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THE FAIR PILOT OF LOCH URIBOL.

A YACHTING EPISODE.

BY AN IDLE VOYAGER.

“She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment’s ornament!”

Wordsworth.

On the afternoon of a summer day, a small schooner yacht closely reefed made her appearance off the mouth of Loch Uribol, a long and lonely fjord in the remote Hebrides of Scotland, and while beating to and fro in the open sea in the midst of the squalls from the neighbouring mountains, hoisted the inverted red flag to the foremost as a signal that the parties on board were in need of assistance.

It had been a dark, dry day, with the wind blowing fresh from the west very steadily and strong, and the yacht, a tiny thing of fifteen or sixteen tons, with a small cock-pit, had been beating since early dawn across the tossing waters of the Minch, which divides the dark, serrated peaks of Skye from the far-off Outer Isles. Lightly as a bird she had bounded over the great rollers of the sea, splashing the foam over herself from stem to stern, but seldom taking on board a drop of “green.” The distance across was thirty miles, and the wind was dead ahead, so that her progress westward was slow indeed. The time slipt by; however; the basaltic crags of the northwest coast of Skye grew fainter and fainter; and the islands of the ocean, which at first had been scarcely distinguishable on the horizon, had gradually loomed more and more distinct—stretching in one desolate and lonely darkness from the high hills of Lewis, past the faint, low-lying flats of Uist, to the dark and rocky shores which fringe the cliffs of Barna. Not once in the long day had the sun actually made his appearance. The atmosphere had been full of a palpitating, silvery light, in which the skies seemed close to the earth, and very gray, and the waves of the sea, where they did not break into white foam, unusually black and threatening. Yet it was “good weather,” a safe, snug day for sailing, and the sombre, colourless tone of all things—sea, far-off land, and sky—was not without its charms for those who have learned to love the pathetic “neutral tint” of the melancholy Scottish coast.
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But as evening approached, the sun looked out from a gray chasm above the out-lying hills, and shed a lurid light over the dancing sea, illuminating to rose colour the white sails of the little yacht, which was by this time within a few miles of the dangerous coast. Just about this time a weather-beaten Highlander, who was steering the little vessel, cocked his eye up to the sunset, and relinquishing the tiller to a young man who sat in the cock-pit beside him, said quietly—

"She's going to give a puff out o' the west yonder, and Loch Uribil's a terrible place for squalls. We'll take off the foresail altogether, and let her go cannie wi' mainsail, staysail, and jib."

Scarcely had the speaker, with the assistance of another man who had been lying listlessly in the forepart of the vessel, carried out his precaution, and taken the foresail down, when the first squall from the land came up white as foam and laid the vessel over to the coming of the cock-pit. Squall after squall followed, while the light from the sunset grew every moment of a more lurid crimson, streaming with the wind out of a great rent in the vast mountains of cloud. The yacht was too lightly ballasted to carry her canvas well, and more than once the wind struck her so savagely as to threaten to founder her outright, the water passing into the cock-pit in one green torrent and drenching the helmsman to the skin. The sea was comparatively smooth, however, owing to the shelter of the hills. From the dark precipices and distant misty glens the squalls shot out with a fury only realisable by him who has navigated these coasts in a small vessel. With the fury of hate and the strength of despair, so to speak, they plunged one by one upon the schooner, like wild beasts frantically endeavouring to tear her to pieces.

With a light laugh, the helmsman dashed the wet hair out of his eyes, and strained his gaze towards the land.

"Which is the Uribil land?" he cried to the old Celt who had first spoken. "Can you make out the mouth of the Loch?"

The old man shook his head.

"I know fine she lies somewhere in yonder," he said, "but I've never passed the mouth. Luff, sir, luff! We'll put about directly—there's a nasty bit o' water fair ahead."

The young man uttered an exclamation expressive of impatience.

"Here, Calum, take the helm, and let me have a look at the chart."

So saying, he again resigned the tiller to Calum, as the old man was called, and plunging down the companion to the cabin, soon re-emerged with the Government chart of the coast in his hand, spreading it out on the "coach-roof," and following the marks with his finger he studied it attentively, now and then glancing at the land, while the yacht, having put about, was dashing along through squall after squall, and coming nearer and nearer to the shore.

He was a man of eight or nine and twenty, with a rather hand-
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some style of face—broad, high brow, a nose of the so-called Grecian sort, and a proud, sarcastic mouth. His skin was dark and tanned, as if he had lived long in the sun of warmer climates. He was clean shaven, all save the upper lip, where he wore a thick fleshy moustache, very fair in colour. His eyes were blue and very large, though he had a habit of contracting them very much when he was looking at any person. In his whole person, and in every gesture, there was a certain air which bespoke the gentleman by birth. His expression, nevertheless, was marred by audacity and superciliousness, and his laugh had not the ringing clearness of youth, but sounded hollow at times, with a sort of spasmodic gaiety his face did not share.

As he studied the mysterious lines of the chart, his face grew very black. It was clear that this gentleman, whatever might be his good qualities, possessed a very passionate temper.

"Why the devil did I come here without a pilot?" he exclaimed.
"Look here, Calum! the mouth of the loch is full of sunken rocks in every direction. Far out to the right there's Bo Scarbh, a regular reef, three feet under water at high springs; close by—see! there's another, Bo Something Else; and then there's half-a-dozen rocks peppered here, and another half-dozen there. To crown all, there's only six feet at low water in the deepest part of the channel, although we are drawing seven feet ast; and, by George! the channel itself is only about two cables' length across. It would be certain shipwreck to enter without a pilot. What are we to do?"

It was in answer to this question that Calum recommended that they should signal to the shore for a pilot; and so the little yacht was kept running to and fro on the wind just off the shore. On coming thus close in under the mountains, they could just distinguish, half a mile ahead, the silver gleam of the mouth of the loch, and, seen from afar, it looked very narrow indeed—only a few yards across. Just inside, as they knew, there was good anchorage in a small snug basin just opposite the "village."

But an hour of great excitement passed, and there was no answer to their signal from the shore. Every instant the squalls grew more terrible, till it seemed the little vessel must be lost indeed. Worst of all, night was near; the hills were already growing dim.

"It's an awfu' coast," said Calum reflectively, as he shook the boat through a violent squall. "I mind once of a smack of a hundred tons being clean foundered just off here. And there wasna any sea: she was running for the south with herring, and had two or three empty barrels on her deck; and the wind came aff yonder hill and sank her as ye'd sink a spoon in a bowl o' milk. I wouldn'a sail an open boat here for a heap o' money."

"No one appears to take any notice of us," cried the young man.
"What is to be done? The boat won't stand much more of this."
"The boat's a good boat," said Calum, "but the night's going to
be bad; and nae yacht o' this size can live if it comes on a gale. If nae man comes off from the shore, we'll just have to run for Loch Uish, straight down the coast. It's no' a cannie run in the dark, for there's the Mackenzie Rock, and the reef where Sandie Gow lost the Spell; and forbye that, there's the Black Rocks; but we'll dae our best."

"Humph! then it's only a chance that we get clear out of this confounded mess?"

"O ay, just a chance. The folk 'll be awa at the fishing, and it's a bad nicht for a boat like this in the open."

Something in the perfectly unmoved and phlegmatic tone of the speaker took the other's attention, for the young man stared at him for some time with a half comic, half sneering look of astonishment; and, seeing the grim, weather-beaten features perfectly unmoved, he broke into a hard laugh.

"You take it coolly enough, at any rate," he cried.

"And what for should I no' tak' it coolly? I'm only a common man, and maun tak' the winds as they come, and earn my breed."

"Can you swim?"

"Not a stroke," replied Calum, burying his face in his hands to light his black cutty pipe; while the man at the forepart of the vessel, reclining against the bitts, hummed in a low voice the doleful lively ditty of "Gillie Calum."

Still finding secret amusement in the stolidity of his companions, the young man laughed again; then, entering the cabin once more, he re-emerged with a fowling-piece, and fired two shots rapidly into the air. Scarcely had he done so, when an enormous black dog sprang up the companion, and, rushing to the bulwarks, gazed eagerly out on the waters.

"Down, Nero, down!" cried the young man. "He thinks I have shot something. Ha! the noise seems to have attracted attention at last. Look yonder!"

On a small eminence overlooking the entrance of the loch two or three figures were now dimly seen; but it was already too dark to make out who and what they were. The twilight had quite fallen, and the wind was blowing with great fury.

"Hang off ten minutes longer," the young man said, "and then, if no one comes, we must risk the run down the coast."

The helmsman nodded, "put about" once more, and run through the wind. The squalls could still be seen whitening the sea to windward when they struck the water; but every minute the coast grew dimmer, so that only a very familiar eye could have made out the landmarks.

Ten minutes passed; and the order was already given to let the vessel run with a free sheet, when Calum, knocking the ashes of his pipe out into the water to leeward, said quietly—
"Wheest a minute! I hear the sound of oars between us and the shore."

Listening intently all could hear the splash, splash of oars coming nearer and nearer. Immediately afterwards a small boat, rowed by a solitary figure, shot out of the shadow of the hills. It seemed to be a rude coble quite at the mercy of the wind, but very skilfully managed. While Calum brought the boat up to the wind, the young man leant over the side of the vessel and regarded the small boat intently. Presently he uttered an exclamation which bore a suspicious resemblance to an oath, and turned angrily to Calum—

"Look there! Confound the idiots! They've sent out a woman!"

Calum, who was quite as astonished, but exhibited more self-control, nodded sharply. The boat was indeed rowed by a female, to all appearance strong and young, but her head was covered by a dark hood, and they could not see her face.

Angrily enough Calum addressed the stranger in Gaelic. He was answered in clear ringing tones, in the same tongue; and almost before he could say another word the coble was alongside the yacht, and a light girlish figure, with a speed and agility perfectly marvellous to the southerner, had sprung on board.

It was too dark to distinguish her features plainly, but she seemed fair-complexioned and very young. Her hood had fallen back, and her face and hair were damp with spray. Perfectly lost in amazement at so strange an apparition, the young man stood staring open-mouthed, while the stranger and Calum spoke to each other rapidly in Gaelic.

"What does the girl say?" he at last inquired, impatiently. "Is anyone coming off to pilot us into the anchorage?"

Calum replied in the methodical way peculiar to him and to his class.

"The lassie says there's not a man in the village this night that can pull an oar or draw a net. The whole village is awa after the herring at Loch Uish, and there's nothing left but wives, bairns, and old bed-ridden men."

A furious squall struck the yacht as the fisherman spoke, and almost capsized her, for she had entirely lost way through being brought up to the wind. Again addressing Calum rapidly in Gaelic, the girl pushed him aside and seized the tiller.

"Hullo, what are you doing?" cried the young man. "You're never going to trust the boat to a girl like that!"

The girl seemed either to understand what was said, or guessed at the meaning, for she laughed. By this time the yacht was again running rapidly through the water, steered by the stranger.

"The lassie says," observed Calum, phlegmatically, "that there's no better pilot in the place than hersel'; and if we leave the boat to
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her she'll take us in all snug. The tide's at the flood, she says, and we'll hae plenty o' water at the narrows."

"But it's nearly pitch dark, and this is a mere child."

"Never you fear, sir. See that! She kens how to steer a boat, and take my word for it, she'll take us safe. I've had worse pilots than this before now. She's a bold lass, and a cannie, and better than many men."

A loud cry from the girl interrupted him. She seemed giving instructions in her own tongue. In a moment he ran forward to assist the other hand with the sheets, while the girl brought the vessel round just a few feet from a large black mass projecting out of the sea.

"That's close work," cried the gentleman, nervously. "I'm afraid we'll come to grief."

The girl spoke again to Calum, and he interpreted.

"That's Dhu Sgr, she says. But there's three fathom water to the very edge of the reef. We're coming up to the narrows now, and need every inch o' room."

Another cry from the girl, and the vessel was round again on another tack. They were now quite in the shadow of the hills, and all seemed darkness and confusion, especially to the unaccustomed senses of the young man. To him the land seemed closing in on every side, the mountains towering straight above, the wind coming in all directions. A wild roar was in the air, and the water seemed swirling and boiling below them with an angry roar.

"We're in the narrows now," cried Calum, "that's the boiling o' the tide."

The wind was sweeping dead out of the mouth of the Loch, and again and again the vessel put about, so rapidly, indeed, that she scarcely got way upon her on one tack before she had to come round again. Once, for this reason, she refused altogether to answer the helm in coming round, and seemed drifting right on the rocks of the channel; but in a moment, urged by the girl, Calum boomed out the staysail to windward with an ear, and the vessel slowly completed her swing out. All seemed to grow darker and darker after this, for they got more and more in the shadow of the hills, but by and by the young man saw that they had emerged into more open water, and that several lights, like those of a village, were glimmering from the darkness of the shore. The wind still shrieked loudly.

"All's safe now, sir," said Calum. "We're close to the anchorage, and out o' a' danger."

So saying he ran forward and assisted his fellow-seaman to haul up the chain on deck, that it might run free, and to hoist the anchor over the bows. A minute afterwards the vessel was brought up to the wind, and glided steadily along through smooth water for about a
THE FAIR PILOT OF LOCH URIBOL

hundred yards, when the girl cried out to the men forward, and released her hold of the tiller.

The yacht was quite stationary. Down went the anchor, with that delicious sound which only the weary cruiser knows and loves. For some minutes there was confusion in the darkness. The young man went forward to see all snug, and to take a look about him. So far as he could make out in the night, they were in a nice natural harbour, surrounded on every side by hills, and sheltered almost entirely from the wind then blowing.

"Five fathom water," said Calum, hauling in the lead-line; "and a fine soft mud for the bottom. We couldna be in a snugger berth."

The young man who had been plunged in deep reflection, touched him on the shoulder.

"Come aft with me and speak to the girl. In all probability she has saved our lives."

But when they went in search of her she had disappeared, and the old cable in which she had rowed out to their assistance had disappeared also. They strained their eyes into the surrounding darkness, and listened for the sound of oars; but all was quite still, and they could not see a glimpse of the stranger.

AMENDE HONORABLE.

(Note on Article "PITY THE POOR DRAMA!" in May No.)

Some remarks of mine in "Pity the Poor Drama!" have, I am sorry to say, offended Mr. Hollingshead, a gentleman for whom I have great literary esteem. The manager of the Gaiety Theatre writes to say that I have ("unintentionally, he is sure," and he is right) done him "an injustice," and that he has nothing whatever to do with the Restaurant attached to his Theatre. I gather indeed from his letter that he personally regards the Restaurant as out of place so near to a Temple, or pseudo-Temple, of Art; and he is right again: only, can he not hinder the Proprietor from calling his establishment after the theatre it adjoins? However, that is neither here nor there. My present object is merely to disclaim any reflection on Mr. Hollingshead’s character, and to rejoice that at least one of our London managers, having read my article with attention, wishes himself presented in his true character of a friend to the best interests of the Drama.

WALTER HUTCHESON.
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN IRRECONCILEABLE.

L.

"In the Apology which Plato gives us, as the speech of Socrates before his judges, there is this remarkable passage: 'Do not be vexed with me for telling you the truth. There lives not the man who can escape destruction if as a born antagonist he opposes you or any other popular majority and endeavours to prevent many unjust and unconstitutional things being done in the state; but it is necessary that he who will fight this battle for what is righteous, and yet, even for never so short a time, keep himself unharmed, must maintain the privacy of an individual, and take no part in public affairs.'"

Although the distinguished and very wise and humane writer who quotes this passage in his last book goes on to observe that in modern times and in Britain the Antagonist is in no such danger as the Antagonist in Athens in the days of Plato, this is by no means a true judgment. This writer does not fail, indeed, to admit that even now the Antagonist may be in danger of "persecution"—evidently not having present to his mind what a miserable burden that word carries in a compactly-formed and rapidly intercommunicating organisation like modern society. It in fact carries with it an endless scroll of threatenings; and the formula of to-day is the formula of the age of Plato—Conform, or we will destroy you if we can.

The Antagonist or Irreconcileable is not necessarily a haunter of barricades or in any recognised form a social or political conspirator. Neither of these characters would suit me, and in reading these autobiographical notes the reader will please to bear in mind that an Irreconcileable is simply an uncommitted person. He need not be cantankerous; he need not be ungentle; he need not be unsociable, when association can be made truthful. His ideals, religious, political, domestic, and other, would be found, when expressed in general terms, to be in accord with those whom most men and women agree to call good, wise, and great. But on the question of methods—that is to say, of the law and customs directed to the cultivation of these ideals, an Irreconcileable is simply an uncommitted person; one who not only makes no show of acquiescence in these matters, but who firmly holds aloof from everything which could fairly be held to commit him to any such acquiescence.

Leaving alone the rationale of this position for the present, I will ask leave to begin these Notes with such hints of the character of my father and mother and of my own childhood as may at least help
"The Fair Pilot of Loch Uribol
one of my favorite stories

WALT WHITMAN,
CAMDEN,
NEW JERSEY.