A MAIDEN FAIR.

A Scottish Love Story.

BY CHARLES GIBBON.

CHAPTER I.

A FRESH BREEZE.

A grey day that would have been dull anywhere but by the sea. A strong breeze blowing and the grey and blue waters leaping into white combs and points. A landsman would have called it a gale, but to fisherfolk it was only a "wee thing fresh." The grey old houses, with their red and brown roofs, looking out on the harbor, would also have appeared dull and dirty but for their picturesquely irregular gables and heights. Then the busy figures of the fishwives in their bright-colored petticoats and "short gowns" (long jackets); the lounging groups of the fishermen, and, above all, the bustle in the harbor and on its walls which projected out into the Forth, gave life to the scene in harmony with the strong breeze and the leaping waters.

Out on the farthest point of the grey walls a group of men and women, with the spray flashing over them and the keen wind biting their cheek, stood watching a smack which was tacking to make the port.

"Will she win in, think you?" asks one.

"Safe enough—Bob Ross is steering," confidently answers a little weather-wizened-faced old man, by name Dick Baxter.

Bob Ross had seen a smack capsize, and with five trusty comrades had put off to the rescue

"It was a daftlike thing for Bob to think he could be out in time to help them."

"It was worth trying," said Baxter dryly.

Suddenly the prow of the boat is turned towards the opening in the walls and comes straight and swiftly along, crosses the bar, down goes the sail, and boat and men are safe in the haven.

There was no cheer although brave work had been done; but an eager inspection of the boat to see who was in it.

"They hae gotten them a' but Jock Tamson," said Baxter in a matter-of-fact tone, the circumstance being of too ordinary a nature to call for much feeling; "puir sowl, he's gaen."

"My man, my man," cried a woman rushing down the steps to the boat, "whar's he?"

There was no answer and the woman understood. She bowed her head, covered her face with her hands and was silent. Then a couple of burly women, with broad shoulders and muscular hands, took each an arm of the mourner.

"Come awa hame, Jeanie," said one quietly, and the voice was tender although the notes were harsh—"ye'll be better there."

And they led the widow home.

Bob Ross was the first out of the boat, helping one of the three men who had been saved to land. The others followed, and were first assisted to a much needed dram and then to their homes. The crew proceeded to the inn, accompanied by a number of friends eager to obtain more details of the rescue than had been given in the hurried answers to the crowd in the haven.

Ross did not accompany them. He gave his stalwart frame a shake, like a huge Newfoundland dog after coming out of the water, and that contented him. He was a man of about thirty, a handsome fellow, tall and sinewy, dressed in a pilot jacket, and boots over his trousers.

In his scaly old blue jersey and corduroy trousers, and with his thin brown wizened face, he was always at his post and knew everybody's affairs.

"I was on the look'out for you, Bob. Hoo did ye manage? It was weel done onyway."

"We were just in time—poor Thompson had gone and the other three were just dropping off the keel. But you see we got them, and that's all."

"Ay, but it was weel done, and there'll be a paragraph in the *Scotsman* about you the-morn."

"Well, it'll do nae harm," answered Ross, laughing.

"Is that a' you think o't? Man, I'd gie onything to hae them speak about me in print! But be that as it may, wha do you think is here?"

"A lot o' folk."

"Jist that, jist that; but I was thinking you would like to ken that Jeems" (pronounced with the *s* short) "is here."

"To see his mother, I suppose, and get some more of her siller."

"Jist that, an' speaking that fine English I could hardly understan' him. But I thought you would like to ken, for he's come to see some ane forbye his mither."

That was what Dick Baxter had been waiting to tell, and he enjoyed the look on Bob Ross's face—a comical attempt to hide the fact that the news disturbed him.

"But what can that matter to me, Dick? I suppose he is free to go wherever he is welcome like other folk."

"Nae doot, and it's jist as you tak' it. But if I was in your place I'd be there afore him."

"Where, man, where?"

"As though you didna ken?" exclaimed Dick slyly. "Howsever, you'll ken fine when I tell you that I saw her yestreen and she was speerin' for you, and there was a braw laugh on her face when I said you was to be here the-day."

"Thank you, Dick," said Ross with evident annoyance; "but I wish you wouldna' meddle."

"I didna' ken afore that it was ony harm to do a frien' a guid turn," answered Dick Baxter in his most dignified way.

"No harm—I hope."

"I didna say onything by ordinar," said Dick a little sulkily, and yet with a desire to reassure Ross, seeing him so much put out. But the "by ordinar" must have had an extensive range indeed in his mind, since he had been praising his young friend without stint to Annie Murray, the only child of Captain Duncan Murray, who was sole owner of Anchor Cottage and the "Mermaid" steamer. "And she didna take it that ill," added Dick pawkily.

"Then it's all right."

And Ross laughed again as he went his way, and that way was to Anchor Cottage. He had been sent for by Captain Duncan on a matter of business. But the business was not in Bob Ross's mind as he walked rapidly along with head bowed against the wind, the spray dashing over the parapet, and the sun slowly beginning to make its way through the mist.

"I wonder can it be true! Was she thinking o' me? Maybe, maybe, for she's no upsettin like other lassies I ken o'—but what havers is this? The captain is friendly and kindly; but he is proud o' his daughter, proud o' his steamer, and proud o' his siller—he would never hear o't when there's a chiel like Cargill hanging about waiting for her."

At this thought he stopped, teeth closed and feet went down harder and faster on the ground. Again—

"But why should he not think of his own early days and count my chances as guid as his were?"

Here a faint smile of hope crossed his face; but the smile faded into a troubled look.

"I'm thinking he would do it, too, if Cargill werena here with his fineries and his siller that he had no hand in making. Puir auld Bell Cargill—it was a pity you spent your life in hoarding up your bawbees for a loon that's more than half ashamed to call you his mother before his fine friends—ugh! Lord forgie me for thae hard thoughts. If Annie likes him let him hae her."

The healthy nature of the man rose against this envious spirit which had for a moment taken possession of him. He lifted his head and looked fate steadily in the face. She should take him for his own sake, or he would "e'en let the bonnie lass gang."

It was a relief to the man to feel this better mood upon him before he reached the cottage, for he knew that ugly thoughts make ugly faces. It was a relief, too, that the sun had scattered the mist and brightened everything.

CHAPTER II.

ANCHOR COTTAGE.

The cottage stood on the high ground overlooking the Firth. It was a square, comfortable-looking building of one story, built of brown stone and slated. The only piece of ornamentation about the building was a porch. It stood in a piece of ground which was also square and planted with things useful—vegetables, fruit-trees, and berry-bushes. There were a few plots of flowers and some rose-bushes, but these things being merely beautiful were kept well within bounds. Nevertheless the place had a cosy appearance and was attractive on that account.

The captain had been brought up to regard utility as the first consideration in life; and the only bit of fancy he had permitted himself when the grounds were laid out, was to place an old anchor in the centre of the patch of grass, called the green. This anchor had one of its points stuck firmly in the ground as if it were holding the whole place steady.

"That auld anchor, sir," the captain would say to any visitor, "saved the 'Mermaid' once when she was being blown out of the roads by one of the clartiest storms I have ever been in. The 'Mermaid' of that time was a bit cutter you maun ken. And when I sold the cutter and got the steamer I brought that anchor here and I'm proud o' it—rael proud—and so I named the house after it."

As soon as Ross passed through the gate he halted, hesitating whether to go straight to the door or to cross the green towards the lass he saw amongst the berry-bushes busy gathering fruit. His heart's impulse had its way, and he went towards her.

As the gate closed behind him with a clang a frank, sun-browned face looked up from amongst the bushes and recognized him with a pleasant smile. He thought that smile as bright as the sunshine itself.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Ross," she said in a rich, cheery voice. "Father has been expecting you, but there is somebody with him just now."

How cordially Bob Ross thanked that "somebody," and how earnestly he prayed that the "somebody" might stay long.

"I could not come so early as I was meaning to do, and I'm no exactly sorry."

"How is that?"

"You are here."

She looked as if she enjoyed, or at any rate did not dislike, this very direct compliment. She said banteringly—

"I'll hae to take care of you, Mr. Ross."

"That's just what I would like you to do," he rejoined sincerely.

"Keek into the berry-bush and say what you see there," she replied, laughingly quoting an old play-rhyme of childhood.

"I'm doubting you would not let me tell you what *I* see."

"Oh, but I would, for I'm no the gowk!"

"I'm sure of that, for what I see is the bonniest lass in all the world!"

"Eh, Mr. Ross?" she cried laughing again, "I'm thinking I had better go and tell my father you are here."

That was a check, otherwise he might have found an opportunity to turn this banter to serious account. She was conscious of that, and wished to avoid the possible turn the conversation might take—and he was aware of it.

But he tried to detain her by the assurance that he was in no hurry and would rather wait until the captain was quite free. With a smiling shake of the head, she took up her basket of fruit and went toward the house. A tall winsome figure, in neat, simple dress; and as she crossed the green her rich, fair hair glistened in the sunlight like gold.

The wistful lover, following, felt that there was no use in following, for such a prize could never be his—not because there was any inseparable gulf between their positions; but because she in herself appeared to be so much above him or any ordinary mortal. Alas, poor lover!

But Annie was a bright specimen of woman nature—kind and generous, bonnie and brave. The man who won her would be fortunate indeed, for he would possess that greatest of all blessings, a faithful helpmate in all that concerns daily life—tender in his sorrow, blithe in his gladness, and patient of his errors.

All this and more Ross thought, and it rendered the possibility of her becoming the prize of James Cargill the more bitter. He tried to make allowance for his own feelings in regard to Annie and the influence they had upon his opinion of the man. But when all allowance was made he could not believe that Cargill was likely to make her or any woman happy.

The captain's daughter was as famous as the captain himself; for *although* she could play the "pianny," and was reported to be able to speak French "as well as the French themselves" (such a smattering of the language as any schoolgirl might possess would suffice for this report), she was her father's clerk and purser, besides being his housekeeper. She accompanied him on all his voyages, and in the wildest storm was as cool as the oldest seaman on board.

When the "Mermaid" was in straits she would stand by her father's side—her sailor hat and the peajacket over her ordinary dress giving her tall figure a somewhat manly appearance—ready to obey him in anything that he might command.

And throughout this rough life she preserved the gentlest characteristics of womanhood. When at home in the cottage no stranger would have suspected that the quiet-looking lass with the merry smile was accustomed to such stern experiences.

The "Mermaid" was a small steamer which Duncan Murray had purchased a bargain. Then, having sold his cutter, he employed the steamer to considerable advantage in carrying goods along the coast, or to wherever he might obtain a cargo. By this means he had made a good deal of money—a big fortune his friends considered—some of which was prudently invested in house property.

He might have retired and lived comfortably on his income. But he would not do that; he only became more particular about his cargoes and about his rates of freight. Likewise, he would now employ a pilot more frequently than had been his custom, in order to give himself more ease on board.

Often he had been heard to declare with an emphatic oath that he could never part with the "Mermaid" or his daughter "as lang as they could hand thegither."

In spite of this well-known declaration there were men who would have been glad to make him forego his vow so far as the lady was concerned; only she seemed to be as much disposed to observe it as her father. At any rate, no one had yet obtained her favor; and there seemed no likelihood of that favor being easily won.

To herself there was the simple fact that her life was a happy one and there was no need of change. Even if one should appear possessed of that strange power which draws a maiden away from father, mother, and kindred to trust her whole life to him, she believed that she could resist it, until *her* father said, "Go, and take my blessing with you."

"Here is Mr. Ross, father," said Annie, as she entered the room, and added with some surprise, "Mr. Cargill has gone?"

"Ay; did you no see him?—he wanted to see you. How are you, Bob? I'm wantin' you to come wi' us as far as Peterhead. Can you manage it?"

The captain was a burly little man with a very ruddy face—shrewd, sharp, and yet not ill-natured.

"When?" was the prompt query.

"Next week, on Tuesday maybe, but on Wednesday sure."

Ross looked at Annie—his eye turned to her involuntarily, asking the question, was she going too? But she looked down at the table examining some forms which her father had thrust towards her whilst he was speaking.

"I'm no sure. But what should you need me for?—you know the road better than me."

The captain's quick, pale eyes looked up at him sharply, and he said good-naturedly—

"I'm perfectly aware o' that, Bob, but next to myself I think you ken them best."

"Thank you, captain."

"And as I am to have a friend wi' me, I dinna want to hae mair fash mysel' nor is just necessary. That's the reason why I want you wi' us, though what you are sae particular about kenning for, I canna make out. What's wrang wi' ye?"

That was a question not easily answered, for the man himself did not know precisely. He felt that there was a great deal wrong with him; but as he found it difficult to discover an explanation for it in his own mind, it was impossible to translate it in words to the understanding of another. So he answered vaguely—

"Nothing, captain, except that I would like a bit rest."

"Rest!—you that fetched aff they three billies frae the smack this morning, and was able to walk out here as if naething had happened—you talk about rest when you are gaun aboard the 'Mermaid'!—hoots man, that's no your reason."

"What is that about the smack, father?" broke in Annie, with eyes brightening, as she remembered the explanation Ross had given for being late.

"A daft thing—that fool-fellow gaed out in the teeth o' a gale because he saw a smack capseezed—"

"Did you save them?" she asked of Ross; but the father replied—

"Oo, ay, he brought hame three o' them—but he might hae made the loss o' his ain crew as weel as that o' the smack. It was cleverly done as I am told, all the same; but you should mind that a life in the hand is worth twa in the wrack. But that's no the question: are ye to come wi' me or no? Cargill is coming."

Annie, by a flush of the cheeks and a movement of the hand—instantly checked—as if she would take that of Ross, appeared to think that the saving of the men was very much the question.

The father did not observe the movement, and Ross was entirely occupied with the announcement that Cargill was going to Peterhead on board the "Mermaid."

"I'll go wi' you, captain," he said quietly; and any one hearing him speak would have thought that he was merely closing an ordinary bargain. But through his mind was passing the panorama of Cargill, all the way along the coast courting Annie.

"That's a plain word, and I think you ought to hae spoken it sooner, for it's an easy job to you, and you'll be among frien's. Take a dram on the head o't."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE GATE.

He had been in a dream during the last ten minutes of his stay in the captain's room. He was in a dream now that he got out into fresh air. Cargill going with them—Cargill had been at the cottage just before him—why, then it was all settled and there was no hope for him.

What fiend, then, had prompted him to say he would be pilot of the "Mermaid" on this voyage? Why should he be with them when it would be only to intensify his sense of loss into hate, and—maybe crime?

He should have said, no, no, no!—and he had said yes for the very reason which should have compelled him to say no.

It was not yet too late. He could find some excuse; he could feign illness—he could drown himself. Anything rather than go on board that vessel and see them together, knowing the man to be so unworthy. He did believe that if he had thought Cargill an honest man he could have said good-bye in sad resignation to the inevitable; he could have steered them safely into port with no chagrin, but only sorrow in his heart.

As it was—he must escape from the engagement. He could not answer for himself if he fulfilled it.

As he was mechanically opening the gate his arm was grasped by a friendly hand.

"Stop a minute, Mr. Ross, I have been noticing that you are not well, can we do anything for you?"

"Not well! What a poor thing was it, then, that the wreck of hope and future should come to be a mere question of "Can we do anything for you?" So much medicine—so much fresh air—and lo, hope is restored and the future is as bright as ever. That is the current mood—and a happy one—but to the homely nature of a man like Ross it brought no balm. He had ventured his all in a single boat and it had sunk.

He turned and saw Annie, the bright, sympathetic eyes full upon him. Like most men deeply in love he was most shy of the being he most loved. So he answered somewhat ungraciously—

"That is true—I am not well; but thank you for coming to say a kind word to me."

"I am very glad to have given you any comfort. I doubt you have been overtaxing yourself to-day."

He rested on the gate. The sweet voice was echoing in his brain and he listened. Then speaking to the voice he breathed the name, "Annie."

She did not draw away from him. She stood breathless,

"Will you let me speak to you?" he said, so quietly now that he could scarcely realize himself that he had been for a moment in dreamland.

"If it will do you any good, to be sure I will," she answered with an endeavor to speak quite frankly and easily; but the voice faltered a little.

"Onything I like?"

"Of course."

The permission granted he appeared to find difficulty in taking advantage of it, so there was a pause, and the outcome of it was—

"I'm a stupid gowk."

But ridiculous as the expression might be to other ears they were not so to those of Annie Murray, and she asked tremulously—

"What for?"

"Because I care more for you than for anybody or anything else, and—I have been aye feared to tell you. Now it is useless telling you."

He spoke almost fiercely as in the throes of a strong man's agony; but with the evident effort to restrain his passion.

"You are not to speak any more," she said, drawing a long breath; "you are to listen to me. You are young, and you can go where you will find friends to comfort and cheer you——"

"So it is said of all men," he muttered.

"My father is an old man," she went on, "and has only me as his constant friend and companion. Well, can you think of it? I said to myself long ago that I would never leave him until he sent me away. Well, can you think of it? The only time that I ever wished I might leave him was——"

But there the blood came rushing to her face and a startled expression appeared in her eyes as if she had caught herself in the commission of some crime, and she became silent. She, who had been calm in the midst of storm, trembled.

"Well?" he asked, surprised by her sudden stop and looking into her face for an explanation.

"Well," she said softly—an entire change of tone and manner—"there's nothing more to say except that I am glad you are to be the pilot of the 'Mermaid' on her next trip."

He took her hand gently, and for a moment each looked into the others eyes. Then—

"Now it is my turn to ask you to listen to me," he said slowly. "Whilst I was coming down the path, I made up my mind that I would not go. You shall decide me. Is Cargill going by your wish?"

"No."

"Do you wish me to go?"

"I do—because father wishes it."

She added the latter words quickly, as if fearing that he should misunderstand the import of her wish; and again they looked into each other's eyes in silence.

"Very well," he said, "I will go."

And then they said good-bye. The understanding between them was complete, although no word of compact had been spoken. She was to be faithful to her father, and he was to wait until the father spoke.

Wait!—ay, he would wait all his life. And he had no doubt that after this trip of the "Mermaid," a little conversation with Captain Duncan would enable him to arrange matters satisfactorily. With that conviction he went merrily on his way.

CHAPTER IV.

A DUTIFUL SON.

The original part of the village consists of two rows of buildings forming a narrow street. The buildings have two flats; the upper one is approached by a staircase with a thick wooden railing outside the wall; and the landings of these "outside stairs" form the rostrums of the fishwives from which they harangue their gossips. Poles jut out from windows carrying ropes to form a triangle, and on these hang men and women's clothes to dry. On the stairs are broad-haunched women gossiping to others below on either side, or across the way. Beneath the stairs are others preparing bait, mending nets or clothes, and also gossiping.

At the foot of one of these stairs is Dick Baxter. To him approaches a big, lumpish man, jauntily. He is dressed in the latest fashion of tailordom, has a large signet ring on the third finger of his left hand, and carries a slim umbrella in his right, which makes his own figure the more conspicuous. He is evidently conscious that such a dandy is out of his element in this place. He is rendered still more conscious of it by the salutation of Dick Baxter.

"Weel, Jeems, you are a grand sight, but you might hae come sooner, for your mither's in a great way about you.'

"Thank you, *Mister* Baxter."

"That's as muckle as to say that I ought to call you *Mister* Cargill," said Dick pityingly. "Na, na, laddie, I canna do that. I hae kent ye since you were a bairn running barefoot here in the Row, and you maun just thole me saying Jeems to the end."

Before Dick had finished his observation, the gentleman had ascended the staircase and entered the dwelling at the top. There he was saluted by an eldritch cry—

"Ye hae come at last, ye deevil's buckie. What's keepit ye? Wait or I get up and I'll learn ye manners. Did I no say that ye was to be here at twa o'clock and noo it's four?"

This came from an old woman who was seated in an old-fashioned armchair. She wore a high white "mutch," which rendered her shrivelled features and shrunken eyes the more marked; and the passion on the face at this moment made it appear more haggard than it naturally was.

The lumpish dandy was not at all disturbed. His mother, Bell Cargill, had been paralyzed in her lower limbs for ten years past; and although she was always expecting to recover and making her arrangements for that event, it had not yet come to pass. She was constantly telling her neighbors what she would do when she "got up," and they kindly humored her hope, and the hope sustained her. She had been one of the briskest and strongest of the fishwives, and by a singular business tact had been successful to a degree almost beyond precedent. Although living in this poor dwelling, surrounded by her creels and fishing-tackle—it was her humor to have all the relics of her trade about her—she possessed a considerable fortune, the result of her own energy and industry. Bawbees had grown to shillings in her hands, and shillings to pounds. Then, whilst she still carried her creel, she had started a small fish shop in the High Street, Edinburgh, and out of that had grown two large fishmongery establishments, one at the West End, and the other in the main thoroughfare leading to Newington. She had been careful in the selection of her managers, and she had prospered.

She had once said—but she never repeated it—that the only mistake she ever made was in getting married; and the only good her man had ever done her was in "deeing sune." But he had left her with a son as useless as himself.

Notwithstanding all her prosperity, she clung to the abode in which she had been brought up, and out of which she had reaped everything. Her son, however, had different ideas.

"You see, mother, I was detained by——"

"Can you no speak your native tongue, you idiot? What's the use o' puttin' on your fine airs wi' me?" cried Bell irately.

"I really thought that I was speaking my native tongue as far as I knew it, mother; but if there is any other form which will please you better I shall be happy to adopt it," he answered, taking a chair and seating himself on it carefully, as if he feared that it might break under him.

The old woman eyed him all over, and the twinkling of her eyes showed that she had a secret pleasure in his grand appearance, although she maintained her querulous manner.

"Weel, you have a guid Scotch tongue in your head if you would only make us o' it: but you'll do naething usefu'. You just spend, and spend, and spend."

"If you would allow me," he said in a lazy way, "I am quite willing to take the management of the business——"

"Catch me lettin' ye do that. I gied ye a tether o' three months, and if I had gien ye three mair there wouldna hae been ae penny to clink agin anither left us."

"Very well," he said shrugging his heavy shoulders, "I am content. Only don't blame me."

"No blame you, ye lazy loon! Oh, wait till I get up; and it'll no be lang noo or that. No blame you! If ye had been half a man ye would hae been the greatest fish-merchant in the kintry by this time."

"But I don't want to be a fishmonger," he said as before, and folding his hands on his paunch.

"Fish-merchant, I said, and mair shame to ye? Is it no the grandest trade and the bravest trade in the world? Can ye no think o' what it means—men's lives gaun to feed the livin'? And can ye no think what it has been to you? Whaur would your bonnie claes come frae, and your rings, and your watches, and your breastpins, if it hadna been for the fish?"

"I am quite ready to make my acknowledgment to each particular fish if you'll only tell me their names," he answered coolly, as he readjusted a horseshoe pearl breastpin.

She was exasperated by his coolness and made a movement as if she would rise, but fell back on her chair with the old cry—

"Wait till I get up and I'll set ye a bonnie dance, my braw lad—you that canna come to see me ance a month, cause ye're shamed to be seen amang the folks that ken whaur your braw duds cam frae. But bide ye. I'm gaun to hae the lawyer here and I'll settle ye. And I'm gaun to hae Bob Ross as a witness——"

"Bob Ross!" muttered Cargill, for the first time roused from his lethargy; "he's eternally turning up where he isn't wanted."

"Ay, it's like you to misca' folk that are better than yoursel'. He looks after them that belangs to him while ye gang aff to your grand chambers in Edinbro' and London, and are feart folks should ken you got your siller frae the puir auld fishwife that ye leave here."

(To be continued.)

Archbishop Feehan returned to Chicag from a visit to the Pope yesterday afternoon. He was escorted home by a procession of ten thousand persons. Over a hundred thousand assembled along the three mile march to witness the parade. Except General Grant's welcome, the ovation exceeds anything of the kind previously witnessed in Chicago.

A lady 70 years old, residing in Belleville, Tex., has just cut four new teeth, and there are indications that she will soon have a full set of natural grinders.

A citizen of Hartland, Me., in a fit of sanity, recently cut off his toes, one at a time, and calmly trimmed the stumps.