MACHA.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert dressed his wife in a lady's garb, and surrounded her with all the appointments that were suited to her new station. The first jar to his happiness was given by his perception that, beautiful as was Macha in her silks and laces and trinkets, musical as was her speech, grateful as were her movements, there was yet something wanting in her to make her a bride that could be presented, without risk of criticism, to his friends. The enchanting mountain girl, with her picturesque beauty and wild charming ways was no more. The lovely Lady Gilbert was a little too unconventional, with her soft brogue, her vivid and figurative language, her quick natural gestures, her little slips in grammar, and artless habitual utterance of the truth. But Sir Humphrey was very patient with her, and set to work to polish his precious gem in the rough.

A long time passed over, and the husband felt no desire to revisit the highlands of Connaught.

"Dear," said his wife to him one day, "when are we going back to see my mother?"

She was standing before him in a flowing robe of white stuff, with her honey-coloured hair dressed by a French maid with jewels in her ears, and flowers on her breast, looking such a picture of beauty and refinement that even the peculiar intonation that still clung to her speech could not declare her other than a lady. Macha possessed in a high degree the power of adapting herself to the ways of those around her. Her husband recognized this power in her, and relied upon it to carry him through the consequences of his own rash and extraordinary conduct. He was grateful to his wife for the persistent efforts he saw her make, knowing she was influenced solely by love for him for she took but little interest in the pleasures that surrounded her. He did not know how far she was influenced by another motive also, the desire to earn a reward, in the fulfilment of his promise to bring her back to her native hills.

So long ago did it seem that folly that had married him to a peasant-wife, that all recollection of the details of the circumstances had almost passed away from his mind. He was a man of quick overpowering impulses, and memories that faded with ease. Things that were full of pathetic interest to him yesterday were very likely to be follies to him to-day. Yet he was faithful in his affection for Macha; and the sight of her struggling with her difficulties, labouring to make herself all that he could wish, and succeeding by the inspiration of something like genius, touched and delighted the best feelings of his nature. He was the more disposed to be satisfied with the results of his marriage because his wife's low extraction was a secret from his associates. It was believed that she was the daughter of an noble but impoverished family—that she had been negleacted in her early years, and educated by her husband. A pretty romance had been constructed, how, or by whom, Sir Humphrey did not know. His wife's gentle grace was the real foundation for it; and at all events he had not the courage to contradict the tale.

With all this good luck there was something wanting to their happiness. Macha did not fall into raptures with the splendours of her home, nor with the amusements of society, nor with the flatteries and triumphs that fell to her share. She only half lived in luxury by her husband's side; the other half of her lived on the mountain among the privations to which she was born. Under her rich sables she shuddered at the cold on her mother's limbs; and by her own glowing fireside she kept counting the sods of turf that might have been saved in the rainy season to keep warmth in the aged grandmother's withered frame. She heard the little sisters saying, "What is Macha doing? Macha is so happy she has forgotten us!" The heart within her was getting every day more chill, because as yet her husband's promise did not seem likely to be fulfilled. At last she had summoned courage and asked him the question,

"When will you let me see my mother?"

Sir Humphrey was troubled. He was quite resolved never to let Macha return to her people, and he had hoped that the desire to go to them would have faded away from her before now. There was something in her face which he could not understand, but which made him feel that he must deal very gently with her.

"It is out of the question at present love," he said; "but you shall send her any present you please."

She shut her eager lips, seeing that her husband would not bear to be urged. He went hurriedly out of the room, and Macha stood silently by the fire, with a strange gray cloud over-shadowing her face. The third summer had gone by, and now again the winter was pessing, and she seemed farther than ever from attaining the great desire of her heart. A minute she stood where he had left her, with closed eyes, climbing in spirit the rough ascent to the mountain cabin. In imagination she threw herself at her mother's feet, begged her forgiveness, assured her of her love, pleaded her inability to keep her word. Then with a long sigh she unclosed her eyes, unbent her brows, and patiently went about her occupations. She took advantage of her husband's permission to send a present—a cloak for the grandmother, and flannel for the mother and little sisters. There was much trouble about addressing the parcel so that it might reach that distant and isolated cabin; but the trouble was taken, and that the parcel went safely home was known by the arrival of an acknowledgment of the gift—a grotesque scrawl in pen and ink, scarcely legible, but expressive of love and gratitude. Sir Humphrey read the curious document with a curling lip, and threw it in the fire. Allow his wife to go back among these savages? No; it was not likely he could be so foolish. One such folly in a lifetime was surely enough. They must learn to forget Macha, and Macha must learn to forget them.

How was she to be taught to do it, though? Why was she so stupidly, so obstinately blind to the exigencies of the case? Full of intelligence on every other subject, she could not be brought to see that between Sir Humphrey's wife and the wild tribe of her people there could not and must not be any further personal intercourse. How slow she was in taking up his meaning, when he tried to bear it upon her, without putting the fact before her in uncomfortable words! With her beautiful serious face her outward and inward refinement, in her soft white draperies, and delicate laces, how could she contemplate a visit to that abode of poverty which he remembered only too well? Fancy the wild, brown, little sisters hugging the elegant Lady Gilbert; the meagre weather-beaten mother weeping over her, the mummy-like grandmother mumbling Irish into her ears! There was a grotesqueness in the picture, as presented to Sir Humphrey's imagination, that brought the indignant colour to his face.

Macha's obtuseness was aggravating. From time to time she would say to him imploringly, "When will you allow me to go?" and when answered satisfactorily, would turn away with that dull look of patience that was becoming habitual to her countenance. She lived in a state of painful suspense, of silent expectation, which showed she had not taken in the idea that he was resolved never to grant her request. The memory of his promise was still so fresh in her thoughts. Her stupidity was the blindness of perfect faith.

Every day her yearning grew deeper and the look of it settled in her eyes. Her husband resolutely appeared to misunderstand her, refused to meet her pleading glance, persuaded himself that she was ill, out of temper, anything rather than home-sick and lonely by his side. If his conscience smote him with the remembrance of an eager promise voluntarily made, he told himself that foolish vows ought never to be kept. The strangest part of it all to him was, that she did not reproach him with having broken his word. But she did not think he had broken it—only that he was wearily long about beginning to fulfill it.

A bitter season set in, and Sir Humphrey, looking at his wife's thin cheek, and the darkening trouble about her eyes, bethought him of taking her to some gay city, to a genial climate and the novelty of strange faces and places. He had watched her walking to and fro among his comfortable tenantry, in and out of their warm wholesome dwellings, and he knew what brought the spasm upon her lips and the quiver of pain across her eyes. She was thinking of that dreary hovel among the wilds of the Connaught hills. Where the sun always shines, he thought, she would forget how cold and hunger sting. So the Christmas guests were put off, and Sir Humphrey and Lady Gilbert went to winter at Florence.

Uncomplainingly Macha did her husband's bidding. She said to herself, "When we come back, early in the spring, he will take me or let me go." In the mild air of Italy she did not realise so keenly the well-remembered rigours of the Connaught winter. Her imagination was caught by the beauties that surrounded her, and for a little time Sir Humphrey thought his triumph was at hand, It was but an accident that turned the scale against him, and made shipwreck of his plans and of Macha's life. Accident or fate led Lady Gilbert, who rarely looked at anything printed, to glance into the columns of an English newspaper; and a paragraph met her eye in which certain rough statements were made, regarding a famine of food and fuel in certain parts of hungry and melancholy Connaught. Instantly her long-suffering patience gave way, and all the latent fire of her nature burst forth. She flew to her husband with burning eyes, and laid her finger on the cruel lines, Sir Humphrey was in an irritable humour. Cut off from his customary country pursuits, idling in a foreign city, he had fallen into play, and had lost heavily the night before this eventful morning. The sight of his wife's feverish emotion made him angry; her passionate demand to be sent with succour to her people chaffed and bewildered him. Macha! for whose good he had inconvenienced himself so seriously, left his home in winter, lowered himself to sit at the table with gamblers! —Macha to rise and turn on him with those flaming eyes! He met her with a flat denial, and uttered some bitter reproaches, upbraiding her with her imprudence and persistent folly. Having begun to give a little vent to his displeasure, he ended by saying more than he had ever meant to say. He refused to believe in the newspaper's tale of distress, and forbade her to mention her people again.

Macha stood like one stunned, slowly taking in what his angry words conveyed. As she had believed his words before, so she believed them now. They fell upon her like blows, and when he had turned harshly away and left her under sentence of his displeasure, one only desire and determination possessed her—to get away out of this cruel world of plenty, and bring food and comfort to her famishing mother. She did not weigh the consequences of defying her husband; her agony and longing blotted out even the memory of his existence. How she made her way to Connaught who shall tell? As the lioness finds her stolen young, so did Macha scent the path to her native hills. Accustomed to rely upon her husband for everything, to follow his instructions and mark out nothing for herself, she must have made almost supernatural exertions to accomplish her end. But accomplish it she did. When her husband returned that night, half angry and half relenting, revolving plans for reconciliation, taking counsel with himself as to how he ought to deal with her, knowing very well that he meant to send a largess to those creatures on the mountain who were such a thorn in his side—when he came back to his home that night, Macha was gone.

Dismay, anger, terror, all passed through and over him. He first swore and condemned her; then remembered her sweet face and her former patience, and almost forgave her. Uneasily he resolved to let her go and have her way. He had given her money yesterday, commanding her to spend it on her own amusement; for the present she could not want; and this reckless visit would be sure to tame her. Very soon she would be glad to return to him on any terms. Thus torn by distracting thoughts Sir Humphrey went back alone to his English home. Pride, obstinacy, and the conviction that his wife was wrong and required punishment and humiliation, prevented his following her to Ireland.

The sun was setting behind whitened peaks when Macha came wearily up the last ascent of the hills. There were the bare seamed levels, the weird rocks, the scant green patches, the dark mysterious-looking lake. "O, God, I have returned!" broke from her. "There is my mother's cabin." The fierce ache that had gnawed her heart suddenly left it, and a glow of satisfaction went tingling through her veins. Strange, instinctive, unreasoning love of home and kindred, that can forbid a human being to accept ease and pleasure in exchange for the suffering of want! Macha, who had been delivered over to abundance and luxury, cast them from her like broken fetters, and rushed forward into the embraces of her old companion and foster-mother—Poverty. This was the spot where she had danced and sung, wept and prayed; where she had been hungry and cold and full of care, and had been necessary to the existence of those she loved. Here was where she had watched, half credulous, for the fairies among the rocks; and, wholly believing, beheld, with delight, the procession of glorified beings in the heavens. This was the home of her passionate devotion; the strait hard bed from which she could endure to yield up her mortal breath.

Only the eagles, and whatever supernatural beings had been lurking near natural beings had been lurking near, heard the clamour of wild cries that arose in the isolated cabin at sight of her.

"Mother there is something beautiful coming that looks like Macha!" cried one of the little sisters. "Macha must be dead, and coming from heaven to see us!" And they all stood solemnly in the doorway to watch the approach of the apparition. But when Macha's living lips spoke to them, and her outstretched hands touched them, then arose such cries as the rocks gave back.

The advent of mercy was not an hour too soon to bring the colour of life back to pinched faces, and to put light on the fireless hearth. A long battle with hunger and cold must soon have dolefully ended had not sucour arrived. Rains had drenched the turf, and the sun had not shone to dry it; and the potatoes had been washed out of the earth. Macha had known how it would be, though her husband refused to believe in the tale. Who will take oil from the flinty stone, or honey out of the rock? The very birds will not live in this barren world. Why should man cling to it with such an unaccountable love?

When Macha, having ministered to their bodily wants, and comforted their hearts with her love, lay down that night on the old familiar bed of straw, she had time to remember the husband from before whose angry face she had fled. "He will never love me more," thought she; "he will never come to seek me again." She tried to comfort herself with the thought that that she was still the Macha of old, and would work for her people; but the tears poured from her eyes, and her passionate heart was not satisfied yet.

Next day she went about her old work in her old dress, and tried to forget that she had ever been away from her home. Painfully she saw the misery and squalor of it, and planned such little improvements as might lie within her reach. But soft living had spoiled Macha for privation and toil. Hunger afflicted her, and her limbs were wrung with cold; she was come back to a state of things which she was no longer fit to strive. Wandering round the dark waters she could not now feel an interest in "him who lives down in the lake;" "living man" whom she had displeased and forsaken, whom she had loved and made unhappy, absorbed all the dreams of her imagination. Even the blessed spirits, the golden cloud-shapes moving across the sky, had become cold abstractions to her whose eyes were always looking vainly for one absent human form.

Her experience of better things, her natural good taste, and the money she had brought with her enabled her to make the projected improvements in her home; yet, when they were made, she had no pleasure in beholding them. They had cost her too dear to have the power to give her any delight. In satisfying the infidelity of her nature on one side, she had but inflicted a mortal wound upon it on the other. The blue pinched look of hunger had gone from her mother's face; the stars were no longer visible through the roof; yet, lying there at night, and thinking about it all, Macha felt that the pinch of cold and hunger had settled on her own heart, and that the stars of love and possible happiness were forever shut out from her life. A hundred times a day she made in imagination, impassioned acts of love and sorrow and appeals for pardon at her husband's knees. In fancy she uttered explanations to him, that in reality would have been impossible to her tongue. And she was too shy and too timid to attenpt to write to him.

"When a wife leaves her husband," thought Macha, "of course he will not want her any more." She blamed no one but herself. "I behaved badly to my mother in leaving her at first," she reflected, "and badly to my husband in running away against his will. There must be a twist in me somehow; for I know I did not want to do wrong." Sorrow-stricken, remorseful, perplexed, she lived through the long uneventful days and nights. The strength ebbed away from her limbs, the light from her eyes. She made no complaint, for she was willing to endure bravely in expiation of the wilfulness of her sins. Her one burning desire was to see her husband before she died; yet, so self-condemned did she stand, she could not summon courage to implore of him to come.

Sir Humphrey sat at home in the depths of what may be truly called a sulk. He had more than half forgiven his wilful wife, and was ready to receive her, should she ask to return. Hece was willing to go and fetch her as soon as she should send for him; and it is not wonderful that he was at fault as to her motive and conduct, for her nature had always been a riddle to him. Why could she not write and tell him where she was? That much he had a right to expect from her. He was quite resolved not to go in search of her, not to attempt to communicate with her till her penitent cry should be heard, and till her love should make her ask to be taken back to his home. He told all who inquired to know that Lady Gilbert was paying a visit in her native land, and then sat in his loneliness awaiting some sign.

It was only a few weeks, after all, since she had left him and returned to her mountain, but many a heart has been broken in a far shorter time. The woman was one, who, in other circumstances, would have made the happiness and well-being of those she loved; but divided duty and fidelity rent her asunder, the ardour and tenderness of her nature consumed her, and all the powers within her wrought towards tragedy and death.

One evening Macha sat at the cabin-door, thinking of her husband, owning her trespasses, and watching the sun set redly behind the mountain-peaks, the sun that never was to rise for her again. That night she turned her eyes on the old brown crucifix which was to her as the passport to that region where the weary are at rest. She was not so glad to go as she might have been had she never met anyone while walking in her girlish innocence round the margin of the lake. "Tell him I was sorry," were the last words she whispered in her mother's ear.

The sign that Sir Humphrey waited for came at last in the shape of a scrawled letter, with an unpronounceable name on the postmark. "Come to the mountain to see your son," it said; "Macha, the mother, is dead."

That sorrow is long past now. Sir Humphrey is married to a more suitable wife, and life has gone pleasantly with him. His eldest son has Macha's eyes, with often a grave, sad, unaccountable expression in them, which, in the midst of mirth, will make his father start and sigh, while the words of the poor peasant mother on the mountains will come ringing back in his ears, "'Tis only the heart that is too strong in her; and it's ill to love a stranger that must part you from your own!"

The end.

MAGIC AT THE BANK.

Two Favorite Tricks of the Late Professor Herrmann.

The death of Herrmann, the famous magician, has called out many stories of the pranks he was accustomed to play in the course of his travels, about the world. One of these has to do with a visit of his to a bank, where he, accompanied by two friends, had an interview with the cashier.

The talk had hardly begun before the visitor drew a cigar out of the cashier's Vandyke beard. The cigar he quickly multiplied into enough to go around. The cashier had been busy clipping new bank-notes from printed sheets issued by the Treasury.

"I see you are a magician, too," said Herrmann, jocularly, "You're making money. That's something I can do myself at all times."

He asked to be allowed to examine the sheet of bank notes, and while looking at it he rattled off one of his pet stories, and got the cashier and his friend and the stranger all interested. In the midst of the story some heavy object fell from a desk and apparently startled the magician, who, in his fright, tore the sheet of notes in half.

The magician seemed angered at his clumsiness, and in a rage tore the sheet into small fragments, Then he offered to make good the loss with money from his own pocket. The cashier protested that this was needless.

Herrmann then declared that perhaps the accident might not be so bad after all. He rolled the torn bits into a ball in the palms of his hands, blew in them, and then, unrolling the ball, spread out the sheet unharmed.

In another bank he performed a trick that was always a favorite of his. He wore upon the little finger of his left hand a striking-looking ring with a heavy setting. The president of the bank commented upon the odd appearance of the ring.

"Yes," the magician said, "that is an odd ring. It was given to me by the Emperor of Austria. But you can have it if you will accept it."

Thereupon he drew the ring from his finger, and slipped it upon the bank president's little finger. But it wasn't there when the latter looked at his hand. Instead, it glittered upon the little finger of the professor's left hand. The change had been effected by a skilful bit of palming.

WARFARE ON OWLS.

British Columbia Sportsmen Roused by the Preying of These Birds on Game.

According to the Forest and Stream, owls have raided British Columbia game bird covers, and have almost exterminated pheasants in some districts, notably that of Saanach. The sportsmen are up and doing against the birds, and over 500 have been killed on Vancouver Island, 200 of them in the city of Victoria and the district of which it is a part. More than 1,000 were shot in the province. In an ordinary season twenty or thirty are killed.

The birds are not particular as to their diet, as long as it is live meat. Pheasants, grouse, quail, and domestic fowls are their principal food. A house cat is relished by them as much as any rat would be. Where they all come from is a mystery. The weather has been mild, and flowers are blooming in the gardens in spite of the predictions of the old men of British Columbia, red and white. May be cold cold weather in the north has driven them down. Birds sometimes make extensive migrations, even if they are of a species not commonly migratory. Prairie chickens once flew north over Detroit, thousands of them alighting within the city limits before crossing the water to Canada. Thousands were drowned while trying to fly over Lake Superior, but others got across safely, and now inhabit the great burned territories north of the big lake. Why did they go? The only explanation generally received is that persistent market hunting drove them.

A similar migration of wild turkeys took place in Michigan. These birds had been once hunted a great deal and suddenly they all disappeared. But they left a trail, and were seen going due west. The flock was a fourth of a mile wide and several hours long. Turkeys appeared soon afterward in prodigious numbers where there had had been only a few before in the region to the west.

LONDON'S FIRE DEPARTMENT.

It Is Called a Brigade, and Perhaps That Is a Good Enough Name for It.

At first glance it seems a remarkably low average that a city so vast and compact should have but 122 serious fires in a year; but in addition to the fact that a "serious" fire in London usually means a total destruction of the property (exterior walls sometimes excepted), there is to be considered the appalling fact that 106 lives were lost in these serious fires. Commander Wells says that statistics testify to the rapid increase of fatalities as the result of fires, and the inference is plain that better methods of dealing with the great enemy are imperative.

Within the county limits of London (some 75,442 statute acres) there is a population of, in round numbers, 4,500,000. To fire-guard the immense territory there is a brigade of 842 firemen, 25 men under instruction, 17 pilots, and 76 coachmen. There are 58 land fire coachmen. There are 58 land fire engine stations, 5 river stations, 6 substations, 15 street stations, 57 land steam fire engines, 9 steam fire engines on barges, 77 manual engines, 115 hose carts, 37 miles of hose, 8 steam tugs, 13 barges, 246 fire escapes, and 580 call posts. The average number of men available for duty is 652 by day and 388 by night.

In the majority of London houses there is but one stairway, and that a narrow one. There is no emergency exit or escape, and the thought of provision to insure safety in the event of a fire seems never to have entered the mind of a builder. That the "fire escapes" furnished at the eleventh hour by the firemen are to a large extent mockeries is proved by the proportion of 106 fatalities to 122 "serious" fires. That the vocation of firemen is not one of great hazard here is shown by the fact of there having been but 110 accidents of all kinds to firemen last year, and only two fatalities. An economic conservatism is largely contributory to the fire risks of London, where a cheap mineral oil is chiefly used in lighting. Lamps are in common use where a brighter illumination than candles afford is desired. There is a pretence of gas in most of the better sort of houses, but mineral oil lamps predominate even there, and in the great majority of lodging houses gas is used only on the drawing room and dining room floors. Electric lights are coming into service very slowly. But candles and lamps are still the main opponents of darkness in London houses, as throughout the rest of England. Their utility in support of the fire brigade, or in supplying it with reason for existence, is considerable when weighed against other causes of fires. Out of the total 3,616 fires, candles may claim the credit for 206 and mineral oil lamps 399 among ascertained causes, and probably a fair proportion of the 880 "unknown" causes.

CORSETS.

The corset is found on the mummified bodies of Egyptians who lived in the times of Rameses. The pictures on the walls leave one in doubt as to whether the peculiar style of drawing the human figure means corsets or not. Records of them are found in the times of Caesar. In France we learn that in the time of Louis VI. bandages designed to change the shape of the figure were worn, one reaching from the but to the waist line, the other overlapping this, reached below the hips. At the close of the fourteenth century a corset to be worn outside of the dress, laced in front, but not brought together so as to display embroidery beneath, was much in vogue, and it would seem that the lace bodice of the peasant may be a survival of this; then came a wooden one made in two similar parts joined at the back by many strips of linen. The object of this was to give a narrowing appearance from the shoulders to the hips, and among the portraits of the time we can see how the wearers looked.

What martyrs they were! But they probably consoled themselves with the saying, "Il faut soufrie, pom the belle." This instrument of torture was followed by an iron cage, made of kid-covered strips of iron, but these were suppressed by the edict of Henry IV., and then the women took to putting evasive strips of steel into their gowns, with an effect occasionally more grotesque than graceful. The next advance was in the adaptation of whalebone, and soon so good a corset was produced by French tailors that both men and women began to adopt them as comfortable additions to the wardrobe; and so skillfully were they made that Louis XV. set aside 500,000 florins for whale-fishing and the production of whalebone.

Modern times have seen the anatomy of the figure so carefully studied that the corset has become an element of comfort, and, many good physicians believe, of health. Now, dress-reformers may banish the corset, but it will be a long time, for no matter how difficult the shape to be accommodated, human ingenuity accomplishes it, and the corset as we know it is a marvel of lightness and grace.

WORST PAID OF MEN.

Deacon Capen is dead. His title to distinction is that, living all his life of 87 years on a wooded and rocky farm, near Sharon, Mass., and following no pursuit but farming, and economizing, he accumulated a fortune of $190,000. Of this sum he made over some years ago over $88,000 in securities to the Massachusetts Baptist Association and $30,000 to the Baptist Home Missionary Society of New York, stipulating that while he lived he should receive annually a sum equal to 6 per cent. on the amount given. He denied himself what others consider the comforts of life, and was proud of his economies, boasting that he had worn the same coat to church for about 60 years.