was a slight disturbance of the water in the vicinity of the other rock. A short, dark, sinewy arm terminating in the fin-shaped hand which seemed so familiar to me, and which, alas! was so like my own, stretched forth from the water to seize a projection in the rock. Then appeared a human head and shoulders.

"The face was perhaps also like my own — I know the hair was. The moment it came out of the water, the

hair resumed its natural waviness, which I have often been told gives it the appearance of being chiselled like the head and hair of the Tritons and Neptunes we see in Roman sculpture. The Fiskmann looked round cautiously in my direction, but I was entirely concealed, only a portion of my face being exposed to view round the edge of my rock.

"Having overcome his apprehension he drew his great body out of the water, and with an agility born of lifelong habit clambered up again on to the rock.

"As he did so, he gently pulled at something at the side of the rock, and I now perceived that there hung a line secured by a stone.

"He had been fishing. I never moved—I hardly breathed—I watched and watched.

"At length an event occurred for which I had waited with anxiety.

"The line was pulled out to sea.

There was a quiver — a commotion — a jump.

"The Fiskmann had caught a fish.

"I had laid my calculation well. I am a fisherman myself, and I know that when I have a big fish on my line an army could surround me without taking my attention from my prey.

"Silently I glided into the water, swimming low as I well knew how.

"Stealthily I propelled myself to the spot in the water from which the head and shoulders of the sea-man had first appeared.

"Then while he was busy hauling in a large fish I called quietly, 'Fiskmann!'

"I had expected to cut off his retreat. I had reckoned without mine host. Dropping fish and line, the Fiskmann leapt right over my head, taking a header into the waves beyond. But I can dive too, and with my eyes open.

"In a twinkling I had followed him

into the green depths, just in time to see him disappear in an aperture in the rocks two fathoms below the surface.

"I gave a kick with my feet to prevent rising again, at the same time feeling for a knife I carried in my belt.

"I found myself in a covered passage, the floor of which rapidly rose towards the surface of the sea.

"The consequence was that, allowing myself to rise to the surface, I remained standing on *terra firma*, and hurried along the tunnel on dry sand. A vague light illumined the interior. A few steps more and I perceived that the covered path descended again, and at the other end re-entered the water.

"The Fiskmann had evidently already raised the alarm, from the sounds which reached my ears, as the lashing of the water, and above it a bellowing or moaning. I half regretted my intrepidity, but resolved to push forward. Grasping my

great knife, I made a headlong dash at the opening into the sea. I felt myself striking against slippery bodies, then struggling with them. My arms were held, my knife taken from me, and I was dragged on to a platform of rock high and dry.

"When I had shaken the water out of my eyes, rubbing my face on my arm, for I was securely held, a strange sight met my view. I was standing on a level ledge of rock at the mouth of a great cave. Similar ledges and similar caves appeared to form a rocky circle, the centre of which was the sea. Resting on the rocks or floating about on the water were some twenty Fiskmänne or more, men, women, and children. The men you have already heard described. The women offered but little contrast. Not near so good-looking as the men; the weather-beaten tough appearance which suited the males,

in the women merely destroyed any charm which might attach to their sex.

"True, when I had the courage to look about me, I descried two or three half-grown and scantily clad damsels whom constant hard work and exposure had not yet deprived of roundness of contour and freshness of appearance. These had run out of their dwellings impelled by curiosity, but on meeting my gaze they speedily withdrew. Of children there were few, and these had a half-starved wizened appearance. A moment was enough to take in the scene. My arms were securely held by two stalwart young men. A third, whom I could not see, stood behind me, his sinewy hands round my throat. A fourth held my own knife, which he had snatched out of my hand, ready to slay me if I moved. The whole crowd seemed to be waiting.

"Suddenly I was made to turn round

with my back to the assembled Fiskmänne. From the cave in front of us emerged a tall gaunt form.

"His skin was dark, his extremities more fin-like, his whole being more thoroughly of the sea than the remainder of the tribe. One felt that he was of a former time, before the Fiskmann became a loathed and hunted creature.

"He paused a little distance from where I was held, and stood gazing at me with the keenest scrutiny.

"'Why do you come here?' he at last asked me, very quietly.

"'I am a Fiskmann,' I replied, at the same time by a movement indicating my hands and feet.

"'You are a Fiskmann,' he repeated, 'and you pursue one of us, your knife in your hand.'

"'I drew my knife in case I should be attacked. My object was not to kill.'

"'You came out of curiosity,' said the Gubbe, for such I imagined this stately individual to be.

"'I came to know my people,' I replied.

"'And how did you come where no boats can float?'

"'I swam,' I replied.

"'You are indeed a Fiskmann,' said the Gubbe. 'Still we mistrust strangers, even if they are of Fiskmann descent. Take your knife and depart. And do not return,' he added, as he slowly turned towards his dwelling.

"The moment he had disappeared, all restraint seemed to vanish. Men, women, and children crowded round me with curiosity. They touched my clothes, they asked questions. Several of the men begged me to give them the knife, and I feared they would fight about it.

"'Look you,' I said, 'if you will let

me come back, I will bring you more knives like this one, and many other beautiful things for the men, the women, and the children.

"'Fishing tackle with which you will catch more fish, household things, and ornaments. Will you let me come back?'

"'Yes, yes, come back, come back,' they cried; 'but do not let the Gubbe see you. Only keep your promise.'

"And I said I would, and was conducted through the mysterious passage; and having carefully noted the spot where I must dive, I stretched myself upon the water for my homeward journey."

CHAPTER XII.

"SINCE then I have been to see them a hundred times, each time carrying them some small present. Bits of stuff for the women, sweets for the children, fishing implements or some other suitable things for the men.

"The poor people soon began to look forward to my coming. I say poor people, for are they not to be pitied?

"The remnant of a persecuted race, they live isolated from everything human.

"The entire impossibility of intermarriage with other races causes deterioration almost to the limit of the lower

animals. Small wonder, then, that they should greet with enthusiasm a friendly messenger from the outer world, one who brings with him a new version of the tale of life, giving them an insight into the working of civilisation, a knowledge of 'something beyond the seas.'

"Before I revealed to them the fact of my descent from the accursed Jan, I wished to have a perfect hold upon them, to become indispensable to them. Otherwise their love might turn to hatred, and my labours be in vain.

"Although I visited the Fiskmänne whenever the weather permitted, there were long periods during which it was impossible for me to venture along the rocks. My progress in their estimation to the point I required was thus necessarily slow.

"As I gained ground, their friendship became embarrassing. Did I not show good reason for staying away longer

than usual, the Fiskmänne would in a thousand ways show their anxiety for my return. Their usual sign that they want me is to lash the water with fury, making such a commotion even at this distance that one would look for a coming storm.

"Sometimes at nightfall a messenger would come lurking about the beach, in the hopes of seeing me. On one occasion the apparition of one nearly killed our old gardener with fright. The situation would be ludicrous, were it not in reality so terrible. At last I made up my mind to tell them everything and brave the result. This state of things must be put a stop to.

"Since the first day I penetrated into the marine village I had never set eyes on the Gubbe. But I had frequently communicated with him through an intermediary. The people had told me that the Gubbe, some time after my

first visit, had noticed a change for the better in the community, and his attention was attracted by the many practical and ingenious things now made use of. He of course had questioned them about this improvement in their surroundings. On hearing it was mainly due to my visits, he evinced surprise.

"'I said he was not to return,' he exclaimed, 'but let it be; he is a good man.'

"Thus I was sure that my confession would not be fraught with much danger even from the Gubbe.

"Before I placed myself in any way in the power of these strange people, I made up my mind I would absent myself for a longer period than usual. By this means I would prove to them how indispensable I was to them. If the Gubbe had any supernatural power, such as events seemed to have proved, but which common-sense forbade my

implicitly believing, he would be the more willing to exercise it in my favour in order to retain my services. It was this idea, combined with a touch of rheumatism brought on by constant exposure to the elements, which brought me to Germany — the first time I had the courage to travel abroad.

"It is fortunate I did so, for on that occasion I met you.

"As I had expected, my return was greeted by the Fiskmänne with enthusiasm. I must not leave them again for so long. They could not get on without me. They had run out of this and run out of that. For they had come to take it as a matter of course that I should keep them in luxuries. But, to do them justice, they were not hard to please. Worse than all, a woman on whose industry they greatly depended for their clothing had fallen ill, and they wanted me to doctor her.

"I was glad to find I really had so important a place in this little community, for it rendered my task easier.

"To the young man whom I had first discovered on the rock, and who was the means of my gaining access to the Fiskmann's house, I put my case very clearly. It was he who carried messages between myself and the Gubbe.

"I confessed that I had proved my descent direct from Jan the pirate.

"I explained that I had diligently searched the history of the Fiskmänne at that period, and had come to the conclusion that the curse put upon him by the Gubbe was hardly justifiable, Jan being naturally under the impression that he was deserted by the tribe.

"That this was evidently a misunderstanding, as the chart had been probably left by the Gubbe for Jan's use. In my case, as far as I could ascertain, the spell

had to a certain extent been broken by my having married and had a child.

"I now wished to know whether I had anything to fear, not so much on my own account as for my daughter, who had only me to care for her. I further said that although I would at all times be ready to do all in my power to be of service to the remaining members of the race, I thought they were a little exacting, and that by not giving me greater freedom they placed both themselves and me in the greatest danger.

"The young man went off to interview the Gubbe, who presently sent back word that he would give me an answer on the following day. I therefore arranged to sleep that night in the caves. This I had done before, and did not dislike. The great cleanliness of the place mitigated the roughness of the accommodation. On this occasion,

however, I slept little, so great was my anxiety to have the Gubbe's answer. Perhaps had I known what that answer would entail, I should not have been in such haste to obtain it.

"While I was still reclining on my couch of dried seaweed the young Fiskmann came to my cave.

"'This is what the Gubbe says,' he spoke after the morning greeting. 'You have been spared the fate of your ancestors because you were intended to benefit your people.

"'As long as you continue to be of service to them, no harm will befall you.

"'Now do as the Gubbe bids you, and you and your daughter and your descendants will live happily.

"'You are fond of your daughter. Bring her to your people. Let her choose a young man from among them, and take him for a husband, then the tribe will be restored to thrift

and content, and the curse that is upon you shall be a blessing.'

"You may imagine the feeling with which I received this last suggestion.

"That after the way I had laboured for them this wretched remnant of an accursed race should venture to suggest my daughter being sacrificed to them, —the thought was too repulsive, my anger too great, for me to answer at once.

"Fortunately I had sufficient presence of mind to dissemble what I thought, or I should never have been allowed to go alive, and God knows what would have befallen my poor Edna.

"As it is, I merely said I would resume the subject on my next visit.

"But the Gubbe's fiendish suggestion, or command, as he chose to consider it, had oozed out through my messenger.

"The idea was received with enthusiasm by the Fiskmänne. They would

make a queen of Edna, they said. She should have the best quarters, they would all combine to work for her comfort.

"It would have been worse than useless to argue with these benighted beings, — to try and explain to them that no carefully brought-up and civilised young lady could bring herself to live in such a manner even for two days, much less a lifetime.

"They would only have left it to me to alter the whole economy of the people. They would probably suggest my gaining permission for them to dwell on the coast. These creatures would stick at nothing. I came away as soon as I could, bearing with me the promise that whenever I told them they would come *en masse* to bring Edna with them.

"Since that day I have not been out to sea.

"But they have begun their importunities again. Only a day or two ago I heard the familiar bellowing, a kind of cry they have amongst themselves. It proceeded from the beach just below the garden. It was nearly dark. They never ventured so far out at any other time.

"I found two men sent by the Fiskmänne. They came, they said, as messengers from the Gubbe. He wanted his command carried out. The people had taken up the idea with enthusiasm, and were getting impatient at the delay. I must mention a date, and not a distant one, for the carrying out of the scheme. If not, the Gubbe would have to take steps to enforce it. They wished me well, but they considered I had a duty to perform. What was I to do? I had to have recourse to subterfuge. I said my daughter had been upset at the pro-

spect of so great a change—that they must wait a fortnight. After much argument they went away. They did not appear satisfied.

"It was at this juncture I sent you the message which must have seemed to you peremptory and unwarranted.

"What I fear so much is an invasion. They might all come and clamour at the house, endeavouring to take us away by force. I have carefully avoided initiating them into the use of firearms, and the poor things would be easily disposed of by two or three armed men. But then the fearful commotion the whole thing would cause! If the men were seen by a coastguard, the only neighbours we have, the matter would at once become public.

"The position is, as I said before, laughable, did it not place us in so fearful a dilemma. I considered I had a fortnight's respite from the date

of my reply to the Gubbe's messengers. Even people as primitively ignorant as the Fiskmänne would not be so pig-headed or reckless as to undertake a dangerous expedition when they might hope to gain their object by a little patience.

"Had I been alone in the world I should not have troubled my mind about their movements. The most probable course for me to adopt would have been to leave Kinlochie at a moment's notice, never to return.

"But although I am not more imaginative than most other men, it would be impossible to review the history of my ancestors without a vague apprehension of the supernatural powers of the aged seer.

"The little knowledge I had imparted to the Fiskmänne of the outer world might prove dangerous, enabling them as it would to make attempts to over-

take me. And how terribly might this affect my daughter. My first thought was to place her in security from any machinations of the enemy — if such the Fiskmänne became.

"I immediately bethought me of yourself. Hoping that your affection for Edna had survived the cruel treatment which a sense of duty forced upon us, I decided to appeal to you to come over and help us.

"With generous promptitude you have done so.

"This is how I propose to act. In a few hours it will be dawn.

"I will start off as soon as there is sufficient light.

"On reaching my destination, this is the message I will send to the Gubbe.

"First I will remind him that where-as all my ancestors have lived in fear of the Fiskmann's persecution, I have,

on the contrary, spent many years in trying to discover their whereabouts.

"That since I have succeeded, I have done nothing but endeavour to improve their position, spending endless money in useful presents, tending their sick, teaching their children.

"That now through utter selfishness they would treat me with the grossest ingratitude, seeking to deprive me of my freedom, and above all to rob me of my child. I will say that as long as the tribe choose to continue on the same terms as heretofore, I will undertake to continue working for their welfare.

"But should they venture to make the slightest attempt to interfere with my daughter's happiness, they will find that the spirit of Jan is not dead within me.

"They will, I think, understand what I mean, and accept a wholesome lesson.

"Now this is what I want to give you to do.

"You have promised to marry Edna. You have done well. A better girl you could find nowhere. Nor has the taint of her birth done aught to impair her beauty or her goodness. Since the situation here became so embarrassing, I thought fit to put my worldly affairs in order, so, come what may, Edna's future is secure.

"I have arranged that, while I am still on my outward journey, Edna shall be driven to the station. From thence she can safely travel to Inverness, where old friends of ours will take charge of her.

"You will remain here and wait for the issue of events. I shall probably return before dark. Should all be well, and the Fiskmänne be content to continue as they are, as I firmly believe will be the case, you and I will immediately join Edna, and perhaps go on

to London for a little peace of mind and rest.

"Should those foolish people take my decision amiss, they may follow me under the impression my daughter is still here.

"That matters little, she will be safe.

"Should anything befall me, you will promise me to hasten your marriage with Edna, that by so doing you may turn a childhood saddened by a cloud into a life of happy sunshine."

All this time I had been listening in silence to Janson's projects. My excitement had increased with his recital, and although we had sat far into the night, I felt no fatigue.

"I promise you," I answered, "that in my keeping Edna will be perfectly safe, and that my life shall be given up to her happiness."

"Thank you, my good friend," said Janson.

"Then I will snatch an hour or two of rest before I start.

"See, here are firearms. I do not imagine you will require them, but should the Fiskmänne come up here, you will no doubt be able to turn them back with a single shot. Now good-night and farewell."

"Good night, and God prosper you," I replied.

"I shall be waiting for you in the dining-room down-stairs, as the big window looks out towards the sea."

"Good-bye," repeated Janson, "and my love to Edna."

CHAPTER XIII.

At five o'clock the following afternoon I took up my position in the open window of the dining-room.

Thence I had a splendid view of the sea, which was on that afternoon as smooth as a lake.

Edna I had seen safely off in the morning, even driving part of the way with her and coming back on foot. The humming of an insect and the chirrup of a wren told of the approaching evening, and the first glow of a glorious sunset bore out the warning.

From the battery of firearms which Janson had shown me I had chosen and

carefully loaded a repeating-rifle. This, I thought, would be the weapon most likely to scare the weird creatures of whom I had heard so much. Still hour after hour went by. Sunset gave way to dusk, and dusk to that fitful glare which lasts so long on a summer's evening by the sea.

As I sat there on the alert for the slightest indication of Janson's return, a weird sound fell on my ear.

I could not for the life of me think what it was,—it proceeded straight from the sea.

A few seconds later it was repeated, this time much closer, it must have been on the sea-shore. I can only describe it as the combined wailing of men and women—the stronger voices resembling a bellowing Oh! that was it. It was the bellowing of the Fisk-männe, and there was mischief on foot.

Seizing my rifle, I hurried down through the garden towards the cliffs.

As I passed the flower-garden and reached the rough, uncultivated ground which covered the cliff-tops, the wailing sound became very distinct, and was followed by another sound proceeding from the sea-shore which reminded me of the perpetual chattering of wild-duck on a lake.

In the midst of this continuous sound rose a cry of "Help! help!" and, as I rapidly turned into the path leading down to the sea-shore, a figure brushed past me running at full speed. I felt more than saw that it was Janson, and called to him to stop, but he only ran on and cried again "Help!" in a fainter voice.

At the same moment, in the opening formed by the ravine in which I was, I clearly saw against the shimmering light on the sea the tall, gaunt outline

of a naked figure. Its shortened arms and tapering legs showed me what it was, and quick as thought I fired at it. A terrible shriek followed, and the creature turned running towards the sea and shrieking all the while. I wondered how, even by that light, I could have failed to kill it. Then a little farther off the chattering began again, and I made out that what I had taken to be a heap of rocks was in reality a knot of these creatures standing together, and evidently in great excitement over the shot fired at the man who was pursuing Janson. Every now and again they would point their short arms towards the ravine at the mouth of which I now stood, whilst some of them were consoling the man for the pain caused by his wound.

Of a sudden two or three of the party detached themselves from the rest and made for the ravine.

Mine was a repeating-rifle, and I still had seven shots, besides a lot of cartridges in my pocket should I require them and have time to reload.

I took a deliberate aim at one of the men who were running towards me, and he dropped in his tracks.

His companions hesitated. Then stooping down, they lifted up the lifeless body of their companion and hurried back with it to their friends.

The chattering increased as they joined the group, and there were angry shouts and gestures towards where I stood as before. I fired again, this time into the thick of them.

It stopped their chattering, and from the commotion which ensued I fancy some one was hit.

Then a sound as of a great sigh arose from their midst. Bearing their fallen companions with them, they hurried towards the waves. A great splashing

and a rushing sound told me that they had at last been terrified into flight.

Just then a voice said at my elbow—

"It's nae good shooting at them, mon, it's nae good. They're nae people, they're speerits."

It was the old gardener who had been so scared once before by the apparition of a Fiskmann on the beach. "Ye'd better come along," he continued; "the master's dreadfu' bad."

So, feeling certain that the Fiskmänne would not turn up again that night, I turned my steps towards the house.

. . . . . .

Janson was lying on a sofa in the dining-room which I had but recently quitted.

He was ghastly pale; a thin line of blood marked his chin, and warned me not to question him.

He had broken a blood-vessel.

Presently, however, he roused himself a little and beckoned me to come nearer, and with much effort and interruption gave the following account of his disaster :—

"When I threatened to betray them if they would not give up all idea of Edna they were furious with me, and I wonder they did not kill me there and then. I wished to come away, but they said they would come with me and carry out the Gubbe's orders.

"I used every argument I could think of, even saying I would return the next day. To this they replied that I had deceived them already, and that a man who threatened to follow in the footsteps of Jan the traitor could not be trusted. They would come with me.

"I began my homeward journey slowly. My object was at any rate to lose time, so that it should be dark by the time we reached the shore.

"So it was; but when I saw they still wanted to come up to the house, I lost my temper. I told them the truth about their behaviour, and called them animals and brutes. Then a great hulking fellow came forward and struck me in the face with the flat of his hand. I drew my knife and would have killed him, but another man jerked the knife out of my hand and closed with me. I managed to throw him off and turned to run. The man who had struck me first ran after me."

"He is probably dead by this time," I said; "there are three down, and the others have all bolted."

A faint look of satisfaction came over the poor man's face. He was getting too weak to talk, and we both remained silent for some time.

When Janson spoke again it was only to say, almost in a whisper, "Say Good-bye to Edna, and take care of her."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE other day I left Edna and the children playing in the garden, and getting into my dogcart drove over to Norwich. The Norwich fair was in full swing.

Amongst other attractions was a show exhibited under the name of the North Pole.

A friend of mine suggested we should visit it.

We paid our fees at the door, and walked into the hastily erected shed in which the exhibition was held.

My attention was arrested by a man who was said to be from a point farther north than any other land yet discovered.

A glance at his hands and feet sufficed to convince me that he was a Fiskmann. Taking the first opportunity of approaching him, I asked him, "Is not your name Rudolf?"

"Yes," he replied, adding in bad English, "Why you ask?"

"Because," I replied, "you will probably be interested to hear of your old friend Mr Janson, for whom you once performed a journey to obtain a chart he was anxious to have."

"Ah, yes—I remember—most generous gentleman. What he become?"

"He died," I replied, "by the hand of your accursed tribe."

"Ah, poor gentleman! I always tell him he better stay home and not

meddle with what he don't understand noding about."

And while I was pondering on the palpable truth of this remark, Rudolf added, "You give me few shillings buy a drink?"

THE END.

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