JOHN OXENHAM

WHITE FIRE

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EAN 8596547172161

DigiCat, 2022
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MISS INQUISITIVE

She was so dainty a little figure that the bare-armed women in the doors of the lands and closes turned and looked after her with enjoyment untinged even with envy. They scratched their elbows and commented on her points with complacent understanding.

"None o' your ten-and-six carriage paid in that lot, I'm thinking, Mrs. O'Neill," said one.

"Thrue for ye, Mrs. Macfarlane. Purty as a daisy, she is. It's me that wud like to be on tairms with her maw when she's done with 'em."

And a decidedly pretty little figure the small girl made, in her stylishly pleated blue serge, jaunty tam, natty leather belt, and twinkling brown shoes, and her absolute unconsciousness of anything unduly attractive in her appearance.

Her determined little face was set strenuously. She looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, beyond a glance now and again for landmarks. And above all, and most inflexibly, she never once looked behind her; for she was bound upon an adventure, and her reward lay on ahead.

"Past the cemetery gates," she said to herself. "Up a brae. Past a pond and up a cinder path. That's all right! That must be the woollen mill, and that's the paper-mill, and that splashing white must be the Cut."

As she took the cinder path, the gates of the two mills opened, and a flood of hurrying girls came down towards the town, mostly in bunches, laughing and joking, some with linked arms, some few solitary. Then followed boys and men,

with dinner in their faces, and an occasional word fired at the girls in front.

The girls all fell silent, and resolved themselves into devouring eyes, as the dainty little figure stepped briskly past them. There were spasms of longing among them; they buried them under bursts of wilder laughter. The men and boys glanced at her out of the corners of their eyes, and did not understand why the sky looked bluer and the sunshine brighter than it had done a moment before.

She came, presently, to a dividing of the ways, where the roads branched to the two mills, made a short reconnaissance of the flashing chute she had seen from below, then turned to the right, past the paper-mill and the manager's house, past the clump of fir-trees, and came out on a footpath by the side of which the rushing brown waters of the Cut hurried down to the mills and reservoirs.

"O-o-o-oh!" said the small girl rapturously, and her face was an unconscious Te Deum.

And well it might be, for she had a great appreciation of the beautiful, and she was enjoying her first full glimpse of one of the finest sights in the whole of Great Britain and Ireland and the adjacent Cumbraes.

"O-o-oh!" and she sat down to enjoy it.

Below her to the right rose the smoke of the town and the ceaseless clangour of the ship-building yards. A movement would have hidden them from her. But she did not move; she neither saw nor heard them. Her eyes were fixed absorbedly on the mighty panorama beyond: the lovely firth, blue as an Italian lake, and all alive with traffic; energetic little river steamers racing with rival toys; slow

coasters toiling along like water-beetles; a great black American liner at the Tail of the Bank; the great grey guardship with its trim official lines and hovering launches; and farther out, near the opposite shore, the white sails of yachts flashing in the sun like seabirds' wings. And beyond—the hills, the mighty hills of God. She had known the hills in a general, wholesale way for long enough; but she knew now that she had never known them before. From this lofty vantage point she saw them now for the first time in all their grandeur and beauty, and they overwhelmed her.

Such a mighty array of giants: green, rounded hills; rugged brown hills, flushed with the purple of the heather; grey mountain peaks piled fantastically against the unflecked blue sky; bosky glens; dark patches of forest land; and all about them, down below, the silent strength of the sea, lapping the feet of the recumbent giants, creeping up among their sprawling limbs, and cradling the mighty bulks with tender caresses!

The girl sat for a long time drinking it all in, to the tune of the swirl and bubble and tinkle of the swift brown water behind her. Then she got up and went on along the path, which disclosed fresh beauties of the larger view at every step. She went on and on, heedless of everything but the wide, vast prospect and her own mighty enjoyment of it. She had some lunch in her pocket; she forgot it. The air was so sweet and strong that she felt no fatigue. She had walked for over an hour in this new heaven of delight, when she came tumbling to earth in truly feminine fashion.

The path followed the Cut round the folds and wrinkles of the hillside. At times, on in front, it disappeared into the sky.

She was nearing one such sharp turn, when a pair of mighty horns came wavering round it, and behind the horns an evil monster all in black and with baleful eyes. At sight of her it gave an angry bellow and pawed the ground. Alongside her was a small stone erection like an unfinished hut, on a little platform, below which white water trickled down a glen full of ferns and trees. She clasped her hands, gave herself up for lost, and dropped out of the monster's sight behind the one end wall of the hut.

Then a boy's voice rang out full and clear—

"Ah, beast! Bos ferocissime! Get out o' that, or I'll do for you. What's taken you to-day, you old villain?"

Then followed more forcible argument in the shape of stones, and, with grateful twitches of her clasped hands, the small girl saw her discomfited enemy go crashing down the hillside among the whins and ferns and rolling rocks.

The beast was evidently possessed of an unusually perverse disposition that day. It looked up once at the girl behind the wall, and made some spiteful remark, which elicited a dissuasive "Would you?" and another shower of stones from its keeper. Then it went galloping away on the sides of its feet along the steep hillside. The boy, with an exclamation, sprang down after it, and the girl caught sight of him for the first time—a sturdy little figure, with light hair and unlimited energy. He chased the beast with boyish objurgations, which broke out with new vigour when the chase led through a piece of black swamp, with the natural results to the pursuer.

He came back presently, hot and muddy, whistling like a blackbird.

She was just about to get up and go on, when she heard him jumping down into the little glen below, and she craned over to see what he was about.

He scrambled down to a small round natural basin in the rock, threw off his jacket and waistcoat, unbuttoned his flannel shirt, and proceeded to a mighty wash.

He seemed to revel in it so exceedingly that the girl sat and watched him with enjoyment. He had no towel, so did not waste any time in drying himself, but allowed the sun and wind to do their duties. Then he came clambering up the slope again. There was a large flat stone in front of the embryo cabin. He came and sat down on it, and remained there so long and so quiet that at last she moved slightly and peeped round to see what he was doing.

And what he was doing was so very astonishing that she gave an involuntary gasp of amazement.

He was lying flat on his stomach, with a tattered book open in front of him. On the flat slab was a diagram drawn with the chunk of chalk he held in his hand, and he was studying it so intently that he did not hear her till her shadow fell across his work.

"Hello! Where did *you* come from?" and he jumped up and stood staring at her. He was not aware of it, but he was dimly perceptive of the fact that she was very nice-looking. He remembered later—when her face evaded him—that she was very prettily dressed.

"From behind there," she said. "That nasty bull frightened me."

"He's a stupid beast." And then, suddenly bethinking himself, "Have you been there ever since?"

The girl nodded. She liked the look of him. His jacket and trousers were rough and well worn, but his face was wonderfully bright and clean. She did not know when she had seen a boy's face she liked so much. There was such a glow in it, and his blue eyes were so fearless and looked at her so very straight. She did not know very many boys, and did not care much for any of those she did know. They were always either teasing or silly, and always abominably selfish. Somehow this boy did not seem any of those things.

"You'd no right to watch a gentleman washing himself."

"You're not a gentleman, and I couldn't help myself. At least——"

"You're not a lady, and you could have gone away quite well. It's a good thing for you I didn't have a bath in the big pool there. You'd have watched just the same, I suppose, Miss Inquisitive!"

"Oh!" she said sharply. "You rude thing! How did you know?"

"Know what?"

"That! Miss—— what you called me just now."

At which he laughed out loud, a great merry laugh that did one good to listen to, and showed a set of sound white teeth and a quick apprehension.

"Is that what they call you at home?" he asked, with a mischievous twinkle.

"My aunties call me that. Father says 'Want-to-know gets on.'"

"He's right," said the boy, with a blaze in the blue eyes. "I like your father better than your aunties. Where were you going when the beast stopped you?"

"Right along there," she nodded.

"All the way to the Sheils? It's a gey long way for a bit lassie like you."

"I'm not a bit lassie. I'm thirteen."

"Really! You're young for your age!"

She was somewhat doubtful about this remark, but it felt like a compliment, so she let it pass.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Kenneth Blair. What's yours?"

"Jean Arnot. How old are you?"

"I'll be fifteen next July." This was August.

"What's that you were drawing? Is it a windmill?" staring intently down at it.

"A windmill!"—with unutterable scorn. "And you say you're thirteen! That's Euclid—Prop. 47. It's a thumper too."

"I haven't begun Euclid yet," she said meekly, and regarded him with a face full enough of questioning to amply justify her nickname. "Will you please tell me something?"

He began to laugh, and she knew that "Miss Inquisitive" was on the tip of his tongue. He only nodded, however.

"Do all the herd-boys about here do Euclid?"

"I d'n' know. There's nothing to stop them if they want to."

"Why do you speak so differently from most other boys? You speak almost as well as I do."

A smile flickered in his face for a second, but died out, and he said quietly—

"That's easily told, anyway. My father was schoolmaster at Inverclaver. He taught me."

"And does he teach you still? Where is he schoolmaster now?"

He looked at her a moment in silence, and then said—

"I don't know. He's dead."

"Oh! But he can't be a schoolmaster anywhere if he's dead. I'm so sorry. And of course he can't teach you either."

"I don't know," said the boy slowly. "I think sometimes ——"

But she was off on another scent.

"What are you going to be when you grow up?"

"Ah!"—with animation. "I'm going to be a big man."

"You can't make yourself that. You're not very big now."

"I've not done growing yet, and I'm very strong, and I've never been ill in my life. Besides——"

"I've just had measles and whooping-cough. That's why I'm here."

He nodded, as much as to say, "Yes, that's just the kind of thing girls would have"; and went on, "And then I'm going to be an explorer."

"O-o-o-h!" with snapping eyes. "Where?"

"I don't know where. Anywhere where nobody's ever been before."

She devoured him with hungry appreciation. His face was so very clean, so radiantly bright, and the sparks in his blue eyes kindled answering sparks in her own. For she too possessed a lively imagination, and a spirit many times the size of her body.

"But will you be able to? Are you very rich?"

"Rich? No, I'm not rich, but I'm not that poor either—not just now. I bought this last week," with a touch of superior

pride, as he hauled out a Latin grammar, sixth-hand, but still boasting covers. "When I've finished it I'll feel poor till I get the next. But that's not yet."

"Wouldn't you like to be very rich?"

"I d'n' know. I never tried it."

"My father is very rich."

"Is he? And what are you going to do when you grow up?"

"Oh, I'm going to be a lady."

"Yes, that's about all you can be, I suppose," he nodded, and looked really sorry for her.

"I shall be very rich, and I shall do just what I like—except darning and needlework. They're hijjus!"

"Hideous," he said, with a touch of pedantic reproof which consorted oddly with his jacket and trousers.

"I always say 'hijjus' when it's quite too awful and past words. How would you like to be a manager of one of my father's mills?"

"I don't know," he said, regarding her doubtfully. "I'm thinking perhaps I wouldn't make a very good manager. Not yet."

Then her hand happened to touch her pocket, which reminded her of her lunch.

"Are you hungry?" she asked. "I'll sit down here and you shall have some of my lunch, and you shall tell me the names of all those hills and lochs opposite. Aren't they splendid?"

"Ay, they're grand. I've been watching them for a year now."

She wrestled her dainty little packet out of her pocket, and sat down on a rock looking out over the wonderful

panorama in front. The boy sat down on another rock and hauled out a piece of newspaper in which were wrapped some broken pieces of thick oatcake and some rough fragments of cheese.

"Do you like oatcake and cheese?" she asked.

"Rather!"

"Won't you have some of my sandwiches?" she said politely, but not without anxiety.

He looked at the delicate provision, and said stoutly—

"No, thank you. I like this best."

And, as the little lady possessed the dainty but vigorous appetite of the fully-restored-to-health-and-got-to-make-up-for-lost-time, and as she was only thirteen, she was not rude enough to press him unduly.

"Now tell me the names of all those hills and lochs," she said, and he proceeded to tell her all she wanted to know.

"Yon's Dumbarton,"—between bites; "you can see Glasgow some days," and she regarded him doubtfully.

"And yon's the Gare Loch. That big fellow with the shoulders is Ben Lomond. The one humped up like this is The Cobbler. That other big one is Ben Ihme. That's Loch Long and a bit of Loch Goil, and yon's Holy Loch and Ben More."

When she had eaten her tiny sandwiches, and her two small cookies with jam inside, and her two biscuits, and had learned the names and personal peculiarities of all the hills and lochs, and he had finished the last crumbs of his oatcake and cheese, he convoyed her past the black menace down below, as far as the next stone dyke, and told her how she could shorten her journey by cutting across

some fields, and so get down to the Inverkip road, and eventually to Ashton and the "caurs."

He watched the sprightly little figure, with the gleaming mane of hair and swinging skirts and twinkling brown shoes, till she reached the next distant corner, waved his hand to her, received an answering wave from her, and turned back to his life—his unruly beasts, his treasured Euclid and Latin grammar, his dreams, his hopes, and ever so much more than he knew.

Waved his hand to her, and received an answering wave.

Waved his hand to her, and received an answering wave.

But Prop. 47 was not amenable that afternoon. He smiled at thought of the windmill, and looked up to see her standing before him with her sweet childish face and questioning eyes. He thought much of the winsome little lady, both then and for a long time afterwards. He scanned the winding path by the Cut each day in hopes that she might come again. But she was away home to London, and at last only a memory of her remained, and that growing dimmer and dimmer till it was little more than a sentiment—simply the warm glow of a pleasant impression.

And she? Ah, she wrought better than she knew that day.

For when she got home from her great adventure, and had been duly scolded by her aunts for undertaking so much, when they had only expected her to go up to the Cut and down again in a couple of hours or so—when she reached home, old Mr. MacTavish, the minister, was there, and he rejoiced in her prattling tongue, and delighted in drawing her out.

She enlarged upon the very uncommon herd-laddie she had met up on the Cut,—on his satisfactory looks, his unique cleanliness, his fearlessness in the matter of wild beasts, his understanding, and his aims in life. Her thoughts were full of him, and when Miss Jean Arnot had something on her mind her little world was by way of hearing of it.

Old Mr. MacTavish had been a herd-laddie himself in his time.

Suffecit!

CHAPTER II

THE MAN

Ten years later Miss Jean Arnot was visiting her aunts in Greenock again. Not but what she had been there many times in between, but this is the only occasion of which we need take note.

There had been many changes in these ten years.

For one thing, Jean's father was dead, and she was a very wealthy young woman. In many respects she was still very like the little Jean of earlier times. Her face was still the sweet, long oval of her childhood, though the features were more pronounced and matured. But the chief impression it left upon you was still that of eager questioning, a great longing to know, tempered somewhat by years and freedom from all material care. "Want-to-know" was getting on in years—twenty-three, a great age—but there were still mysteries of life which she had not solved, wherein she found matter for surprise at times.

But life ran very smoothly and pleasantly with her. She went out a little, and entertained a little in return, travelled much, and was not wanting in good deeds and charity. Her income was about ten times as large as was really good for her, and if she gave munificently she never missed what she gave, so that the recipients were the sole beneficiaries of her giving.

She had hosts of friends, phalanxes of admirers; could have had hosts of aspirants to a still closer relationship, but

so far would have none of them. She was enjoying herself exceedingly, and fulfilling in their entirety the aspirations of her childhood. She was a lady, she was rich, and she was doing as she liked—and she had not touched a needle since she came into her kingdom.

That was the natural rebound, for Aunt Jannet Harvey, a famous needlewoman and housewife herself, had rigorously insisted—so long as she was in power—on her niece learning the minor as well as the major accomplishments of a gentlewoman, such as had obtained during her own long apprenticeship to that high estate. And that is how it came to pass that Miss Jean Arnot, wealthy heiress and society lady, really knew a very great deal more about some things than you would have imagined from the casual sight of her at dance or opera.

The moment she was free, and a woman of herself, she relegated the "hijjus" things to what she considered their proper place in the economy of her life, and, later, dug them up out of their dusty corners gratefully, and Aunt Jannet was justified.

Aunt Harvey—Aunt Jannet Harvey, to distinguish her from Aunt Lisbeth Harvey—had lived with them and mothered her since her own mother died, when she was a very small child indeed. Aunt Jannet was really her mother's aunt, early widowed and childless, a wise and placid old lady—old, that is, in the eyes of effervescent three-and-twenty—with somewhat rigid ideas of right and wrong, toning slowly, by course of time and easy circumstance, into a tolerant acceptance of things as they came. Her husband had been a professor in Edinburgh, and the society he and she had

enjoyed in the modern Athens, thirty years before, was her standard of what society ought to be. She was, however, each year becoming more reconciled to the disparities of the lighter age with which John Arnot's great success in life had forced her into contact. And Jean had been to her as her own daughter would have been, if she had had one, since the day she first took charge of her and began to endeavour to answer some of her questions, and quietly to shelve others for more suitable occasion of discussion. For little Jean Want-to-know had a most active brain and an insatiable curiosity, and never hesitated to ask for fullest details of anything she did not understand; and the wonderings and questionings of such a child have no bounds at times, and are almost impossible of control, either from the inside or the outside.

Jean made a point of spending a part of each year in Scotland, wherever else she and Aunt Jannet might wander at other times. On such occasions Aunt Jannet went to Edinburgh and lived again in the past, but in a yearly narrowing circle, so far as the personal element was concerned, and Jean went to Greenock and queened it over her aunts there.

She was a great enjoyment, a continuous ripple of excitement, to their ordered household; and since they no longer sat upon her and answered her erstwhile inconvenient questions by gentle snubs and nicknames, the times she spent with them were times of great enjoyment to her also.

She rather patronised them, of course, which was perhaps inevitable; for she lived twenty to their one, and,

moreover, possessed the means to do it and a will that carried all before it.

She insisted, for instance, on paying for her board and lodging, and on a tariff of her own fixing, whenever she came to stay with them, and flatly declined to come on any other condition. They were independent-minded, and declined to be dictated to in such a matter by a small thing whom they had known in frocks with skirts only thirteen inches long. She promptly scandalised them by going to the Tontine and putting up there. Then they gave way, and she had them. After that she was capable of anything, and they submitted to all her whims, which were always pretty and thoughtful ones, and—she assured them, just as they had been wont to assure her in the days of the thirteen-inch frocks—entirely for their own good and happiness. She salved the cicatrice of the Tontine wound by carrying them all off *en masse* to the Riviera for a month; and Aunt Jean, after whom she was named, gravely suggested the advisability of frequently opposing her ideas, since the outcome was so eminently agreeable.

Then she was always making them presents, at which their independency kicked, but in which, nevertheless, they could not but own to enjoyment.

But the girl was right, after all. She had much too much, and they had only enough, and that only with clever handling; and they would no more have accepted bald gifts of money than they would have burned down their house and claimed double the value of the furniture.

Jean and her visits, and their visits to her, and with her to hitherto unattainable places, were the high lights of their

lives. They loved her dearly, rejoiced in her greatly, were proud of her, and wondered much when it would all come to an end in the centering of her thoughts and affections on one sole and—they fervently hoped, but were not without misgivings, because of her wealth and her impulsiveness—worthy man.

They made ingenuous little attempts at sounding her on that subject, but she was much too clever for them, and skilfully eluded all approaches which might tend, even remotely, to any self-revelations. That there were no revelations to make only added piquancy to the game, from her point of view, since it kept the aunts in a state of perpetual mystification, and held no pitfalls.

Among many other changes she had seen in the last ten years, old Mr. MacTavish had retired long ago, and a younger man occupied his pulpit, and, strange to say, gave satisfaction in it.

The Rev. Archibald Fastnet was so exactly the opposite of his predecessor that it might have seemed impossible that where the one had pleased the other should do so. Mr. Fastnet was young, and he believed in—as he put it—making things jump. And he made both things and people jump at times. He was full of enthusiasms which were generally at white heat and—which is more unusual—remained so. The older generation said he kept them on the perpetual "kee-vee" to see what he would do next; the younger people enjoyed him and the service he exacted from them. And on Sundays they all, old and young, always turned out both morning and evening, since it invariably came to pass that, if they missed a service, something

happened which made them feel out of the running for the whole of the following week. When Jean Arnot was at Greenock she did as good Greenockians do, and went to church twice every Sunday and one evening in the week as well.

The Rev. Archibald never failed to furnish her with a certain amount of quiet amusement, and, apart from other feelings, she always went in expectation and was rarely disappointed.

On this particular Sunday morning Mr. Fastnet had prepared a little surprise for his people, which turned out, as his arrangements generally did, a perfect success. It also afforded Jean Arnot the surprise of her life, and she never forgot it.

You can forget many things in ten full years. If, for instance, you yourself had met a person informally ten years ago, and spent half an hour with him, just incidentally hearing his name, it is doubtful if you would recall him very distinctly if he presented himself suddenly before you after the ten years had passed.

Jean felt a rustle of surprise among her aunts in the pew, and she saw that two men passed up into the pulpit where the Rev. Archibald lorded it alone as a rule. The voluntary ceased, and he stood up, beaming all over, as usual when he had something unusually delectable up his sleeve for them.

"Instead of speaking to you myself this morning," he said, "I have asked our friend Mr. Blair to say a few words to us. We all take a fatherly and motherly, and I may say a sisterly and brotherly, interest in Mr. Blair. Perhaps some of

us regret that none of us has taken a still nearer and dearer-than-all-otherly interest in him"—at which Fastneticism a smile rippled round. "Our young friend leaves this week to begin his work in the South Seas, where, as you know, he is about to join that valiant bearer of light into outer darkness, John Gerson, in his noble work. You will, I know, appreciate with me this chance—it may be the last chance—of hearing our young standard-bearer's voice before he passes beyond the fringes of the night."

Then he came down, and took his seat in a front pew and enjoyed a preacher's holiday.

And, after a pause, and very quietly, young Blair rose in the pulpit and gave out the hymn.

So far Jean Arnot had been only interested and amused. But the sound of his voice, clear and round and full as an organ tone, made her jump with surprise. He had spoken quite naturally, but there was a ring in it that told of immense possibilities behind, and there was something in it that plucked at some hidden chord of Jean's memory and set it humming as a harp-string responds to a bugle note.

She stared at him eagerly. Had she ever by any possibility met him before? She could hardly have forgotten it if she had, she thought. For he was a young man of most striking appearance. Tall, square-shouldered and broad-chested—a commanding figure in truth. It occurred to others besides Jean that if the natives needed more forcible arguments than words for their conversion, here was a likely man for the work. Light-haired and clean-shaven, his face seemed to glow with an inner radiance—a masterful face, and grave. His eyes were wonderfully magnetic; fearless

and steadfast, they made you jump as their glance crossed your own. Jean had just jumped, so she knew.

Now who was this? Surely she had met him before somewhere.

Remember it was ten years since she had seen him, and then only for half an hour, and under very different conditions, and she had never heard his name since.

She ordered her brain, or her heart, or whichever of her inner servants it was that held the key, to go find it, and sat gazing at him to give them such light as that might afford. But the clue evaded her till he was near the end of his quiet, forceful talk.

He had told them of his hopes, and the plans he and Gerson hoped to carry out—"The grandest man I have ever met, a most noble Christian gentleman," he said, in a burst of enthusiasm. He asked them for their help, their prayers, their sympathetic remembrance, their money—since the work had to be maintained from the outside, and even missionaries must live.

He spoke very simply, with no ornate periods or calculated sentences; but his voice was like a trumpet, and his eyes were like stars, and his words were illuminating and full of power, and now and again were flung out white hot from the glowing heart within. Though he spoke for the most part so restrainedly, now and again the brake would slip, and the sweet, white fire of a great, enthusiastic soul would flame through.

Perhaps he was a trifle over-confident of success—that is one of youth's glories and pitfalls; but there was no doubt

that his whole heart was in his work—that here, for once at all events, a square man had found his own square hole.

"It was always the great hope and desire of my boyhood to go out into these unknown lands," he was saying. "Though perhaps at that time the inducement was chiefly the unknown, and the inhabitants, I fear, appealed to me more as possible hindrances than inducements. When I tended my uncle's cattle on the hillsides of the Cut——"

And then she knew him, and she sat up with a jerk, and stared at him as though she had only that moment awakened to the fact that he was speaking.

And such, to some extent, was the fact. She had been interested and puzzled. Now, in a moment, it was a new man she was looking at and listening to—a new man, but an old friend. And she was sitting on one piece of rock eating cookies, and he was sitting on another munching oatcake and cheese, and he was saying, "I'm going to be an explorer."

It was very wonderful—though she remembered that she had recognised him, even then, as a boy of different texture from most other boys. And so he had got what he wanted—the greatest prize a man may win, she supposed: to desire vehemently a certain lofty course in life, and to attain to it.

And she? Yes, she remembered. She was going to be rich, and a lady, and do as she liked. Truly hers was but a poor attainment compared with his.

She did not hear much more of what he said, though she was gazing fixedly at him all the time. Her mind was away back to the hillside by the Cut, and it was only when they

stood up to sing the last hymn that mind and body came together again.

Mr. Blair came down to shake hands with his many friends, and most of the people went forward for that purpose, Jean's aunts among them, and she with them; and as they sat at the back they were among the last to reach him.

She was shaking hands with him, and the straight blue eyes looking into her own set her heart jumping.

"Ah!" said the Rev. Archibald, all one vast beam of satisfaction at the general enjoyment of his little surprise. "Now we have you, Blair. This lady, at all events, you can't claim as an old friend, though I am quite sure she is a well-wisher."

Blair still held her hand and looked steadfastly into her eyes.

"This is——" began Mr. Fastnet, and was stopped abruptly by a peremptory gesture of Miss Arnot's other hand.

"Yes—I think so," said the young man, breaking suddenly into a smile of enjoyable reminiscence, "Miss—Jean—Arnot? Or possibly now Mrs.——?"

"Jean Arnot is still good enough for me, Mr. Blair," she said brightly. "How wonderful that you should remember me all these years!"

"Why more wonderful than that you should have recognised me, Miss Arnot? We are both a good deal changed since last we met."

"Why, what's all this?" said the Rev. Archibald jovially. "I had no idea you knew Miss Arnot, Blair."

"We met once, ten years ago, up on the Cut—and had lunch together," said Blair, with a smile. "I was keeping Highland cattle from goring little girls, and Miss Arnot was exploring. We have both travelled far since then."

"You much the farthest," she said quietly, "and going still farther. I congratulate you very heartily. It is what you desired then. Do you remember telling me?"

"Yes. I am very grateful."

Blair's thoughts were full of her. As they went home he quietly led Fastnet on to speak about her, and offered him the best inducement to plentiful speech in the appreciation with which he listened.

Fastnet enlarged upon her great wealth and generosity, her cleverness and culture, her independence of thought and deed, and incidentally mentioned that he had seen or heard some rumour of her possible marriage with Lord Charles Castlemaine, second son of the Duke of Munster, but he could not say what truth there was in it.

As a matter of fact, Jean Arnot would as soon have thought of marrying the ticket-collector at Monument Station as Lord Charles Castlemaine. The gentleman with the snips at Monument Station is doubtless a most worthy individual, but I know absolutely nothing whatever about him. Jean Arnot knew exactly as much, and one does not, as a rule, marry a man one knows absolutely nothing about, nor—a man about whom one knows considerably more than is to his credit. Jean Arnot knew a good deal about Charles Castlemaine, and there was not the slightest danger of her marrying him.

"Is he a good sort?" asked Blair.

"Much what dukes' younger sons mostly are, I imagine. The elder brother is not strong, so if it comes off you may perhaps count among your well-wishers a duchess sooner or later."

"Miss Arnot's good wishes would weigh more with me than those of all the duchesses in the land," said Blair quietly. "There is something very taking in her face—it is so bright and eager." Then he laughed at his thoughts. "I remember, that day up on the Cut, I quite accidentally hit upon a nickname they used to her at home—Miss Inquisitive—and she flared up at me like a rip-rap. She was always wanting to know, I believe."

"She is still," said Fastnet, laughing, "though she must have learned a good deal in all these years. She told me once that she was born curious, and that she was especially curious to know all about what came after this life. She said she thought the thought that she was going to solve that greatest of all puzzles would take away all fear of death when the time came. That was just after I came here. She must have been about fifteen then."

Blair's time was very short. He left that afternoon for Edinburgh to spend his last two days with his old friends, Mr. and Mrs. MacTavish. He was to join Mr. Gerson in London on Wednesday and sail on Thursday.

Mr. MacTavish had been a father to him from the time he walked along the Cut—the very day after little Jean Arnot's prattle had set him on the boy's track—and found him, prostrate on the flat stone, still wrestling with Prop. 47.

He had been just there himself when a small boy, struggling against the retarding clay of a narrow agricultural

home. He knew the sturdy independence that would be in the boy; and, in his own full knowledge, went to work warily. The slightest hint of charity, and the shy, proud one would be off.

So he never mentioned Jean, met the boy on his own ground as a perfectly new acquaintance, gradually won his confidence and his heart, guided, led, and finally enabled him by his own exertions to obtain a bursary and proceed to college. With that, nothing could keep him back. His heart was in it, his aims were high, and his course was a triumphal progress. He had learned, as a boy, that greatest of lessons —how to learn. The rough experiences of his boyhood on the hillside had given him splendid health and a body that never tired. He was tough as wire, and, among other things, was known at college for that passion for personal cleanliness which, in its earlier days, had helped to introduce him to Jean Arnot on the hillside. He had, quite early—as soon, indeed, as he perceived the possibility of attaining to it—fixed on the mission-field as offering what his soul yearned for. Perhaps at first it was the unknown that drew him. No matter. By degrees the known outrivalled the unknown, the greater absorbed the less, and his heart was fixed on the highest of all high work.

In these ten years he had learned mightily. Head, heart, and hand had toiled incessantly, and never felt it toil, since it was only the natural satisfaction of a great heart-craving. Then he had come across Gerson, home on leave for the first time in twenty years. Their hearts and eyes struck sparks the first time they met.