

AN account of certain events which are supposed to have occurred in the month of May, 19—, at a quiet country inn on Dartmoor, in Devonshire; the events being recorded by the persons most interested in the unfolding of the little international comedy.

The story is written by four authors, each author being responsible for one character, as follows:—

MISS VIRGINIA POMEROY, of Richmond, Virginia, U. S. A., by *Kate Douglas Wiggin*.

MRS. MACGILL, of Tunbridge Wells, England, by *Mary Findlater*, author of "The Rose of Joy."

MISS CECILIA EVESHAM, Mrs. MacGill's English companion, by *Jane Helen Findlater*, author of "The Green Graves of Balgowrie."

SIR ARCHIBALD MAXWELL MACKENZIE, of Kindarroch, N. B., by *Allan McAulay*, author of "The Rhymer."

THE AFFAIR AT THE INN

I

Virginia Pomeroy

DARTMOOR, DEVONSHIRE

THE GREY TOR INN

Tuesday, May 18th, 19—

WHEN my poor father died five years ago, the doctor told my mother that she must have an entire change. We left America at once, and we have been travelling ever since, always in the British Isles, as the sound of foreign languages makes mamma more nervous. As a matter of fact, the doctor did not advise eternal change, but that is the interpretation mamma has placed upon his command, and so we are forever moving on, like What's-his-name in "Bleak House." It is not so extraordinary, then, that we are in the Devonshire moorlands, because one

cannot travel incessantly for four years in the British Isles without being everywhere, in course of time. That is what I said to a disagreeable, frumpy Englishwoman in the railway carriage yesterday.

"I have no fault to find with Great Britain," I said, "except that it is so circumscribed! I have outgrown my first feeling, which was a fear of falling off the edge; but I still have a sensation of being cabined, cribbed, confined."

She remarked that she had always preferred a small, perfectly finished, and well-managed estate to a large, rank, wild, and overgrown one, and I am bound to say that I think the retort was a good one. It must have been, for it silenced me.

We have done Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and having begun at the top of the map, have gone as far as Devon in England. We have been travelling by counties during the last year, because it seemed tidier and more thorough and businesslike; less con-

fusing too, for the places look so alike after a while that I can never remember where we have been without looking in my diary. I don't know what will come after England, — perhaps Australia and New Zealand. I suppose they speak English there, of a sort.

If complete ignorance of a place, combined with great power of appreciation when one is introduced to it, — if these constitute a favourable mental attitude, then I have achieved it. That Devonshire produces Lanes, Dumplings, Cider, Monoliths, Clouted Cream, and Moors I know, but all else in the way of knowledge or experience is to be the captive of my bow and spear.

It is one of the accidents of travel that one can never explain, our being here on this desolate moor, caged, with half a dozen strange people, in a little inn at the world's end.

In the hotel at Exeter mamma met in the drawing-room a certain Mrs. MacGill, who like herself was just recovering from the in-

fluenza. Our paths have crossed before; I hope they'll not do so too often. Huddled in their shawls, and seated as near to the chilling hotel fire as was possible, they discussed their symptoms, while I read "Lorna Doone." Mrs. MacGill slept ill at night and found a glass of milk-arrowroot with a teaspoon of brandy and a Bath Oliver biscuit a panacea; mamma would not allow that any one could sleep worse than she, but recommended a peppermint lozenge, as being simple, convenient, and efficacious. Mrs. MacGill had a slight cough, so had mamma; Mrs. MacGill's chest was naturally weak, so was mamma's. Startlingly similar as were the paths by which they were travelling to the grave, they both looked in average health, mamma being only prettily delicate and Mrs. MacGill being fat and dumpy, with cap ribbons and shoulder capes and bugles and brooches that bespoke at least a languid interest in life. The nice English girl who was Mrs. MacGill's companion in the railway

train, sat in the background knitting and reading,—the kind of girl who ought to look young and does n't, because her youth has been feeding somebody's selfish old age. I could see her quiet history written all over her face,—her aged father, vicar of some remote parish; her weary mother, harassed with the cares of a large family; and the dull little vicarage from whose windows she had taken her narrow peeps at life. We exchanged glances at some of Mrs. MacGill's reminiscences, and I was grateful to see that she has a sense of humour. That will help her considerably if she is a paid companion, as I judge she is; one would hardly travel with Mrs. MacGill for pleasure. This lady at length crowded mamma to the wall and began on the details of an attack of brain fever from which she had suffered at the Bridge of Allan thirty years ago, and I left the room to seek a breath of fresh air.

There is never anything amusing going on in an English hotel. When I remember

the life one lives during a week at the Waldorf-Astoria or the Holland House in New York, it fairly makes me yearn with homesickness. It goes like this with a girl whose friends are all anxious to make the time pass merrily.

Monday noon: Luncheon at the University Club with H. L. and mamma.

Monday afternoon: Drive with G. P. in a hansom. Tea at Maillard's. Violets from A. B., American Beauty roses from C. D. waiting in my room. Dinner and the play arranged for me by E. F.

Tuesday: One love letter and one proposal by the morning mail; the proposal from a Harvard Freshman who wishes me to wait until he finishes his course. No one but a Freshman would ever have thought of that! G. H. from Chicago and B. C. from Richmond arrive early and join us at breakfast. B. C. thinks G. H. might have remained at home to good advantage. G. H. wonders why B. C. could n't have stayed where he

was less in the way. Luncheon party given by G. H. at one. Dinner by B. C. at seven.

Wednesday: Last fitting for three lovely dresses.

Thursday: Wear them all. The result of one of them attention with intention from the fastidious A. B.

And so on. It would doubtless spoil one in time, but I have only had two weeks of it, all put together.

The hall of the hotel at Exeter was like all other English hotel halls; so damp, dismal, dull, and dreary, that it is a wonder English travellers are not all sleeping in suicides' graves. Were my eyes deceiving me or was there a motor at the door, and still more wonderful, was there a young, good-looking man directly in my path, — a healthy young man with no symptoms, a well-to-do young man with a perfectly appointed motor, a well-bred, presentable young man with an air of the world about him?

How my heart, starving for amusement, rushed out to him after these last weary months of nursing at Leamington! I did n't want to marry him, of course, but I wanted to talk to him; to ride in his motor; to have him, in short, for a masculine safety valve. He showed no symptom of requiring me for any purpose whatever. That is the trouble with the men over here, — so oblivious, so rigid, so frigid, so conventional; so afraid of being chloroformed and led unconscious to the altar! He was smoking a pipe, and he looked at me in a vague sort of way. I confess I don't like to be looked at vaguely, and I am not accustomed to it. He could n't know that, of course, but I should like to teach him if only I had the chance and time. I don't suppose he knew that I was wearing a Redfern gown and hat, but the consciousness supported me in the casual encounter. Naturally he could not seek an introduction to me in a hotel hall, nor could we speak to each other without one.

His chauffeur went up to him presently, touched his hat, and I thought he said, "Quite ready, Sir — Something;" I did n't catch the name.

Well, he bowled off, and I comforted myself with the thought that mamma and I were at least on our way to pastures new, if they were only Dawlish or Torquay pastures; or perhaps something bracing in the shape of Dartmoor forests, if mamma listens to Mrs. MacGill.

The owner of the motor appeared again at our dinner table, a long affair set in the middle of the room, all the small tables being occupied by uninteresting nobodies who ate and drank as much, and took up as much room, as if they had been somebodies.

It is needless to say that the young Britisher did not, like the busy bee, improve the shining hour — that sort of bee does n't know honey when he sees it. He did n't even pass me the salt, which in a Christian country is not considered a compromising

attention. I think that too many of Great Britain's young men must have been killed off in South Africa, and those remaining have risen to an altogether fictitious value. I suppose this Sir Somebody thinks my eyes are fixed on his coronet, if he has one rusting in his upper drawer awaiting its supreme moment of presentation. He is mistaken; I am thinking only of his motor. Heigh ho! If marriage as an institution could be retained, and all thought of marriage banished from the minds of the young of both sexes, how delightful society could be made for all parties! I can see that such a state of things would be quite impossible, but it presents many advantages.

Mrs. MacGill

EXETER, DEVONSHIRE
ROUGEMONT CASTLE HOTEL
Sunday, May 16th, 19—

I HAVE made out my journey from Tunbridge Wells in safety, although there has been a break-down upon the Scotch Express, which is a cause of thankfulness. There were two American women in the same carriage part of the time. The mother was, like myself, an invalid, and the daughter I suppose would be considered pretty. She was not exactly painted, but must have done something to her skin, I think, probably prejudicial like the advertisements; it was really waxen, and her hair decidedly dark — and such a veil! It reminded me of the expression about "power on the head" in Corinthians — not that she seemed to require it, for she rang no less than eight times for the guard, each time about some different whim-

sey. The boy only grinned, yet he was quite rude to me when I asked him, only for the second time, where we changed carriages next. Cecilia spoke a good deal to the girl, who made her laugh constantly, in spite of her neuralgia, which was very inconsistent and provoking to me, as she had not uttered a word for hours after we left Tunbridge Wells. The mother seemed a very delicate, sensible person, suffering from exactly the same form of influenza as myself — indeed many of our symptoms are identical. They happened to be going to this hotel, too, so we met again in the afternoon. I had a bad night. Exeter is small, but the Cathedral chimes are very tiresome; they kept me awake as if on purpose; Cecilia slept, as neuralgic people seem often able to do.

Somehow I do not fancy the idea of Dartmoor at all. It may brace Cecilia, but it will be too cold for me, I'm sure. I must send for my black velvet mantle — the one with the beads at the neck, as it will be the very

thing for the moor. At present I have nothing quite suitable to wear. There is a great deal of skirt about Americans, I see. Even the mother rustled; all silk, yet the dresses on the top were plain enough. As I had nothing to read in the train, I bought a sixpenny copy of a book called "The Forest Lovers," but could not get on with it at all, and what I did make out seemed scarcely proper, so I took up a novel which Mrs. Pomeroy (the American) lent me, by a man with a curious Scriptural name — something like Phillipotts. It was entirely about Dartmoor, and gave a most alarming account of the scenery and inhabitants. I'm sure I hope we shall be safe at Grey Tor Inn. Some of the wilder parts must be quite dangerous — storms — wild cattle roaming about, and Tors everywhere.

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Mrs. MacGill

DARTMOOR, DEVONSHIRE
THE GREY TOR INN
Tuesday, May 18th, 19—

I WISH I had brought winter flannels with me. It is all very well to call it the middle of May on Dartmoor, but it is as cold as the middle of winter in Aberdeen. There may be something odd about the red soil that accounts for flowers coming out in spite of it, for certainly there are primroses and violets on the banks, a good many, — very like flowers in a hat.

We met Miss Pomeroy, the American girl, in the lobby of the hotel. She said that her mother was resting in the drawing-room. Like me, she seems to suffer from shivering fits. "I can't imagine," I said, "why any doctor should have ordered me to such a place as this to recover from influenza, which is just another form of cold." The windows look straight out on Grey Tor. It is, of course, as

the guide-books say, "a scene of great sublimity and grandeur," but very dreary; it is not mountain, and not what we would call moor, either, in Scotland — just a crumpled country, with boulders here and there. Grey Tor is the highest point we can see — not very lonely, I am glad to say, for little black people are always walking up and down it, like flies on a confectioner's window, and there is a railing on the top.

There is a young man here, who, I was surprised to find, is a nephew of the uncle of my poor brother-in-law, Colonel Forsyth, who died in a moment at Agra. Sir William Maxwell Mackenzie used to be often at the Forsyths, before his death. This young man's name is Archibald, and he drives a motor. I sat next him at dinner, and we had quite a pleasant little chat about my poor brother-in-law's sudden death and funeral. Miss Pomeroy ate everything on the table and talked a great deal. Cecilia said she wasn't able to come down to dinner, but, as usual, ate more