Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie

THERE is something soothing even in hotel tobacco, I suppose, so I was better, though still feeling decidedly blue, later in the day at Widdington, when I came up to the inn door and began overhauling the motor as it stood in the yard. There was nothing particularly cheering in finding several long cuts in the tires, and I was probing them to get the grit out, when I heard a little cough behind me. I turned to see Miss Virginia standing in the doorway, looking at me rather doubtfully. Now of course I had been rather short, not to say nasty, but somehow it's a fact that you cannot be sharp with a woman without at once being put in the wrong, though she may really have been the sinner all the time. It was Miss Virginia who had brought me out on this show, who had cost me about forty pounds in tires, and heaven knows how much in other ways, but it was

I who felt a beast now. Yet she looked at me in a way which seemed to say she was sorry I was vexed. She was rubbing her hands together and shivering a little. Of course she was cold in that ridiculous dress.

"A nice day it has turned out, has n't it?" I said rather spitefully.

"Oh, I'll never, never ask for a picnic again!" cried she, with a comical look. She came and began to look at the cuts in the tires herself.

"Oh, they *are* bad," she exclaimed, "and I suppose you love that old motor better than anything on earth, don't you?" she inquired.

"I get a good deal more pleasure out of it," I truthfully replied, "than I do out of the society of most human beings." She gave a little laugh.

"I expect I had better go inside after that!" she said, and of course I felt rather a brute. I had n't really meant to be rude or send her away. I hunted under the tar-

paulin that covered the motor for my fur-lined coat, and then I followed her into the inn.

"Look here," I said, "better put this on; you 're horribly cold." She seemed half inclined to refuse, but finally let me put the coat over her shoulders and run her arms into the sleeves.

"You 're pretty damp," I observed.

"'Deed I am!" she shivered. "Miss Evesham and I went for a walk and got caught in the rain as usual. My hair 's all wet too!"

"Better dry it," I suggested.

She ran off to some room or other, and when she reappeared she had two plaits of dark hair, as thick as bellropes, hanging down her back. With that and my motor coat, Miss Virginia cut a pretty queer figure. I cannot say she looked plain, however; her spirits had come back, and so had mine, strange to say, for the day was far from finished.

There was a parlour in the inn, so low in

I CANNOT SAY SHE LOOKED PLAIN, HOWEVER

the ceiling that I could not stand up straight in it, and was forever knocking my head against the rafters. When we went in, this place was as full of women as it could hold, all fighting like cats, — Mrs. MacGill, Mrs. Pomeroy, Miss Evesham, — and all wondering how they were to get home. The place was simply steaming with tea.

Mrs. MacGill, it appeared, utterly refused to go home in the pony trap unless it were driven by me. Needless to say I declined this honour with a firmness equal to hers. Finally it was arranged, chiefly by Miss Evesham's management, that the two old ladies and herself were to go home in the motor with Johnson, while Miss Virginia and I negotiated the pony and trap. This was pretty thick, considering I had refused point-blank to drive Mrs. MacGill, but Miss Evesham seemed to make it sound all right, — clever sort of young woman in her way. As the weather threatened to get worse immediately, the motor party was packed off

without loss of time, and Miss Virginia and I had a comfortable tea by ourselves before starting for home.

It was not late in the afternoon, but the little inn parlour was almost dark, chiefly because the church tower overshadowed the house, and the window was so small. Presently the bells began ringing (it was a saint's day, Miss Virginia said), and my word, what a din they made! The whole house shook and the very teacups rattled. Miss Virginia seemed to like it, however, and sat listening with her chin on her hand. She had been strumming on an old spinet sort of thing that stood in the corner of the room, and I asked her if she would sing a little before we set off.

"I will," said she, "if you 'll smoke a little," an invitation I accepted with alacrity.

"You deserve something," she remarked, "to make up for the wretched time you 've been having to-day. It was partly my fault. I am sorry."

"Oh, don't mention it!" was all I could say, of course, and Miss Virginia began to sing before I could speak another word.

There is a tremendous charm in her singing: her style is so simple; her voice is so fresh; you can hear every word she says, and she always sings the right songs. How this sort of singing makes a man think! I can't describe the effect it has upon me. As Miss Virginia touched the tinny, stringy old notes and went from song to song, — now an Irish melody, now a nigger one, now an English ballad, — I forgot all about the day's worries; I forgot the motor and the cut tires and the bad weather and the beastly picnic — it was a kind of Heaven. If I marry, it must be some one who can sing like this. I have been changing my preferences for blonde women lately. No doubt they look very nice when young, but they don't wear well, I feel sure, and get purple and chilblainy in cold weather. Of course the dark ones are apt to turn drab and mottled, but not when they have as

much colour as Miss Virginia. All sorts of scraps of thoughts and ideas chased each other through my mind as she sang. She had got on to a thing she had sung in the hotel several times, — a plantation Christmas carol she called it, the sort of thing you cannot forget once you have heard it, either the words or the music.

"Oh, dat star 's still shinin' dis Chrismus Day,
Rise, O sinner, and foller!
Wid an eye o' faith you c'n see its ray,
Rise, O sinner, and foller!
Leave yo' fader,
Leave yo' mudder,
Leave yo' sister,
Leave yo' brudder,
An' rise, O sinner, and foller!"

And there was a bit about a shepherd too: —

"Leave yo' sheep, an'
Leave yo' lamb, an'
Leave yo' ewe, an'
Leave yo' ram, an'
Rise up, shepherd, and foller!" *

I asked her to sing it over again. I had forgotten all about the time and the drive

* Ruth McEnery Stuart.

home and the beastly weather. Luckily I happened to look at my watch. It was nearly six o'clock!

"We 've got to look sharp," I said, "if we want any dinner at the hotel."

Look sharp, indeed! The woman at the inn must have been mad or drunk when she told us that the low road home was only two miles longer than the way we came. We may have missed the right turning, for Miss Virginia was talking and laughing at such a rate when we began the drive, that I confess I had n't much attention to spare. We gradually emerged from the valley where the village lay and were soon on the open moor and fairly lost on it before you could say Jack Robinson.

I never saw such a dismal, howling, God-forsaken country, without a house or a hut or so much as a heap of stones to mark the way, — a wilderness of stubby heath and endless, endless roads, crossing and recrossing in a way that is simply maddening and

perfectly senseless, for they lead to nowhere. We were three mortal hours crawling along on those confounded roads. It rained, of course, and a wind got up, and at the end of that time we were apparently no nearer Grey Tor than when we left Widdington.

Miss Virginia kept up very pluckily for a long time, but she was dead tired and very cold and became more and more silent. It was about the most uncomfortable predicament I ever was in, — and with a girl on my hands, too, a thing I have hitherto always managed to avoid.

And then a thing happened that really I can't account for, and yet I suppose it has changed the whole affair, as far as I am concerned. I feel a perfect beast whenever I think of it, and I hope to goodness Miss Virginia knows nothing about it. We had come to an interminable hill, and I had been walking for about half an hour. Miss Virginia was totally silent now, and suddenly I saw that the reins had slipped from her

hands. She was actually asleep, huddled up in my coat against the back of the chaise. It was beginning to rain again, and the incline being very gentle at that point, I felt I had to get in and hold an umbrella over the girl. I did, and a sudden jerk of the wheels sent her almost into my arms without waking her. Her head was on my shoulder, her cheek so close to mine. Of course I have heard fellows talk about kissing: I have always thought it a disgusting habit myself, and discouraged it, even in near relations. But now — now it seemed suddenly different — she seemed meant to be kissed — and by me — and well, I kissed her — that 's the naked truth, and the moment I had done it I would have given worlds not to have done it, or else to have the right to do it again. A man is a man firstly, I suppose; but secondly, at least, he ought to be a gentleman. That 's the thought that has been spinning in my head all night. Does Virginia suspect? I hope not — and yet I don't know.

We got home, of course, all right in the end, for the hotel turned up quite unexpectedly round a corner, with all the lights shining out across the moor.

N. B. There has been the devil to pay with the motor and the old women.

Cecilia Evesham

I HAVE always had an idea that events need a propelling hand every now and then. Somehow it seemed to me that afternoon at Widdington that Virginia and Sir Archibald were in need of my assistance, and I took the desperate resolution and helped them to the best of my power. This is what I did: I undertook to look after Mrs. MacGill and Mrs. Pomeroy in the motor if Sir Archibald drove Virginia home in the pony chaise; but not content with this, I deliberately sent them round by a road some five miles longer than the one we had come by. I happened to be speaking with the landlady about the roads, and she told me that there was another way back to Grey Tor, only that it was longer. The idea struck me, as the saying goes, "all of a heap."

"Sir Archibald," I said, returning to the parlour, where they all sat, "if you had

seen the business I had to get Greytoria *down* that hill, you would hesitate more about getting her up it. But the landlady here tells us that if you go round by the lower road you avoid the hill, and it is only a little longer."

"I don't believe in country people's distances," he said, "but I'll inquire."

I turned back, as if by accident, into the bar, and leaned across the counter towards the landlady. She was a genial-looking old woman with a rollicking eye.

"The young people wish to go round by the low road," I said, "but I'm afraid there may be some difficulties made about it." I hesitated and smiled at her, adding, "It's not *much* farther, is it?"

"Happen four mile or so, ma'am," she said, looking hard at me.

"Four? As much as that?" I asked.

"Happen three mile, maybe," she corrected; "no, two and a half."

Here Sir Archibald came out to inquire

about the distance. He looked up at the gray skies first, and seemed uncertain.

"How much farther do you call it by the low road to Grey Tor?" he asked.

"Close on two mile, sir," she mumbled shamelessly, and Sir Archibald hesitated no longer.

"Two miles of level are better than half a mile of precipice. I vote for the longer road, Miss Pomeroy," he said, on going back into the parlour.

Virginia nodded and smiled. She was sitting at the old, tinny-sounding spinet, singing the most beautiful little wandering airs that might have been learned in fairyland.

Suddenly she drifted into a plaintive melody we had not heard before, and when we had succumbed to its spell she began singing some words I had found in my dear mother's diary. I had given the verses to Virginia, and she had set them to an air of her own. It is a part of her charm that she

sings sad songs as if she had never felt joy, and gay ones as if she had never known care or sorrow.

"'T is I am a lady, now that I 'm old ;
I 'm sheltered from hunger and want and cold,
In a wonderful country that 's rich in gold
(And life to the last is sweet).
Now in the doorway I sit at my ease,
And my son's son he plays at my knees
On little stumbling feet.
But my heart goes back to the days of old,
To a barren country where gorse is gold,
For oh ! it was there that my love was told,
'T was there we used to meet !

They may think I 've forgotten the land forlorn,
In the happy valleys covered with corn ;
They may lay me down with my face to the morn.
A stone at my head and feet ;
But I know that before the break o' the day
My soul will arise and be far away
(For spirits travel fleet), —
Away from the valleys covered with corn,
Back again to the land forlorn,
For oh ! It was there that my Love was born,
'T was there we used to meet !" *

* Mary Findlater.

Sir Archibald, Mr. Willoughby, and I could have listened for an hour, but I felt that it was time to hurry off the elders of the party, so made dark allusions to the weather. These were sufficient to rouse Mrs. MacGill and Mrs. Pomeroy, who were in a semi-comatose condition induced by copious draughts of tea.

We all went to the door of the inn, and Mr. Willoughby came and helped me to my seat in the motor.

"I am coming across to Grey Tor on Saturday," he said. "I have some sketches to take over that way. Shall you still be at the inn ? "

"Probably," I answered evasively.

"I hope so," said he ; "perhaps we may have another talk such as we have had this afternoon."

"Who knows ? Talk is a fugitive pleasure," I replied. "Some days it will be good and others it can't be captured at any price."

"I 'll come in the chance of catching