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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WRECK OF THE NANCY BELL; OR, CAST AWAY ON KERGUELEN LAND

J C Hutcheson

"The Wreck of the Nancy Bell"

Chapter One.

Outwards Bound.

"How's her head?" exclaimed Captain Dinks, the moment his genial, rosy, weather-beaten face appeared looming above the top-rail of the companion way that led up to the poop from the saloon below, the bright mellow light of the morning sun reflecting from his deep-tanned visage as if from a mirror, and making it as radiant almost as the orb of day.

"West-sou'-west, sorr," came the answer, ere the questioner could set foot on the deck, in accents short, sharp, prompt, and decisive, albeit with a strong Milesian flavour, from the chief mate. He was the officer of the watch, and was standing alongside the man at the wheel on the weather-side of the ship, with a telescope under his arm and a keen look of attention in his merry, twinkling grey eyes.

"Ha-hum!" muttered the captain to himself reflectively. "I wish the wind would shift over more to the nor'ard, and we'd then be able to shape a better course; we're going far too much to the west to please me! I suppose," he added in a louder tone, addressing the mate again, "she isn't making any great way yet since daylight, McCarthy, eh?"

"No, sorr, leastways, Captain Dinks," replied that worthy, a genuine thorough-going Irishman, "from the crown of his head to the sole of his fut," as he would have said himself, and with a shaggy head of hair and beard as red as that of the wildest Celt in Connemara, besides being blessed with a "brogue" as pronounced as his turned-up nose—on which one might have hung a tea-kettle on an emergency, in the hope that its surroundings would supply the requisite fire and fuel for boiling purposes. "No, sorr, no way at all at all, sure! Not more'n five knots, cap'en honey, by the same token, the last time we hove the log at six bells, bad cess to it!"

"Everything drawing, too, slow and aloft!" said the captain, with just a shade of discontent in his cheery voice, as he took in with a quick, sailor-like glance the position of the ship and every detail of the swelling pyramids of canvas that towered up on each mast from deck to sky—the yards braced round sharp, almost fore and aft, the huge square sails flattened like boards, the tremulous fluttering of the flying jib, and occasional gybing of the spanker, showing how close up to the wind the vessel was being steered. "You couldn't luff her a bit more, McCarthy, could you?" he added, after another glance at the compass and a murmured "steady!" to the steersman.

"Not a ha'porth, sorr," replied the mate sorrowfully, as if it went to his heart to make the announcement. "I had the watch up only jist a minit ago; an' if you'll belave me, Cap'en Dinks, we've braced up the yards to the last inch the sheets will run, bad cess to thim!"

"Well, well, I suppose we'll have to put up with it; though it's rather disheartening to have this sou'-wester right in one's teeth before we have cleared the Chops of the Channel, after all our good luck in having so fair a wind down with us from the Nore!"

The captain still spoke somewhat disconsolately; but, his temperament was of too bright and elastic a nature to allow him long to look merely on the dark side of things. Soon, he saw something to be cheerful over, in spite of the adverse influence of Aeolus; and this was, as it appeared to him, the wonderful progress the ship was making, although sailing, close-hauled as she was, with the wind right before the beam.

"Now, isn't she a beauty, though, McCarthy," he said presently, with a sort of triumphant ring in his speech, after gazing for a few moments in silence over the taffrail astern at the long foaming wake the vessel was leaving behind her, spread out like a glittering silver fan across the illimitable expanse of greenish-tinged water. "Isn't she a beauty

to behave as she does under the circumstances! There are not many ships laden like her that would make five knots out of a foul wind, as she is now doing, eh?"

"That there ain't, sorr," promptly returned the other with hearty emphasis, only too glad to have the opportunity of agreeing with his skipper. "An' jist you wait, sorr, till we get into the nor'-east trades; an' by the powers we'll say the crathur walk away from us, like one of thim race-horses on the Skibbereen course whin you're a standin' still and a watchin' thim right foreinst you."

"Aye, that we will, McCarthy," chimed in Captain Dinks, now all good humour again, chuckling with anticipated pleasure and rubbing his hands together gleefully. "I wouldn't wish for a better ship under me in fair wind or foul than the *Nancy Bell*. Bless her old timbers, she's staunch and sound from truck to keelson, and the smartest clipper that ever sailed out of the London Docks—when she has anything like decent weather!"

"That she is, sorr, plaze the pigs!" chorused the Irishman to this paean of praise, which might have run on to an interminable length if it had not been just then interrupted by the mate's suddenly raising his gilt-banded cap in nautical salute to a new-comer, who now appeared on the scene.

Captain Dinks, at once "cutting short" any further rhapsodical encomiums he may have contemplated anent the merits of the *Nancy Bell*, turned round.

"Ah, good morning, Mr Meldrum," said he in cordial tones, raising his cap politely like his chief officer. "You are early on deck: an old sailor, I presume!"

"Good morning, Captain Dinks," smilingly replied the gentleman addressed, one of the few saloon passengers who patronised the cuddy of the New Zealand clipper on her present voyage. He had only just that moment come up from below, tempted to turn out by the genial brightness of the lovely June morning; and, as he emerged from the companion hatchway, he bent his steps along the poop towards the binnacle, by which the captain and his aide-de-camp were standing. "Yes," he continued, in answer to the former's question, "I have had a voyage or two in my time, and one is accustomed to keep early hours at sea."

"Begorrah, ye're right, sorr!" ejaculated the Irish mate, with an empressment that showed his earnestness. "An' a dale too airy for some ov us sometimes. Sure, an' a sailor's loife is a dog's loife entirely!"

"Shut up, you old humbug!" said the captain with a laugh, turning to the passenger; "Why, to hear him you would think McCarthy to be one of those lazy lubbers who are never content unless they are caulking below, snoozing their wits away whilst the sun is scorching their eyes out; whereas, he's the most active and energetic seaman I ever met with in all my experience at sea, man and boy, for the last thirty years. Look you, Mr Meldrum, he never waits to be roused out by any chance when it's his watch on deck; while, should the weather be at all nasty, you really can't get him to go below and turn in—it is 'spell ho' with him with a vengeance, night and day alike!"

"Don't you belave his blarney, sorr," put in the mate eagerly, bursting into a roar of merriment, although blushing purple with delight the while at the skipper's compliment. "Why, sorr, whin I go to slape sometimes, the divil himself couldn't wake me!"

"Ah!" rejoined Captain Dinks, "that may be when you're ashore, Tim, but I know what you are when you're aboard ship and duty calls! I don't forget, old man, how, under Providence," and this the captain added reverently, taking off his cap and looking up to heaven as he spoke, "you saved the *Nancy Bell* on our last voyage home—no, Tim, I don't forget!"

"Aye, aye, Cap'en Dinks," replied the other, not to be beaten, "true for you, sorr; but, where was yoursilf the whilst, I'd like to know, and what could I have done without your hilp sure, wid all your blatheration?"

"Nonsense, Tim," returned the captain, giving the mate a slap on the back which must have taken his breath away for the moment, as it made him reel again, and then holding out his hand, which the other grasped with a vice-like grip, in a paw that resembled more in size and shape a leg of mutton than anything else—"Tip us your fist, my hearty, and let us say no more about it!"

It would have done anyone's heart good to see the way in which these two brave men—sailors both every inch of them—then looked each other straight in the eyes, a smile of satisfaction illumining their faces, as if each had reason to be proud of the other, their hands locked in a friendly clasp that was true to the death!

As for Mr Meldrum, the passenger, who was a delighted observer of the good feeling existing between the captain and second in command of the vessel in which, like Caesar, he had "embarked himself and all his fortunes," and was now journeying across the surface of the deep—a good feeling that was fairly indicative of everything going well on the voyage—he was so carried away by the spirit of the moment that he felt inclined to ask that the general hand-shaking might be "passed round for the good of the crowd." What is more, he immediately put his "happy thought" into execution; whereupon, much fist-squeezing ensued between the trio, the steersman looking on with a grin of complacency at the fraternal exhibition, and gripping the spokes of the wheel more firmly, as it were, out of a sort of fellow-sympathy, as he kept the ship "full and by!"

"Tim McCarthy and I are old shipmates," said Captain Dinks presently, as if apologising for the little ebullition of sentiment that had just taken place, "and we've seen some rough times together."

"Pray don't mention it," said Mr Meldrum; "your friendly feelings do you both honour! But, how are we getting on, captain," he added, to change the subject, "the ship seems to be slipping along through the water?"

"Pretty well, but not so well as I could wish. We've got an obstinate head-wind against us, and cannot quite lay on our

proper course; so I don't think we'll be able to log much of a run when we take the sun at noon. The wind looks like shifting now, however, so the next twenty-four hours may tell a different tale."

As the captain spoke, the sails flapped ominously against the masts; and, in obedience to a motion of the mate's hand, the steersman had to let the vessel's head fall off a little more to the westward, in order to fill the canvas again and make it draw.

"I think, cap'en, we'd better thry her on the other tack," said the Irishman after a pause. "The wind's headin' us sure!"

"All right, McCarthy," answered the captain, "go forwards and call the watch, and we'll see about getting her about."

Handing the captain the telescope, which he had retained until now under his left arm, apparently regarding it as the badge of his authority as officer of the watch—an authority which he now relinquished to his chief—the mate was down the poop ladder and on the deck below in "a brace of shakes;" and, in another moment, his voice was heard in stentorian tones ringing through the ship fore and aft. "Hands 'bout ship!"

The cry was like the wave of an enchanter's wand in the realms of Fairy-land; for, where all had been previously quiet and easy-going, with only the helmsman apparently doing anything on board so far as the vessel's progress was concerned, there was now a scene of bustle, noise, and motion,—men darting forwards to flatten the headsails and aft to ease off the boom sheets, and others to their allotted stations, waiting for the well-known orders from the captain, who stood in the centre of the poop, with the passenger beside him, looking on with a critical eye at the way in which the manoeuvre should be executed.

"All ready forward?" shouted the captain, as soon as he saw the crew at their several posts.

"Aye, aye, sorr," replied Mr McCarthy.

"Ready, aye ready," repeated the captain—it was a sort of catch-word of warning to prepare the men for the next word of command, like the "Tention!" of the drill sergeant to his squad of recruits—and he then waved his hand to the man at the wheel to put up the helm.

"Helm's a lee!" was the next cry; and, instantly, the jib and foresail began to shiver and shake as the ship's bows came up to the wind, and the square sails flattened against the masts, while the boom of the mizzen swung to and fro until the vessel should get out of stays and pay off on the port tack.

"Raise tacks and sheets!" came in rotation, and the topgallant-bowlines were let go, ready for the next move.

"Mainsail haul!"—and the ponderous mainyard was swung round, bringing with it the maintopsail and topgallant yards with all their acreage of canvas: the foreyards followed suit, when the captain shouted, "Haul of all;"—and, after the final order, "Brace sharp!" the *Nancy Bell* might have been seen heading a sou'-south-east course in lieu of her former direction to the westwards, and gaining more southing by the change.

The mate had just returned to the poop, after seeing the watch trim the forward sails and curl down the slack of the ropes, while Captain Dinks was wondering why the steward had not yet summoned them down to breakfast, considering that it was past eight bells. He was just indeed asking Mr Meldrum whether he felt hungry or not, when suddenly a great commotion was heard down the companion hatch, as of voices in altercation, a crash of crockery following in rapid sequence.

"I'd like to know what that stupid lubber is up to now," ejaculated the captain. "He's an ignorant ass, and as slow as a mute at a funeral. I'm sorry I had to ship him; but I had no alternative, for my old steward was taken suddenly ill, and I had to put up with this substitute whom he sent me just as we were leaving Plymouth."

"Perhaps," began the passenger, as if he were about to offer some good-natured excuse for the man's awkwardness, but his observations were drowned by a louder clatter below than ever; and, ere the captain could descend to ascertain the cause, the new steward rushed up the companion ladder, with his eyes half-starting from his head, his hair standing on end, and his face pale with terror.

"Howly Moses!" exclaimed the mate. "Be aisy, can't ye. What's the matter wid ye, you spalpeen, to be rooshin' on deck like a bull in a china shop? Spake, you blissid omahdawn, or I'll shake the loife out of ye!"

And the Irishman, putting his brawny hands on the terrified man's shoulders, appeared about to carry out his threat, when the unfortunate wight stuttered out in stammering accents, "Lor-ord, sir, do-oo-oo come below. The-eer's a ghost in the cabin; an-an-and he wants to m-m-murder me!" the man looking the while as if he was going to faint.

"A ghost in the cabin?" said the passenger, laughing; "and in daylight to? Why, Captain Dinks, he must be a sort of *rara avis*—not *in terris*, however, in this instance."

"A ghost in the cabin?" repeated the captain, in a serious tone of voice, with a frown on his forehead that somewhat disturbed the usual good-humoured expression of his countenance; "we must see about this. I don't allow any ghosts aboard my ship!"

And, with these words he dived down the companion, followed closely by the mate and passenger; the panic-stricken steward contenting himself with remaining at the top of the hatchway at a safe distance from the object that had alarmed him, although he could not help peering down below and listening with bated breath as to what might ensue in the cabin—heedless of the entreaties of the man at the wheel, in whom curiosity had overpowered the sense of duty for the nonce and made to speak in defiance of discipline, to "tell him all about it!"

Chapter Two.

Stowed Away.

When the "party of observation" under the leadership of the captain arrived at the foot of the companion way, nothing very alarming was presented to their notices as there were no signs of disturbance to be seen in the steward's pantry, which was close to hand on their right; although, judging by the crashing sounds they had heard when on deck, one and all would have almost sworn that a "free fight" had taken place in that sanctum, causing its complement of crockeryware to come to irretrievable grief.

Nor was anything wrong to be perceived, at first sight, on entering within the cuddy.

On the contrary, everything there seemed in due order. The doors of the cabins on either side, as well as those of the state-rooms at the further end of the saloon, were closed in their ordinary way—with the exception of one, which was opened for an instant, to allow of a night-capped head, evidently of female ownership, peering forth for a momentary peep round, and then immediately slammed to again; and, the long table, which ran fore and aft the vessel the entire length of the apartment from the foot of the mizzen mast, was neatly spread over with a snow-white cloth, on which knives and forks were laid equi-distantly with trim regularity, as well as other prandial paraphernalia, in preparation for breakfast; while to complete the category, the swinging trays above, that oscillated to and fro as the ship gave an occasional lurch and roll to port or starboard, betrayed no lack of their proper quota of wine-glasses, decanters, and tumblers. No, there was no trace of any disorder here, nothing to account for that noise of a struggle and of breakages below that had preceded the sudden uprush of the steward to the poop. What could possibly have caused all that clatter and commotion?

Evidently so thinking, the captain, mate, and passenger looked at each other in a bewildered fashion, as if each were endeavouring to solve some knotty conundrum, and had ultimately come to the conclusion to "give it up!"

They had not long to wait, however, for an explanation to the mystery.

All at once, a deep, sepulchral groan came from abaft the mizzenmast, as if some one was being smothered in the hold below; and, almost at the same instant, there echoed from the adjacent cabin—that whence the night-capped head before mentioned had popped out—a shrill scream, as of a female in distress, succeeded by the exclamation, "Gracious goodness, help us and save us! We shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Be jabbers," ejaculated the mate, following up the captain, who had immediately rushed aft to the spot whence the groan had proceeded; "sure and that's the Meejor's swate voice! I'd know it onywheres, aven in the Bog of Allen!"

On the captain reaching the end of the cuddy table, which had, of course, interfered with his view, the crash of crockery which they had heard, and which had been hitherto inexplicable, became at once clear; for, there on the floor of the deck was the débris of a pile of plates and scattered fragments of cups and saucers which had been suddenly dropped by the steward in his fright and were smashed to atoms; while, in the centre of the scene of devastation, was the dungeon-like cavity of the after-hatchway, the cover of which had been shifted from its coamings by the man, in order for him to get up some of the cabin provisions from the hold, whose gloomy depths were only faintly illumined by the feeble rays of a lantern, which as it lay on its side rolling on the deck, participated in the general upset.

Captain Dinks promptly took up the lantern, holding it over the open hatchway; and, as he did so, a second groan came from below, more hollow and sepulchral than before.

"Who's there?" shouted the captain down the hatchway.

There was no reply, save a fainter moan, apparently further away in the distance, followed by a sort of gurgling sound, and then the fall of some heavy object was heard in the hold.

"Who's there below?" repeated the captain, endeavouring to pierce the cimmerian darkness by waving the lighted lantern about and holding it as far down the hatchway as his arm could reach. "Speak or I'll fire!"

This was an empty threat of the skipper's, as he held no weapon in his hand save the lantern; but it had the necessary effect all the same.

"It's only me, massa," said a thick guttural voice from below; "only me," repeated the voice pleadingly. "Goramighty, massa, don't shoot!"

"And who's me?" interrogated the captain sternly, as the mate and the passenger looked at each other inquiringly, a smile creeping over Mr Meldrum's face, while the Irishman screwed up his left eye into a palpable wink.

"Me, Snowball, sah—a 'spectable collud genleman from Jamaikey, massa," replied the voice in the hold.

"And what the dickens are you doing aboard my ship?" asked Captain Dinks in an angry tone; but the others could see that he was half-laughing as he spoke.

"Me want passage, sah, back home. Very bad peoples, sah, in Plymouth; tieve all poah niggah's money and make him drunk. Snowball starbing; so um see lubly fine ship goin' way and get aboard in shore boat wid um last shillun: eb'ryting scramble and jumble when come on deck; so Snowball go get in cabin, and den down in hold, where he see steward stow um grub, and lie quiet till ship sail. When hold open, he try get out, but can't; box fall on um foot, and Snowball holler wid pain; steward tink um de Debbel and knock down tings. Snowball done no harm; um bery bad wid um leg!"

"Sure, an' it's an impudent schoundrel he is, the spalpeen!" said the mate. "Of all the cheeky stowaways I ever came across, he bates the lot entirely. Shall I rouse him up with a rope's end, cap'en?"

"No, wait a bit, McCarthy," said the captain; "we'll try a little persuasion first. Here, 'Snowball,' or whatever else you call yourself, just sling your hook out of that, and come up here. I fancy I shall be able to accommodate you with something, besides a free passage at my owner's expense!"

"Can't, massa," replied the stowaway, after making a movement, as they could hear, below, succeeded by a suppressed cry of pain; "um leg jammed 'tween box and cask: Snowball feel bery bad—tink leg go squash: can't move um nohow."

"Be jabbers!" exclaimed the good-natured Irishman, "sure an' the poor baste's hurt, and, by your lave, cap'en, I'll go down and say what's the matther."

"Do," said Captain Dinks; but ere he could get out the word, the mate, taking his consent for granted, had caught hold of the hatchway coamings with his powerful hands and swung himself down on to the lower deck; reaching up afterwards for the lantern, which the captain handed him, and then disappearing from view as he dived amongst the heterogeneous mass of boxes and casks, and bales of goods, mingled with articles of all sorts, with which the place was crammed.

After a moment's absence, he came back beneath the hatchway.

"Plaze, git a blanket or two out of one of the cabins, cap'en, to hoist him up," said he; "the unlucky beggar sames to be injured badly, and I think his ribs are stove in, besides a heavy box having fallen on his leg. He hasn't got such a chape passage this toime as he expected; for he has been more'n half suffocated in the flour hogshead where he first stowed himself away; and, begorrah, to look at him now, with his black face all whitened, like a duchess powthered for a ball, and his woolly hid, and the blood all over him, as if he had been basted wid a shillelagh at Donnybrook Fair, why, his own mother wouldn't know him. It's small blame to that fool of a steward to be afther taking him for somethin' onnatural, sure!"

While the mate had been giving this explanation of the stowaway's condition Captain Dinks had not been idle.

With an agility of which none would have thought him capable, looking at his thick-set and rather stout figure, he had rushed in a second to his own cabin, which was near aft; and, dragging out a couple of railway rugs and a coil of rope had pitched them below to the Irishman, concluding his operations by jumping down alongside him, to aid in releasing the injured man from his perilous position—telling the passenger as he quitted him to "sing out" for assistance.

"Steward!" shouted Mr Meldrum up the companion, in obedience to the captain's injunction; but never a bit did that worthy stir in response, nor did the ringing of a hand-bell, which the passenger saw in one of the swing-trays above the cuddy table expedite the recalcitrant functionary's movements, albeit it brought others to Mr Meldrum's aid.

"What is the matter, papa dear?" said a tall, graceful, nice-looking girl, of some eighteen summers, as she emerged from the state-room on the starboard side of the saloon and came towards Mr Meldrum. "Florry and I heard a heavy crash which woke us up, and then a cry of alarm, and a rush of feet along the deck which frightened us, for we could not tell what had happened. I dressed as fast as I could, but I wouldn't have come out if I had not heard your voice. As for poor Florry, she says she won't get up, and is now hiding her head under the clothes, as she thinks there's a mutiny going on or something dreadful!" and the girl laughed merrily as she spoke, disclosing the while a set of pearly teeth that were beautifully regular, and coral lips that would have put a rosebud to the blush; but, when she came up beside her father, who looked very young to be her parent, for he barely seemed forty years of age, she placed her hand on his arm in a caressing way, looking up into his face with a more serious expression, as if she had merely assumed the laugh to disguise a fear that she really felt.

"Oh, there's nothing very dreadful happening, Kate," replied Mr Meldrum; "only a stowaway in the hold whom the steward took for a ghost, to the serious detriment of the breakfast things which you heard being smashed; so, pray go back to your cabin, my dear, and soothe 'poor Florry's' alarms. We are just getting our unexpected guest up from his temporary quarters under the saloon, and I'll call you when the coast is clear." This he said that she might not be shocked at the sight of the wounded man; and he felt far more comfortable when she had retired into her state-room and shut the door of communication that opened from it into the cuddy.

His comfort, however, was not of very long duration.

"I'd like to know what all this terrible hullabaloo is about?" exclaimed a gaunt and elderly female with sharp features and a saffron-hued complexion, coming out from the cabin on the opposite side of the deck, where she had previously appeared for an instant when in déshabille, as her night-capped head had evidenced. "It is positively scandalous, disturbing first-class passengers like this in the middle of the night and frightening them out of their wits!"

"My dear madam," said Mr Meldrum blandly; "why, it is just on the stroke of eight o'clock, and we'll be soon having breakfast."

"Don't 'my dear madam' me, sir," returned the lady indignantly; "my name is Mrs Major Negus, and I insist on being treated with proper respect. Where is the captain of the vessel, sir?"

"Down there," said Mr Meldrum laconically, pointing to the open hatchway.

"And why is he not at his post, looking after the welfare of his passengers?" demanded the lady sternly, with the

voice of a merciless judge.

“Really I think you had better ask him,” replied Mr Meldrum laughing; “it strikes me he is now looking after the welfare of one of his passengers, unexpected though the sable gentleman may be!”

What Mrs Major Negus might have rejoined to this, cannot unfortunately be told, for at that moment, just as she had drawn herself up to her full height of some five feet ten inches, or thereabouts, and appeared prepared to demolish Mr Meldrum for his temerity in laughing at her—in laughing at her, forsooth; the wife of the deputy assistant comptroller-general of Waikato, New Zealand—the captain called out to him to bear a hand to raise the wounded darkey from out of his self-selected prison. Mr Adams, the second mate, turning out of his cabin at the same time to take his watch, the two managed to raise “Snowball”—the captain and the Irishman easing the burden by lifting him from below. As for the grand Mrs Major Negus, she had to content herself with looking on with an undisguised contempt at the whole proceeding, wondering all the while that they should dare to introduce a negro into the saloon in that manner without having first asked her permission!

Help generally comes when it is not specially wanted; so, by the time the stowaway had been lifted and placed on a berth in one of the vacant cabins, having his wounds, which were somewhat serious, seen to and bound up, some others of the passengers appeared on the scene.

Notably amongst these was Mr Zachariah Lathrope, of Providence, Rhode Island, an American gentleman of a particularly inquisitive nature, but who, professing some knowledge of medical craft, was really of some use in this instance, as there was no regular ship surgeon on board; and, secondly, young Master Negus, a “born imp of mischief,” whose acquaintance will be further improved as the voyage proceeds; while, Llewellyn, the steward, summoned courage at last to descend the companion, in company with his wife the stewardess, who had been forward to the cook’s galley in search of some early tea for the lady passengers. Seeing her husband on the poop she had brought him below, being, as Mr McCarthy observed, “twice the man” that her presumptive “lord and master” could possibly have been supposed, even by his warmest admirer.

The mystery being thus satisfactorily explained, and the stowaway made comfortable for the while in a much more sumptuous lodging than he ever expected—Captain Dinks waiting to call him to account until he should have recovered from his injuries—the debris of broken crockeryware was cleared away, and the saloon party piped to breakfast, throughout which meal, it need hardly be added, Llewellyn got chaffed immeasurably anent his supernatural visitor, never having a moment’s peace about his discovery of the “ghost in the cabin” and subsequent terrific fight therewith.

And, all this while, the ship was tacking every now and then to make the most out of the wind, which was shifting from the west to the south, and veering occasionally from the east to the north; rising as it shifted and blowing with an ever-increasing force, till the vessel was running under reefed topsails and foresail, with her spanker half brailed up, her spread of canvas having been reduced by degrees, in preparation for the threatening gale that seemed coming from the south-west, that is, if the appearances of the sea and sky were to be trusted.

Chapter Three.

A Narrow Squeak.

During the forenoon watch, the deck was in charge of Mr Adams, the second mate—a plain, steady-going, matter-of-fact sort of man, with none of that buoyant spirit and keen sense of humour which characterised his senior shipmate McCarthy, although he was a thorough sailor to the backbone, and believed the human race to be divided into two classes, those who were seamen and those who weren’t. The wind now took a more favourable turn, settling itself in the south-east quarter as if it meant to remain there, thus enabling the ship to steer a better course; and, meanwhile, the sky clearing up a bit, the threatening clouds drifted to leeward and the sun shone out again just as it did when the captain first came on deck in the early morning.

Taking advantage of the change, the reefs were shaken out of the topsails, the courses let fall again, the jib and flying-jib hoisted, and the topgallants set; and soon, with her head steering south-west and a half south, the *Nancy Bell* was bounding over the waves under all plain sail, as if anxious to make up for the time she had lost in tacking about against the head-wind that had barred her southward progress ever since she took her departure from the Lizard Point on the previous day when she hauled out from the Channel.

The breeze was freshening, and there was a nasty sort of chopping sea, when the captain came on the poop at noon to take the sun, in order to ascertain his longitude—an operation which would have been much more difficult in the hazy weather that had prevailed some few hours previous, with the zenith every now and then overcast by the fleecy storm wrack and flying scud that came drifting across the sky as the wind veered; but the ship was making good running, and everything bade fair for her soon crossing the boisterous Bay of Biscay, on whose troubled waters she had now entered.

“She’s slipping along!” said Captain Dinks to Adams, rubbing his hands together gleefully, as he put down his sextant on the top of the saloon skylight for a moment and gave a glance aloft and then over the side to windward.

“Yes, sir,” replied the second mate. “Going fine—eleven knots last heave of the lead.”

“Ah, nothing can beat her on a bowline!” said the captain triumphantly. “She’s a clipper and no mistake when she has the wind abeam: bears her canvas well, too, for a little un!” he added, with another glance aloft, where the sails could be seen distended to their utmost extent and tugging at the bolt-ropes, while the topgallant-masts were bent almost into a curve with the strain upon them and the stays aft were stretched as tight as fiddle-strings.

"Yes, sir; she does," agreed Adams; "but, don't you think, sir, she's carrying on too much now that the wind has got up? I was just going to call the hands to take in sail when you came on deck."

"Certainly not," replied Captain Dinks, struck aghast by the very suggestion of such a thing. "I won't have a stitch off her! Why, man alive, you wouldn't want me to lose this breeze with such a lot of leeway as we have to make up?"

"No, sir; but—"

"Hang your 'buts'!" interrupted the captain with some heat. "You are a bit too cautious, Adams. When you have sailed the *Nancy Bell* as long as I have you'll know what she's able to carry and what she isn't!"

With these pregnant words of wisdom, the captain resumed possession of his sextant and proceeded to take the altitude of the sun, shouting out occasional unintelligible directions the while through the skylight to Mr McCarthy, who was in his cabin below, so that he might compare the position of the solar orb with Greenwich time as marked by the chronometer. Then telling Adams at the end of the operation to "make it eight bells," whereupon the tinkling sounds denoting twelve o'clock were heard through the ship, he himself also hurried below, to "work out his reckoning."

On Captain Dinks coming up again, he reported that the *Nancy Bell* had done better than he expected for her "first day out," considering the adverse circumstances she had had to contend with, for she had logged more than a hundred and fifty miles; but he did not look quite so jubilant as he had done before going below, nor did McCarthy, who now accompanied him on deck to relieve the second mate, whose watch had expired.

"What's the matter, captain?" asked Mr Meldrum, with a smile, "are you not satisfied; or, did you expect the ship to have done more?"

The passenger was patrolling the poop, in company with his two daughters, Kate and Florry—the latter a rompish little girl, some twelve years old, with long golden-brown hair which the wind was making wild havoc of, dashing it across her face as she turned, and streaming it out to leeward behind her in picturesque confusion. The girls had some little difficulty in walking along the deck, as it was inclined to a considerable angle from the vessel's heeling over; but, by dint of clutching hold of their father, which they did with much joking and merriment and silvery laughter, each taking an arm on either side, they managed to preserve their equilibrium, keeping pace in regular quarter-deck fashion.

"No," replied Captain Dinks to Mr Meldrum's chaffing question, "I can't say that I am satisfied, for I'm sorry to tell you that the barometer is going down."

"Indeed!" said the other, "and with the wind from the south-east! I'd advise you, captain, to take in sail at once."

"Why, you're as bad as Adams," returned Captain Dinks rather huffily; "I suppose you'd like me to strip the ship just when we're getting the first fair breeze we've had since leaving Plymouth! Excuse me, Mr Meldrum, I know my business; and, I presume, you'll allow a sailor to be better acquainted with his duties than any landsman can possibly be."

"Oh, certainly, Captain Dinks," said Mr Meldrum with a bow, "and I'm sure I beg your pardon for interfering! Of course, as you say, a landsman has no knowledge of these things and has no right to speak."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Kate Meldrum reproachfully, "how could you say that?" while Florry pinched his arm and seemed convulsed with laughter, which she endeavoured to choke down in vain, at some secret joke or other; but Captain Dinks, quite restored to his usual good-humour and politeness by Mr Meldrum's apology, did not notice the girls, and presently all were chatting together with the utmost cordiality, the captain enlarging on the excellent run he hoped to make to New Zealand, and promising the young ladies that they should see Madeira ere the week was out, for he anticipated that the south-easterly breeze they now had would carry them well past the Spanish coast and into the north-east trades, when their voyage would be all plain sailing down to the Equator.

How true, however, is the old adage, "Man proposes and God disposes!"

While the captain was chatting gaily with his passengers, another change was taking place in the appearance of the heavens. The heavy, threatening clouds, which had risen up after breakfast and been swept away to leeward by the south-east wind as it got up, were now slowly being banked up along the horizon to the northward and westward, the haze extending down to the south right ahead of the vessel's track, while a lot of scud began to be seen flying aloft at a very considerable rate—not from but towards the point from which the breeze was blowing, a sign that betokened not merely another shift of the wind, but a squall, and one not to be trifled with either!

The obscuring of the sun by the drift was the first thing that called the captain's attention to the altered state of the weather, and he at once gave the order—"All hands shorten sail!" the mate rushing forwards to see the details properly carried out.

The order did not come an instant too soon.

All at once, in a moment, the wind, which had previously been blowing strongly from the south-east, died away and it was dead calm; while the sea—already rough enough with the short chopping waves of the morning—began to run with those huge billows that seem to get up almost without preparation on the advent of a gale, every second growing more mountainous.

At the captain's word of command, re-echoed by Mr McCarthy, the crew had sprung aloft immediately; and, working with a will, had furled the topgallant-sails, taken in the flying-jib, hauled up the mainsail and mizzen-trysail and

squared the after yards, when the ship resembled a gladiator, entering the arena of the prize-ring stripped for a fight, as she thus awaited the approach of the storm.

In the south-east the sky was clear and cloudless, but in the opposite direction dark heavy purple masses of vapour rolled over each other, more unnatural in appearance owing to a lighter cloud covering the curling, wreathing fluid as if with a veil. Shooting from this dark pile of clouds, some few were detached and became separated, rising to a higher region of the air, in which they were dissipated and blown out like mares'-tails that passed rapidly across the zenith; whilst on the water, and about a mile or so from the vessel, the sea appeared covered with a thick white mist, before which ran a dark line of black.

Mr Meldrum had sent the girls below the moment Captain Dinks had given his orders to shorten sail, in spite of their entreaties to be allowed to remain on deck with him and "see the storm;" so, being now alone, he stationed himself near the binnacle close to the captain.

As he stood watching the lull before the break of the squall, he felt a hand touching his shoulder; and looking round he found his fellow passenger, Mr Zachariah Lathrope, by his side.

"Jee-hosophat! mister," said the American; "I guess we're goin' to have a blizzard, and no mistake!"

"What's a blizzard?" said Mr Meldrum, smiling at the other's nasal intonation, which was more marked than usual, even for a citizen of the land of the setting sun.

"Why, darn my moccasins, deon't yew know what a blizzard is?"

Mr Meldrum shook his head in the negative: he felt that he should laugh outright in the other's face if he opened his mouth to speak, and he did not wish to appear wanting in politeness.

"Waal," said the American, drawing himself up, as if proud of his superior knowledge and ability in being able to enlighten a backward Britisher. "A blizzard's a hurricane and a tornader and a cyclone, all biled inter one all fired smash and let loose to sweep creation. We have 'em to rights out Minnesota way; and let me tell you, mister, when you've ten through the mill in one, you wouldn't kinder like to hev a share in another. Snakes and alligators! Why, a blizzard will shave you as clean as the best barber in Boston, and then friz the marrow in your bones an' blow you to Jericho. It's sarten death to be caught out on the prairie in one of 'em: your friends won't find your body till the snow melts in the spring. I guess you wouldn't like to try one, streenger!"

"No, I think not," said Mr Meldrum, shivering at the description, for he had heard before of these "Northers" of the Far West; but, the next moment, the thoughts of blizzards and all belonging to them were banished from his mind by what he saw, for the storm was upon them.

It came with a blast that shook the ship from truck to keelson and almost turned her over, the wind being accompanied by a shower of hail and rain that pelted those on deck like grape-shot and completely took their breath away.

"Let go everything!" shouted the captain. Fortunately, the halliards being cast off in time, the ship was not taken aback; and the steersman putting the helm down, she paid off from the wind and ran off for sometime directly before it, tearing through the water at the rate of twenty knots an hour, with everything flying by the run.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr Meldrum, in heartfelt thanksgiving to Him who controls the winds and storms, as he sprang to aid the man at the wheel, seeing that he had a hard task to keep the helm over.

"Ya-as, I guess that were a narrow squeak," said the American; "and I kalkerlate I'll make tracks down south fore another of them snorters come!" So saying, Mr Lathrope dived down the companion-way, his departure being accelerated by a heavy sea which washed over the quarter and floated him below.

"Way aloft there!" shouted the captain; and, although his words could not be heard from the howling of the wind, which shrieked and raved like pandemonium broken loose as it tore through the rigging, the men knew what was wanted and scrambled up the shrouds as well as they could, sometimes stopping for breath as a stronger blast than usual pinned them to the ratlines, where they stuck as if spread-eagled for sport.

After a good half-hour's hard work, the courses were clewed up and furled, the jib hauled down, and the topsails close-reefed, a staysail being set to steady her, when the men came down from aloft pretty well worn out with their exertions.

Hardly had they got below, however, than the captain, seeing a second squall coming, ordered them up again, to strip the ship of her remaining sail.

But, he was too late this time.

Before the men could ascend the shrouds the wind struck the vessel, like an avalanche, on her starboard broadside, heeling her over to port as if she had been canted by the caulkers in dock. Then, another following sea pooped her and cleared the decks fore and aft, sweeping everything loose overboard, the maintopsail being split to pieces at the same time; while the foretop-mast stay-sail was blown clean away to leeward, floating in the air like a white kite against the dark background of the sky. Finally, the foretop-gallant mast was carried by the board to complete the ruin, leaving the ship rolling like a wreck upon the waters, though, happily, no lives as yet were lost.

Saved!

While all this turmoil and confusion was going on above on deck—with the ship labouring and straining through the heavy seas that raced after her as she ran before the wind, one every now and then outstripping its fellows and breaking over her quarter or stern-rail with a force that made her quiver from end to end, and “stagger like a drunken man,” as the Psalmist has so aptly described it, the thud of the heavy waves playing a sort of deep bass accompaniment to the shrieking treble of the wind as it whistled and wailed through the shrouds and cordage, and the ragged remnants of the torn topsail flapping against the yard, with the sound of a stock-driver’s whip, in a series of short, sharp reports—those below in the cuddy were far from having a pleasant time of it; for, they were almost in the dark, the captain having caused the companion-hatch to be battened down, and a heavy tarpaulin thrown across the skylight to prevent the tons of water that came over the poop at intervals from flooding the saloon as the waves swept forward in a cascade of foam.

This was just after Mr Zachariah Lathrope, the American passenger, had so well illustrated Virgil’s line, *facilus descensus averni*, in coming down the stairway by the run, on the top of a “comber;” and, although the steward had lit one of the swinging lamps over the cuddy table, it only served, with its feeble flickering light, to “make the darkness visible” and render the scene more sombre.

The *Nancy Bell* was a wooden ship, clipper built and designed for the passenger trade; but, being only of some nine hundred tons or so burthen, she had not that wealth of accommodation below that some of the first-class liners running to Australia and New Zealand possess, especially in these days of high-pressure steamers and auxiliary screws, which make the passage in half the time that the old-fashioned sailing vessels used to occupy.

She was, however, as well fitted up as her size permitted; and, as her list of passengers was by no means filled, there was plenty of space for those who now had possession of the main saloon, most of whom have been already introduced to notice. If she had had, indeed, as proportionate an amount of cargo as she had passengers it might have been all the better for her seaworthiness. Instead of this, however, she was, by far, too deep in the water, having a lot of deadweight amid-ships, in the shape of agricultural implements and other hardware, which she was taking out to Otago, that seriously interfered with her buoyancy, making her dip to the waves instead of rising over them, and depriving her of that spring and elasticity which a good ship should always have.

Now, she was groaning and creaking at every timber, as if in the last throes of mortal agony; and the manner in which she rolled when she got into the trough of the sea, between the intervals of the following billows, would have dispelled any idea one might have possessed as to her proper angle of stability, and made the observer feel inclined to treat it as “a vanishing point.”

Added to this, she pitched every now and then as if she were going to dive into the depths of the ocean; and, when she rose again in recovering herself, it seemed as if she were going down bodily by the stern, the surge of the sea along the line of ports in the cabin bearing out the illusion as it swelled up above her freeboard.

With the glass and crockeryware in the steward’s cabin rattling, as if in an earthquake, and trunks and portmanteaus banging from side to side of the saloon, or floating up and down in the water that had accumulated from the heavy sea that had washed down the companion when Mr Zachariah Lathrope so gracefully made his rapid descent below, the place was a picture of discomfort and disorder such as a painter would have been powerless to depict and words would utterly fail to describe.

Kate and Florry Meldrum had retired to their berths, having experienced a slight suspicion of squeamishness which the unwonted movements of the vessel had brought about. They thought in such case that “discretion was the better part of valour,” especially as they felt no alarm as to the safety of the ship, having perfect confidence that their father would look after them if there was any danger; but Mrs Major Negus, on the contrary, was firmly convinced that the *Nancy Bell* was going to the bottom. She sat in the captain’s seat at the head of the cuddy table, tightly clutching on to the sides to preserve her equilibrium at each roll of the ship, loudly bewailing her untimely fate; and between the paroxysms of her grief she found time now and again to scold her son Maurice, who was enjoying himself most delightfully amongst the floating baggage, narrowly escaping destruction every moment from the wreck of the débris on the cabin floor, as it banged to and fro with the swish of the water and the roll of the ship.

During one of the lulls in the series of squalls that swept over the vessel in rapid sequence, Mr McCarthy came below by the direction of the captain—who, of course, could not leave the deck—to see how the passengers were getting on, as well as to have the dead-lights put up in the state-rooms, in case of the stern-ports being battered in by the waves; for these had now swollen to an enormous size, and seemed veritably mountains high, rising up far above the cross-jack yard sometimes.

“And how are we getting on now, Mrs Meejor?” said he, good-humouredly addressing the lady at the head of the table, as he made his way to the aftermost end of the saloon, followed by a couple of sailors, who had accompanied him to aid him in his task of barricading the ports.

“Sir,” replied she, endeavouring to speak with as much dignity as her insecure position and her qualmishness would allow, “I am surprised at your asking me such a question and displaying levity when I feel as if I am dying, and we are all going down to the bottom—stee-ured!”

“Yes, mum,” said that worthy from the pantry door, to which he was holding on, surveying the scene of desolation before him with the air of a connoisseur.

“Bring a basin, please—oh, my!”

“Yes, mum; coming, mum.”

“Maurice!”

“Yes, ma.”

“Get up out of that mess there, and come to me at once!”

“What, ma?”

“Come to me here, im-mediately!”

“Sha’n’t!”

“I’ll—oh, Lord; oh, dear! Steward, send the stewardess to me, and help me into my cabin. I’m dying, I know I am! Oh, gracious goodness, why did I ever come to sea?”

“Faix, the ould lady has had to give in,” said the mate to one of the sailors with him. “I thought she wouldn’t hold out much longer!” whereat, of course, there was a general laugh from the men.

“The Major”—as everybody on board spoke of the lady, almost after a day’s acquaintance with her peculiarities and haughty airs—was just then endeavouring to rise from the captain’s chair, when the vessel, after a deeper pitch forward than usual, settled down suddenly by the stern, accompanying the movement by a lurch to starboard that carried away the lashings of the chair; and, in an instant she and the steward and stewardess, along with Master Negus, were rolling to leeward on the floor amongst the dunnage, the whole quartette sputtering and splashing in the sea-water, and vainly endeavouring for some time to rise, for the “Major,” first clutching one and then the other as they were scrambling to their legs, hampered their efforts without improving her own position in the least.

At last, by the aid of Mr McCarthy and the sailors, the good lady was pulled up on to her feet and assisted into her cabin, where lying back in her berth, she loudly inveighed against the conduct of everyone, particularly selecting the Captain, in her outpour of indignation, for putting to sea when he must have known, as she held, that a storm was coming on; he had only done it, she was certain, in order to annoy her and put her life in peril!

In the midst of her diatribe—which was listened to by no one, for the mate and sailors had returned on deck after completing the job that had brought them down in thorough ship-shape fashion, and the steward and stewardess, now that they had got my lady to her bunk, were trying to make matters more comfortable in the saloon—Mrs Major Negus suddenly bethought herself of her young hopeful, of whose existence she had been awhile oblivious while attending to her own woes.

“Maurice!” cried she, in accents whose shrillness rose above the roar of the waves and the groaning of the ship’s timbers, “Maurice, come here at once, sir, I order you!”

But, lo and behold! no Maurice made his appearance; nor did he respond to his mother’s heart-rending appeal. The young scamp had sneaked up the companion, unperceived by the mate, and was now on deck in high glee at his freedom from maternal thralldom, watching the battle of the elements and the struggle of the ship against the supremacy of the wind and waves, that were vying with each other to overwhelm her.

The boy stood on the lee side of the poop, and was looking over the side at the wreck of the fore-topgallant mast, which was still attached to the ship by the stay and braces of the yard, the men not yet having time to cut it adrift—all hands being busy in doing what was possible to save the main-topgallant mast, that had begun to show signs of giving way.

Nobody knew he was there, or that he was on deck at all, till Mr Meldrum happened suddenly to cast his eye in his direction, when he at once motioned him to come away.

But, “the imp” took no notice of the warning, and Mr Meldrum was hesitating whether he should leave his station by the binnacle, where he had been doing yeoman’s service in aiding the helmsman ever since the first squall burst over the ship, when a heavy wave came over the quarter to windward, and, dashing violently against the port bulwarks, carried a large portion away into the sea; and, along with the broken timber-work, away went young Master Negus!

Mr Meldrum hesitated no longer as to crossing the deck; but another was sooner at the scene of action.

Frank Harness, the “third mate,” as he was euphemistically called—a dashing young fellow of nineteen, and just completing his sea-time as midshipman before passing the Trinity House examination for his certificate in seamanship—who had been aloft bearing a hand in making the mizzen-topsail snug, the leech of the sail having blown out through the violence of the gale, was just on his way down the rigging again to see where he could be of use elsewhere, when he noticed the boy’s peril as quickly as the passenger; and, with one bound, he alighted on the deck.

In a rapid eye-glance he took in the situation.

Raised on the top of a curling wave, the fragments of the broken bulwarks and stanchions had got entangled with the wreck of the fore-topgallant mast, some twenty yards or so to leeward of the ship; and, clinging to the mass, Frank could see the boy holding on with a grip of desperation and terror, drenched with his ducking and the surf that washed over him, and with his mouth wide open as if yelling for assistance—although never a sound reached those on board for the roar of a giant could not have been heard against the wind.

Taking a turn of the signal halliards round his wrist, Frank Harness at once leaped into the sea and struck out gallantly for the boy; those on the poop cheering him as he cleaved through the foaming billows and quickly neared the wreckage, forgetful for a moment of their own immediate peril in the exciting scene before them, and waiting

anxiously for their turn to assist the rescuer and the rescued on board again.

In the meantime, Mrs Major Negus—alarmed at the disappearance of her young hopeful from below, neither the steward or stewardess being able to give any account of him after searching the cabins in vain—had managed to scramble up the companion-way, nerved to desperation by the divine power of a mother's love; and by some means or other she contrived to slide back the hatch and step out on to the poop-deck, where, holding on by the rail, she eagerly looked to the right and left in quest of Maurice.

Seeing the group on the lee-side gazing steadfastly at the scene in the water, she staggered towards them, clutching hold of the tarpaulin over the skylight to steady herself.

"My boy! my boy!" she exclaimed frantically. "Where is he? Oh, he's lost," she added with a piercing scream,—"fiends, monsters, are you going to let him drown before your eyes?"—and she made an effort as if to plunge overboard to where she could see the curly head of her darling rising just above the waves.

"Hold!" cried Captain Dinks kindly, grasping her arm firmly and drawing her back. "He's being saved, and we'll have him on board again in a minute. There, don't you see, some one has plunged in after him and is just gripping him; we'll have them up together as soon as he has made fast!"

"Bless him, the brave fellow!" exclaimed the poor lady, whose peculiarities and bad temper were now forgotten by all in sympathy with her natural alarm and anxiety, for she spoke in a voice broken with sobs and tears. "Who is he? I'll fall down on my knees and thank him for saving my boy!"

"Frank Harness," said the captain; "but I'm sure the gallant fellow will not want any thanks for doing a brave action! Look alive forward there!" he called out to the men in the waist, "and ease off those topgallant braces a bit and let the wreck drift alongside. So—easy there—belay! Another minute, and we'll have them."

Frank had reached the wreckage while Maurice's mother had been speaking, and without an instant's delay had looped the end of the signal halliards round the boy's waist as he held on himself to the end of the topgallant yard, to which the lee braces were attached. A quick motion of his arm had then apprised Captain Dinks what to do, and in another minute or two the wreckage had been floated in under the ship's quarter, and a dozen hands were helping the brave lad and the boy whom he had rescued up the side - Maurice, indeed, being hauled up by the bight of the signal halliards first.

His mother almost went into hysterics when he was restored to her, as if from the very gates of death; but her joy did not allow her to forget to thank his rescuer, which she did far more enthusiastically than Frank liked, with all the men looking on!

The gale continued raging with unabated force all that evening; but towards midnight it lulled sufficiently for some sail to be set on the ship, which was then kept more on her proper course.

Chapter Five.

A Calm.

It was a lovely dawn the morning after the storm in the Bay of Biscay.

Even Mr Adams, plain, matter-of-fact, simple, and unsympathetic sailor as he was, without a particle of poetry or imagination about him, could not but gaze with admiration at the glory of God's handiwork, as he noticed the grand panorama of change that marked the progress from darkness to light, from night to day!

Soon after his watch began, the twinkling stars had gone to rest, putting out their tiny lanterns, as they had arisen, one by one; and now, the violet blue of the firmament paled gradually into sea-green and grey, soft neutral tints mixed on the great palette of Nature to receive the roseate hue that presently illumined the whole eastern sky, heralding the approach of the glorious orb of day. Next, streaks of light salmon-coloured clouds shot across the horizon, their edges decorated with a fringe of gold that gleamed brighter and more intense each moment, the water glowing beneath the reflection as if wakening into life: and then, the majestic sun stepping up from his ocean bed—all radiant—"like a bridegroom out of his chamber," and moving with giant strides higher and higher up the heavens, as if "anxious to run his course," and make up for the lost time of the night—shone through the transparent purple mist of the morning like a blush rose behind a glittering veil of dewdrops!

By the time the breakfast hour arrived—"eight bells"—the blue sea was dancing merrily in the sunshine, the waves calming down to only a crisping curl of their foam-flecked summits, and the *Nancy Bell* was speeding along under a pile of canvas fore and aft from deck to truck, Mr Adams having made good use of his time while others were sleeping to get up the spare topgallant-mast forward and set all the upper sail he could; so the passengers, roused up to new life by the cheery influence of the bright summer day, coming after all the gloom and misery and storm and tempest of the past, mustered round the cuddy table in full force.

Mr Meldrum and the American were there as a matter of course; but, by the side of her father, on the right of the skipper, appeared now for the first time at the table since the ship had left port, the graceful form of Kate Meldrum accompanied by the slighter figure of Florry, supported on the other side of the table by Mrs Major Negus and her young hopeful; while Mr Adams faced Captain Dinks—it being the chief mate's turn of duty on deck—having brave Frank Harness close alongside.

They formed a very joyous coterie altogether, and enjoyed themselves all the more from their natural revulsion of

spirits after all the discomfort and misery they had passed through, Captain Dinks himself setting an example and provoking the merry laughter of the girls with his absurd jokes, although the young ladies seemed brimful of fun, especially Miss Florry, who the skipper said might make a good match for mischievousness with Master Negus—whereat a grim smile was seen to steal across the face of “the Major,” lightening up her sallow countenance and making her “come out in new colours.”

As for Mr Zachariah Lathrope, he was too busy with the ham and eggs to do much talking; although, like the monkeys, he probably thought the more, for ever and anon he would pass encomiums on the viands and pass up his plate for a fresh helping, the steward having enough to do in supplying his wants quickly enough.

After breakfast, a visit was paid to “Snowball,” the darkey Stowaway, who was found much better and progressing so favourably that the captain ordered his removal to the “fokesail,” to complete his convalescence; which it may be here added he satisfactorily accomplished in a few days, when he was installed in the galley as cook, in the place of a Maltese sailor who was glad to get forward again before the mast. The negro had slept continually from the time he had been released from durance vile in the after-hold, neither the racket below nor the turmoil on deck during the storm having disturbed his slumbers. This, no doubt, had hastened his recovery, for Mr McCarthy was positive that three of his ribs at least had been broken.

“Why is Snowball like a worm, Miss Meldrum?” said Captain Dinks to Kate, after telling her that he intended installing the darkey in the galley as cook; “do you know, eh!”

“Oh, if that’s a conundrum, captain,” replied she with a piquant laugh that lit up her whole face, making it quite beautiful, Frank Harness thought, “I give it up at once. I’m a bad hand at guessing riddles.”

“Well, you see,” said Captain Dinks, with that cheery “ho, ho!” of a laugh of his, which always preceded any of his good things, “the worm or grub develops into the butterfly; but Snowball made the butter fly when he tumbled over that cask in the steerage, and now he is going to develop into the grub line and turn cook!”

“That’s too bad!” said Kate laughing. “I never heard a worse sort of pun in my life.”

“Then it’s all the better, my dear,” replied he; and as everybody else laughed too, they possibly shared the captain’s opinion.

After this, there was a move on deck—not before it was needed perhaps!

At noon, Captain Dinks, after manipulating his sextant and adjusting the sights, seemed to be much longer taking his observation than usual; and when he went below to his cabin to work out the reckoning he certainly remained a most unconscionable time.

By and by, however, he came up the companion again, his face beaming with delight.

“What do you think, Mr Meldrum?” said he, somewhat excitedly, to that gentleman, who, along with the remainder of the saloon party, was standing on the poop leaning over the taffrail to windward, looking over the apparently limitless expanse of water, that stretched away to the horizon, and basking in the sunshine, which was tempered by a mellow breeze that seemed just sufficient to keep the sails of the *Nancy Bell* full—and that was all.

“I’m sure I can’t say,” replied Mr Meldrum good-humouredly. “Found another ghost in the cabin, eh?”

“No, no; couldn’t have two in one voyage,” said the skipper.

“Made another conundrum?” again inquired the other slyly, poking fun at the captain’s previous attempt in the riddle line.

“Oh, no,” said Captain Dinks, laughing out at this. “That was too good to be repeated: I’ve got better news than that, Mr Meldrum—something really to surprise you!”

“I’m all attention,” said Mr Meldrum, “but pray do not keep us long in suspense. Don’t you see we’re all anxious!”

“Why,” exclaimed Captain Dinks triumphantly, “the *Nancy Bell* has made nearly five degrees of latitude since I last took the sun, there!”

“Oh dear!” said Florry ruefully; “I thought you were going to tell us something funny!” and she looked so disappointed that Kate laughed at her and Master Maurice Negus grinned; whereupon Florry, in a pet, smacked the young gentleman’s face, for which she was reproved by her father and ordered below, although the sentence of banishment was remitted later on at Mrs Major Negus’s especial request.

This little interlude over, the captain proceeded with his explanation.

“Yes,” said he, “we’re now in latitude 44 degrees 56 minutes north, and longitude 9 degrees 42 minutes west; so that we’ve run pretty close on four hundred miles since yesterday at noon. Just think of that, now!”

“A pretty good distance,” said Mr Meldrum; “but, you must recollect we had the gale to drive us on.”

“Aye, sorr,” said Mr McCarthy, joining in the conversation, “and didn’t it droive us too! Begorra, there was some times that the wind tuck the ship clane out of the wather and carried us along in the air like one of them flying-fish you’ll say when we gits down to the line!”

“It was fortunate it was in our favour,” observed the captain reflectively. “We couldn’t have tried to beat against it;

and, heavily-laden as we are, it would have been madness to have tried to lay-to!"

"You're right," said Mr Meldrum, "and it was equally fortunate that the gale carried us so far and no further! Another twelve hours of it and we would have been high and dry ashore on the Spanish coast."

"I think you're not far out," replied the captain, scratching his head and pondering over the matter, "for we'll only just shave past Cape Finisterre now keeping our course; and if we hadn't made so much westing when we got out of the Channel I don't know where we should have been!"

"Faix and it was grumbling at it you were all the toime, cap'en!" said McCarthy with a knowing wink; "though you do now say it was all for the best, as the man said when they buried his wife's grandmother!"

"Aye, you're right," said Captain Dinks more seriously, "all is for the best, if we could only know it at the time!"

Thenceforward, the weather kept fine; and the fates seemed favourable to the *Nancy Bell* in her pilgrimage across the sea.

There was no lack of incident in the voyage, however.

One day, about a week after they had bidden farewell to the Bay of Biscay with all its terrors and troubled waters, as the ship was approaching that region of calms which lies adjacent to the Tropic of Cancer, her rate of progression had grown so "small by degrees and beautifully less," that she barely drifted southward with the current, until at length she came to a dead stop, so far as those on board could judge, lying motionless on the surface of the water "like a painted ship upon a painted ocean," as the situation is described in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*.

Round about the vessel, dolphins disported themselves, and "Portuguese men-of-war" floated over the sea with their gelatinous sails unfurled, and everything seemed lazy and enjoyable to the passengers—although the captain and crew did not evidently relish the state of inaction which the calm brought about, for they were looking out in all quarters for the wished-for wind.

Not a ship was in sight—nothing happening to break the peaceful repose of the deep for hours.

The captain was "having a stretch" below; the men snoozing away on the deck forwards in all sorts of odd corners; the officer of the watch blinking as he squinted aloft to see if the dog-vane stirred with any passing breath of air; even the steersman was nodding over the helm, as the wheel rotated round to port or starboard as it listed, according as the ship rose or fell on the long heavy rolling swell that undulated over the bosom of the deep; and most of the passengers were in the same somnolent state—when all at once an event occurred that soon broke the monotony of the afternoon, waking up the sleepy ones to fresh vitality, for an object of interest had at last arisen in the uneventful day sufficient for the moment to enchain their attention.

The listless lotus eaters had to thank Master Negus for the excitement, in the first instance.

That young gentleman was possessed of a keen desire for knowledge, which his more prosaic seniors were in the habit of misconstruing, deeming it to arise, as they said, from an insatiable and impertinent curiosity combined with an inherent love of mischief. Be that as it may, this desire for knowledge on Master Maurice's part frequently led him into places where, to put it delicately, his presence was undesirable in many ways; his love for investigation taking him especially to certain dangerous localities whither he was peremptorily forbidden to go both by his mother and the captain.

Among such tabooed spots in the ship was the forecabin; and here, consequently, as a matter of course, Master Maurice most delighted to steal away when neither the maternal eye of Mrs Major Negus was upon him nor any of the other people aft were watching him. He did not mind the sailors, for they made a point of encouraging him forward and took much pleasure in developing his propensities for mischief.

This afternoon, he was enjoying himself after the desire of his heart—climbing about the rigging in a way that would have made his mother faint, when, in one of his scrambles up to the foretop, he saw something in the water which was hidden from the sight of the others on board, through the head-sails of the ship shutting out their line of view.

"Oh, crickey," shouted out Master Negus at the top of his voice, at once betraying his whereabouts in his excitement, "there's a fight going on in the water, and two whales are leathering each other like fun!"

Chapter Six.

The Black Fish and the Thresher.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs Major Negus, jumping up in a fright from the comfortable nap which she had been taking in a lean-back chair on the poop; "where is that unhappy boy? He'll be the death of me some day!"

"I'm here, ma!" shouted out Maurice from the forecabin. "Do come, everybody. It's such fun! Ah, there, the big one has just got such a whack and is in a terrible wax. He's hunting about for the little one, who has dived away from him out of reach!"

"Fokesall, ahoy!" hailed Mr Adams, who had charge of the deck; "what's the matter forward!"

"Only a fight, sir, between a black-fish and a thresher," answered Ben Boltrope, the carpenter, an old man-o'-war's man, and one of the most efficient hands of the *Nancy Bell's* crew.

"A fit!" exclaimed Mr Zachariah Lathrope, drawing his long telescopic legs together and rising into a sitting posture on the top of the cabin skylight, where he had been taking his usual afternoon siesta instead of putting himself to the trouble of going below and turning into his bunk, as was his usual wont after luncheon. "A fit! Wa-al I guess I'm on. I allers likes to hitch in with a muss!" and, so saying, the lanky American was soon scrambling down the poop-ladder and making his way forward, followed by all the remainder of the passengers—Mrs Major Negus, of course, going to look after her darling boy, while Frank Harness accompanied Kate Meldrum, as he said, to "take care of her," although, as her father was not far distant, it might have been supposed that his protecting arm was not so absolutely necessary as he thought!

A very strange spectacle was seen, when the party, after diving beneath the slackened sheets of the mainsail, that flapped about an inert mess of canvas above their heads, and picking their way past the galley and windlass, at last climbed up into the bows of the ship, where the majority of the crew had already assembled and taken up vantage points in the rigging, half-way up which was Master Maurice, waving his hat wildly in a great state of excitement, and the master as it were of the situation.

"There they are!" said he pointing to where the water was lashed up and broken into foam, about half a mile ahead of the ship, amidst which a couple of dark bodies could be seen tumbling about—one occasionally jumping up high in the air and coming down on the other with a thud, and a smack that sounded like the crack of a whip, or report of a rifle. "There they are, Miss Meldrum, I saw them first!"

"Come down out of that, sir, at once!" screamed out his mother, with a pant and a puff between each word, her breath having been almost taken away by her unusually quick movements in getting forwards. "Have I not ordered you never to go up those ropes?"

"Oh, bother, ma!" exclaimed the young hopeful, paying not the slightest attention to his mother's command. He had been so spoilt, petted at one time and scolded another, that all her authority over him was lost save in name. "There! bravo, little one—oh, my, wasn't that a good one, now?"

And so, Mrs Major Negus—abandoning any expectation of making Maurice descend from his perch in the shrouds, where, however, she could see that he was in no imminent danger, for he had one of the sailors on either side of him who would catch him should he slip—was obliged perforce to do as all the rest were doing and gaze at the thrilling marine drama that was being acted out with such tragic earnestness on the surface of the deep before their eyes.

A black-fish—which, it may be mentioned here, for the benefit of the uninitiated, is a species of cachalot, although differing from the true spermaceti family of whales in having the spout-holes placed on the top of the head, in place of on the snout, and the pectoral fins shorter—was being assailed by its bitter enemy the thresher or "fox shark." This latter is one of the most peculiar fishes to be seen throughout the length and breadth of the ocean, that world of living wonders; for it has a most extraordinary face, or head, which is more like that of an ape than of one of the piscine tribe; while its tail is divided into two lobes or blades, one of which is small and insignificant, and the other larger than the body of the animal, curling up at the end like the tail-feather of a bird of paradise.

There could be no comparison between the two combatants, in respect to size at least; for, while the whale was some fifty feet long—nearly a third of the length of the *Nancy Bell*—the thresher could not have exceeded thirteen feet; and as for girth, the former was in proportion like a portly, Daniel-Lambert sort of man put by the side of a starving street urchin of seven. The only advantage the thresher apparently possessed was in its eyes, which, when one could get a glimpse of them, looked like those of a hawk; while the unwieldy cetacean had little tiny optics, not much bigger than those of a common haddock, which were placed in an unwieldy lump of a head, that seemed ever so much bigger than its body, with a tremendous lower jaw containing a row of teeth, each one of which was nearly a foot long.

The thresher, seemingly, had only the advantage of his antagonist in the proportionate size of his eyes; but, "just wait till you have seen him use his long feather-like tail!" as Maurice Negus said, and you will arrive at the conclusion that the combatants were not so very unequally matched after all.

The very size of the black-fish militated against his chances for, while it took him more than his own length to turn in the water, the thresher darted, here, there and everywhere, like an eel—just getting out of his reach when the other thought he had got him and had opened his ponderous jaws to crush him. It was at this moment that his agile tormentor, seizing his opportunity, would leap out of the water and give the whale a "whack" on his side behind the fin, one of his tenderest spots, the blow resounding far and wide over the water and probably leaving a weal if not an indentation in the animal's side.

Mr Zachariah Lathrope got quite interested, bobbing from one side of the topgallant-forecastle to the other, and trying to obtain the best view he could of the contest.

"Bully for the little scorpion, marm!" he exclaimed to "the Major," as he shoved his hands down into his trouser pockets and seemed to lift himself up in his eagerness. "I'll bet my bottom dollar he'll fix that air whale to rights! By gosh, that wer a sockdolager; I guess the big varmint is kinder gettin' riled!"

The whale here spouted and fluked his tail, diving down for a moment beneath the surface; but, he did not long disappear, and when he came up shortly afterwards nearer the ship, the spectators could see that the water around him was dyed with blood.

As the black-fish rose, the thresher, who evidently had been waiting for him and knew the precise spot where he would reappear, threw himself up in the air, turning a sort of summersault; and, "whack!" came his whip-like tail round his victim's body, the whale seeming to writhe under the blow as if driven half mad with pain.

"Look, look!" exclaimed Florry Meldrum, "the thresher isn't alone; what are those long-nosed fishes swimming about

under the whale? They seem to be helping the other one!"

"You're right, Florry," said her father, "they are swordfish. What you think are their noses are long projecting saw-like blades, and they are the whale's deadliest enemy. I never saw them, however, attacking one in company with a thresher before: they must have formed an alliance for the express purpose, as they have really nothing in common."

"It reminds me, mister," said the American, putting a chew of tobacco in his mouth pensively, "of a bull fit I once see in Carthage when I was to Spain some years ago. That air thresher is just like the feller all fixed up with lace and fallals called the Piccador, who used to stir up the animile with squibs and crackers and make him fly round like a dawg when he's kinder tickled with a flea under his tail; and the sword-fish, as you calls them outlandish things, are sunthen' like the Matador that gives the bull his quietus with his wepping. That air power of blood that you see, I guess, is from them, and not from t'other's cow-hide of a tail!"

"Golly, massa, you speaks for true," said Snowball, who formed one of the party of lookers-on, abandoning his coppers in the galley in order to see the fun. "Bress de Lord! see how dat long snout chap dere gib him goss now!"

It really seemed an organised attack.

As soon as the back of the black-fish appeared above the surface, the thresher, springing several yards out of the water, descended with great violence on the object of its rancour and inflicted what sounded like a hearty slap with its tail, the sword-fishes in their turn striking the whale from below; so that, try how he might, the unhappy monster of the deep could not escape his persevering foes.

"Sure and be jabers it bates Donnybrook Fair entirely!" said Mr McCarthy, who had also come up from below, the news having also reached him of what was taking place. "The poor baste will soon be bate into a cocked hat with all them ragamuffins on to him at once! It's liking to help him I'd be if I saw the chance!"

But the doom of the black-fish was evidently by this time sealed and human aid was powerless to assist him: all could see for themselves that the last act in the drama was close at hand!

Suddenly, the thresher gave another violent bound upwards into the air from the surface of the ensanguined water, leaping almost over the whale; and, as he fell back again into the sea, his tail, which was bent like a bow, delivered a terrible lash, surpassing any of its previous attempts. At the same time, as if by a concerted movement, those on board could see—for the combatants were now so close alongside the ship that the bight of a rope could have been easily hove over them—one of the sword-fish made a dart at the exposed flank of the whale, burying its ugly saw-like weapon almost up to the head and inflicting a wound that must have been mortal.

The black-fish instantly emitted a sort of hollow muffled roar; and, sending up a fountain of watery spray mixed with blood from its spout-holes, splashed the sea violently with its formidable flukes, after which it rolled over, rocking from side to side in its last dying flurry or death agony.

"I guess he's a gone coon!" said the American, hitching up his trousers again and turning over the quid of tobacco in his mouth. "It seems a terrible pity to waste him though. There's a powerful sight of blubber in that air animile!" and the speaker appeared to gaze sadly at the carcase of the conquered cetacean as it floated by.

"It's all over," said Mr Meldrum, turning from the now pitiful spectacle with disgust. "Come away, girls!" But Kate had long since left the scene, the sight not having been of a nature to suit her tender heart; and, she was now far away aft with Frank Harness, sitting in a secluded corner of the poop, where she could see nothing of the sanguinary ending of the contest. Florry, on the contrary, had remained to the last, as well as Mrs Major Negus—who, it may be observed, had watched the struggle from its commencement to its close with almost as much interest as her enthusiastic son and heir; and Mr Meldrum had much difficulty in tearing the little girl away from her rapt contemplation of the dead whale.

"Stop a minute, papa," she urged when he took hold of her arm to draw her from the rail. "Do look! they have all left him now they have killed him. I wonder what they quarrelled about?"

"Sure, an' just for the same rayson, missy, that Christians hate sich other," said Mr McCarthy, "just for no cause at all, but bekaze they can't help it, alannah! And now that the little divils have kilt him, sure they've swum off and left the poor crathur to die, just the same as some ov us does to sich other, more's the pity, by the same token!"

It was true enough.

The thresher and his active allies had all at once disappeared, how, when, or where, none of those looking on could tell; the lifeless body of the black-fish only remaining in evidence of the battle that had taken place.

There it was, floating sluggishly on the heavy rolling swell of the ocean, in solitary grandeur; for the dolphins and "Portuguese men-of-war" that had been seen earlier in the afternoon had taken themselves off as soon as the light began—evidently preferring calmer scenes and not relishing the proximity of such inveterate enemies of their several species as the late combatants.

Chapter Seven.

Fire!

The calm continued for four days, during which time not a breath of wind came from any point of the compass to waft the ship on her way; although, of course, she could not help drifting a few miles every twenty-four hours southwards,

under the influence of the great equatorial current.

However, if there was no wind, there was no lack of novelty to those of the passengers who had never been to sea before; for, from their being now within the tropical region, the ocean around, albeit so still and glassy, seemed to swarm with life. Thousands of flying-fish were to be seen fluttering on either side of the vessel, while skipjacks and bonetas also showed themselves occasionally; and the dreaded shark, with his close attendant and valet the pilot-fish, was not an absentee, for he was continually cruising about astern on the constant look-out.

"How funny those flying-fish look!" said Florry Meldrum, watching a shoal of them that rose from the water just like a covey of white larks, and which, after skimming past the *Nancy Bell*, again settled in the sea, quite tired out with their short flight.

"You should see them nearer," said Frank Harness, who was between the two girls, looking out over the gangway aft—"and then you would call them funnier. Ah! here is one," he added, catching one of the little fluttering creatures that had become entangled in the mizzen rigging; "you see, it doesn't have wings as you think, but only a membrane between its fins, just like what a bat has."

"Yes," said I "I see. It is curious, though, that they should look so white at a distance, when their backs are dark and blueish, like a mackerel!"

"Ah! that is because the under part of their wings is only then visible. Look, now, at that lot there that have just risen to escape the boneta. They seem exactly like a fall of snowflakes!"

"Poor things!" said Kate. "The boneta seems to be their inveterate enemy, or rather consumer, as he appears to be in good condition on the diet. It's a pity, though, that he's such a glutton; for he's a nice-looking fish, all purple and gold, and he oughtn't to be so cruel!"

"Oh! he's not the only enemy of the flying-fish, Miss Meldrum," answered Frank; "you should see the albatross after them down near the Cape. The bird hunts them as soon as they rise in the air, and the boneta when they're in the water; so, between the two, they have little chance of escape—just like the fight, the other day, between the black-fish on the one side and the thresher and sword-fish on the other."

"Ah!" exclaimed Kate with a shiver, "I couldn't look at that long! The boneta hunt the flying-fish in a fairer way, and they do look so pretty when they jump out of the water! How disappointed the boneta must then feel when they see them take unto themselves wings and fly away?"

"They needn't be disappointed long," said Frank Harness, laughing, "for, they must know that they're bound to catch them up in the long run. But, look at that cloud there, Miss Meldrum, slowly creeping up the sky. 'I guess,' as our American friend says, that we're going to have some rain."

"Do you think so?" she answered, smiling at Frank's rather good imitation of Mr Lathrope's nasal intonation of voice; "I thought it looked too bright for that."

"We'll have it soon; just you see," said Frank.

"All right, Mr Positive, I suppose we must bow to your superior nautical skill."

"Oh, Miss Meldrum, don't laugh at me, if I am only a poor sailor," said he reproachfully; "you always seem to taunt me with my profession!"

"I!" exclaimed Kate in surprise. "Why, I would not make fun of you, or hurt your feelings, for the world!"

Frank seized her hand and pressed it, as if he were about to say something in response; but, just at that moment, the rain, without offering the apology of a warning drop or two to give notice of its approach, came down in a perfect deluge, making them rush for shelter beneath the poop awning.

This was just after lunch, early in the afternoon; and the rain lasted until the dinner-bell sounded, coming down in regular sheets of water, as if emptied out suddenly from some enormous reservoir above.

All sorts of tubs, buckets, kegs, and open casks, including the scuttle butt, were ranged along the spar-deck, below the break of the poop, to catch the welcome shower, tarpaulins being spread over the open hatchways, where exposed, to prevent the flood from going below: while the ends of the after awning were tied up in a sort of huge bag for the rain to drain off into it, so that none of it might be wasted—the canvas being let down, when the receptacle was pretty full, to empty the contents into the water-puncheons—for the pure liquid was a precious godsend, being an agreeable relief to the brackish supply which the ship carried in her tanks.

As might have been imagined, Master Negus and Miss Florry watched all these operations with the greatest interest, for they would have been only too glad if their respective guardians had allowed them to take a more active part in the watery campaign than that of merely looking on.

Mr Zachariah Lathrope, however, was his own master, and he made himself very busy amongst the dripping sailors, who were hopping about on the wet decks as if enjoying their ducking, much amusement being caused when Mr McCarthy, for a joke, let the leach of the awning once go by the run, when, the American passenger being off his guard, some hundred gallons of water came down on him, giving the worthy gentleman an impromptu shower-bath.

It was grand fun while the rain lasted, all the men folk paddling about in it to their hearts' content and ducking each other when they had the chance; while the ladies observed the sports from the shelter of the poop, seeming to take equally as much pleasure in the skylarking. It was amazing, too, to notice the amount of dirt and rubbish which the

downpour washed away into the scuppers. What with the continual swilling and scrubbing and swabbing that the decks underwent every morning, it ought to have been an impossibility for any dust or debris to exist; but, there it was, to prove the contrary—the rain “exposing the weakness of the land,” and making a clean sweep of everything that was dirty which lay about in the odd corners fore and aft the ship.

The day after the rain, just when all on board—sick of the calm, the listless monotonous roll of the ship, the flapping of the idle sails against the masts, and the sight of the same cloudless sky and endless expanse of tumid sea, with surface unbroken by the tiniest ripple, save when a dolphin leaped out of the water or a fairy nautilus glided by in his frail shell craft—were longing for the advent of the north-east trades, which Captain Dinks had expected them to “run into” ever since they lost their first favourable wind, there came a visitor to the *Nancy Bell*, the most dreaded of all the perils of the deep—Fire!

Eight bells had just been struck in the morning watch; and the passengers were just preparing for breakfast—that is, such as were late risers, like Mrs Major Negus and Mr Lathrope, neither of whom turned out earlier than was necessary. Those who knew what was the healthiest plan, like Mr Meldrum and his daughters, had been up and out more than an hour before, walking up and down the poop and getting up a vigorous appetite for the first meal of the day.

The captain had not long come up the companion; and, after looking aloft and to the northward, scanning the horizon around, had stepped up to the binnacle, where he stood contemplating the compass hopelessly, as if he had given up all idea of the wind coming, while the hands of the watch on duty were listlessly idling about the waist of the ship, dead weary of having nothing to do.

The cook, apparently, was the only really busy person on board at the time, for he could be seen popping in and out of his galley forwards, handing dishes to Llewellyn, the steward, to bring aft for the cuddy table. The darkey seemed bathed in perspiration, and looked as if he found cooking hot work in latitudes under the constellation of the Crab, whither the vessel had drifted.

All at once, however, a change came over the scene.

As the steward was passing the main hatch in his second journey aft to the saloon, he noticed a thin column of smoke ascending from the main hold, where the principal portion of the cargo was stowed. Like a fool, although it might have been pleaded for him that he was constitutionally nervous, he let fall the dishes he was carrying on a tray, in his fright at the sight of this evidence of a conflagration below, instead of going quietly up to the captain and telling him what he had seen; and, to make matters worse, he called out at the same time in terrified accents, as loud as he could bawl—“Fire! fire! the ship’s on fire!”

Had a thunderbolt burst on board, or had the vessel struck on a rock in the middle of the ocean, the alarm that was instantly spread on board could not have been greater; and where all had been listless inactivity but a moment before, was now all life, motion, and excitement.

“A fire! whar?” exclaimed Mr Zachariah Lathrope poking his head out of the companion-way, judiciously concealing the remainder of his lanky person, as he had not yet quite finished his toilet. “Snakes and alligators, Cap’en, but I’m terrible skeart at fires! I hope it ain’t up to much chucks?”

“Oh, no!” said Captain Dinks, reassuringly, expressing what he wished more than what he felt. He had remained aft in order to somewhat allay the alarm which the outcry of the steward had excited; but he was itching to get to the scene of action himself, although he had sent Mr McCarthy there already, besides ordering the crew to their respective stations, and having the hose-pump manned.—“Oh, no, nothing at all, only one of that ass, Llewellyn’s, happy discoveries, another sort of ghost in the cabin! Here, Harness,” he added aside to Frank, who had just come up from below, dropping his voice to a whisper. “Just stop on the poop a minute, and keep these people quiet. I must go down to the hold myself to look after matters; don’t say anything more than you can help.”

So saying, the captain scuttled down the poop ladder on to the spar-deck in a jiffey, and in another second he was descending the main hatch, whence the smoke could be now clearly seen, coming up in clouds.

Mrs Major Negus’s voice was also heard at this juncture. The good lady had ascended the companion behind the American, who still remained at the spot where he had first made his appearance, and was just then adjusting his braces; and almost at the same instant that her dulcet accents reached the ears of those on deck she burst upon them, as it were by storm, carrying Mr Lathrope along with her, still *en deshabelle*, it is true, as regarded his coat and waistcoat, but fortunately now with his trousers, or as he called them “pants,” properly arranged.

“Goodness gracious, man!” she exclaimed frantically—“do get out of the way. Lord a mercy! where’s the fire? Oh dear, oh my! We shall all be burnt alive? Maurice, my darling boy! come to your mother’s arms and let us die together. Maurice! Where’s my boy?”

“You’d better stop that screechin’ and say your prayers, marm,” said Mr Zachariah Lathrope, sententiously. “The b’y is all right below, sleepin’ in the corner of the sofy, and I’d advise you to go and rouse him up, instead of rushing up har like a mad bull in fly time, a knocking folks down and hollerin’.”

Mrs Major Negus took his advice; for, without withering up the American with her scorn, as she would probably have done another time, she at once rushed back below to the cuddy as quickly as she had come up, to wake up Maurice; while Kate Meldrum, seizing the opportunity which the diversion afforded, sidled up to Frank Harness unperceived.

“Is there any danger really?” she asked the young sailor in a low tone, so that no one else could hear; and her face was pale, but composed and resolute, as she looked into his.

"Could you bear to be told the truth?" said he hesitatingly.

"I could," she replied; and he saw that she meant it.

"Well, there certainly is danger, although it is best not to alarm everybody, for when people get frightened they interfere and hinder what is being done to save them. I wouldn't like to tell the crew, Miss Meldrum, what I tell you; but I know you are brave, and see that you can bear to be told the truth. A lot of woollen goods are on fire in the main hold, and must, from the extent of the area already consumed, have been smouldering for days. We are doing all that men can do to quench it, and we may succeed, as there is no wind and nothing to fan the flames; but the only thing that hinders us is our being unable to get to the seat of the mischief, which is in the very centre of the cargo. However, the men are now breaking in the deck above, and as soon as we are able to get the end of the hose down and pass buckets, all may be well. Keep a good heart, Miss Meldrum, there's no absolute danger yet; when there is I will tell you. So, please, prevent that 'Mrs Major' from going into hysterics!"

"I will, for I trust you," said Kate with a somewhat sad smile on her pale face. "Here, Florry, come below away from the smoke and sparks; Mr Harness says the fire will soon be out and that there is no danger, and I don't want you to spoil your new frock!"

So courageously speaking, the brave girl then went below with her sister; and by her presence and example assuaged "the Major's" fears, thus preventing that lady from going back on deck and spreading consternation amongst the crew by her cries, as would otherwise have been the case. Mr Zachariah Lathrope, too, came down to the cuddy, attracted by the smell of breakfast, which the captain had directed the steward to go on getting as if nothing had happened—thus to punish the poltroon in a sort of way for his cowardly alarm; hence, the coast was left clear for the officers and men to put out the fire without being flurried by the fears and importunities of the passengers.

Meanwhile, Captain Dinks with Mr Meldrum, who was the first to volunteer—their efforts well supported by the exertions of McCarthy and the second mate and Frank Harness—were working like Britons in the *Nancy Bell's* hold.

The fire had broken out, as Frank had stated, almost in the centre of the ship; for two bulkheads had to be battered down and the main deck cut through, before the source of it could be reached. However, by dint of arduously plying the axe and crowbar, an opening was at length made whence the fire could be got at. Flames immediately burst forth the moment air was admitted into the hold, but these were pressed down with wet blankets, and, the fire-hose being carried down and the pumps manned by the watch on deck, a copious stream of water was directed throughout that portion of the ship where all the light woollen and textile goods were stowed. The hose, too, was supplemented by a continuous relay of buckets full of water passed rapidly along the lower deck and down the hatchway by the starboard watch—whose turn it was below, but whom the alarm of fire had caused to rouse out again to duty—so that in half an hour from the discovery of the outbreak all danger was over and the last spark quenched.

"Thank God!" said Kate Meldrum, with heart-felt earnestness, her lovely eyes full of tears as she looked up into Frank's face when he came to tell her the news. "I thought all hope was gone, you were so long in coming!"

"But were you not certain I would come?" asked Frank anxiously.

"Yes, I had confidence in your promise."

"Thank you," was all he replied; but his look spoke volumes.

At the same time another mutual "confidence game" was being played in a different part of the ship; but in this the understanding was between Mr Meldrum and Ben Boltrope, the ship's carpenter and ex-man-o'-war's-man.

"Aye, aye, sir," said the latter when the two were parting on the main deck after the termination of their labours in the lower hold. "I recognised your honour the moment you came on deck that morning of the storm in the Bay of Biscay. I couldn't mistake the cut of your honour's jib, sir, begging your pardon."

"Well, I'm sure I did not recognise you, or you may be sure I would have spoken to you. Still, you need not blurt out my identity to everybody, you know."

"Sartinly not, your honour. I'll keep mum, sir, never you fear, though I don't forget the old—"

"Stop," said Mr Meldrum, changing the subject. "I've no doubt all hands are pretty dry after all the heat we've been in down below, so, with the captain's permission, I'll send something forward for them to splice the main brace with."

"Aye, aye, your honour," replied Ben; "a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

And the two parted, the one going forward to the forecabin and the other aft into the saloon.

Chapter Eight.

An Ocean Waif.

"Wa-al, Cap," said Mr Lathrope after dinner that day, when he was sipping his coffee on top of the skylight, which he had selected for his favourite seat when on the poop, the "location," as he expressed it, having the advantage of possessing plenty of "stowage room" for his long legs—"I guess we've had a long spell o' calms, and a tarnation slitheration of a del-uge, 'sides being now a'most chawed up by a fire; so I kalkerlate its 'bout time we hed sunthen' of a breeze. Thunder, mister, it's kinder gettin' played out, I reckon, knocking about in these air latitoods, without

nary going ahead even once in a blue moon!”

“Oh, the wind isn’t far off now,” replied Captain Dinks, “you see those porpoises there, passing us now and playing astern? Well, they are a certain sign of a breeze soon coming from the quarter towards which they’re swimming.”

“Wa-al, I dew hope so,” drawled the American, with a sigh and a yawn of weariness, “guess I shall snooze till it comes;” and he proceeded to carry his thought into execution.

Captain Dinks turned out a true prophet.

A little later on in the day a breeze sprang up, that subsequently developed into the long-wished-for south-east trade-wind, thus enabling the good ship to bid adieu to the Doldrums and cross the equator, which feat she accomplished two days after the fire.

From the line—which Master Negus was able to see distinctly with the aid of one of Mr McCarthy’s fine red hairs neatly adjusted across the object-glass of his telescope—the ship had a splendid run over to the South American coast, following the usual western course adopted by vessels going round the Cape of Good Hope, in order to have the advantage afterwards of the westerly winds and get well to the south; and, when she had reached the thirty-fourth parallel of longitude and latitude 18 degrees 22 minutes south—that is, about midway between Bahia and Rio Janeiro, her head was turned to the south-east with light winds from the northward and eastward, and she began to make way towards the “Cape of Storms,” after getting to the southward of which she would have a straight run due east to New Zealand.

The *Nancy Bell’s* bows, however, were not long pointed in the direction of the rising sun, when another incident occurred to vary the monotony of the voyage—although, fortunately, this time not a second fire, nor any peril from the sea to those on board.

It was the second day of her south-easterly course; and from the wind blowing fresh from the north-east, right on her port quarter, with fine bright weather, the ship was running pretty free, all sail being set, at the rate of over twelve knots an hour, leaving a wake behind her like a mill-race.

“Arrah, sure, and I call, that goin’!” exclaimed the first mate exultantly, as he walked up and down the poop quickly—just as if his doing so helped the vessel along, in the same way as one sees the coxswain of a boat bending backwards and forwards to keep time with the rowers!

“Yes, like one o’clock!” chimed in Captain Dinks, showing an equal enthusiasm. “The old girl is walking away with us at a fine rate, McCarthy. I wouldn’t be surprised if we logged three hundred by noon.”

“And fifty more tacked on it, sorr,” said the mate. “Why, we’ve done twelve knots ivry hour of my watch; and Adams tould me she wor running the same at eight bells. By the piper that played before Moses, it’s a beauty she is—she’d bate aisy the fastest tay clipper from Shanghai!”

“Aye, that she would!” chorused the captain. “What do you think of the ship now, Miss Kate?” he added to that young lady, who was leaning against the bulwarks to leeward, looking out over the sea. She was all alone with her thoughts, Frank Harness being away forwards attending to the cutting out of a new main-topgallant sail to replace the one they had lost in the storm, the one they were now using being old and unable to stand any further rough usage.—“You are not ashamed of the old *Nancy*, now, eh?”

“Oh no, Captain Dinks,” answered Kate, “I never was, even in her worst moments when we were becalmed; and I’m sure I couldn’t be now, when she is sailing along so beautifully; but, what is that speck out there, captain, away to the right—is it a bird, or what?”

“Eh, my dear?” said the skipper, looking in the direction the girl had pointed—“a bird? no, by Jove, it looks like a sail of a boat well down on the horizon. Here, McCarthy, hand me your glass.”

Captain Dinks seemed even more excited than he had been a moment before when he spoke of the vessel’s progress; for, taking the telescope that the mate handed him, he scrutinised eagerly the object Kate had noticed.

“Good heavens, it is a boat!” he exclaimed presently, “and I think I can see a man in the stern-sheets, though I’m not quite sure: at all events, I’ll run down and overhaul it, for it would never do to abandon a poor fellow in distress; no English sailor would think of such a thing! This is all your doing, Miss Kate, you and your pretty eyes, which have the best sight of any on board. We’ll have to put the ship about, McCarthy,” he added to the mate; “we can’t fetch that boat on this tack.”

“Hands ’bout ship!” roared the mate, in response to the captain’s implied wish; and, immediately, there was much running to and fro on the decks, and a yelling out of orders and hoarse “aye ayes” in reply—a striking difference to the quiet that had reigned a moment or two before, when the ship was slipping along through the water with the wind on her quarter, never a sail having to be shifted or a rope pulled, and only the man at the wheel for the time being having anything to do out of the thirty odd hands on board.

“Helm’s a lee!” cried the captain, and the head-sheets were let go; “raise tacks and sheets!” and the fore-tacks and main sheets were cast off; while the weather crossjack braces and the lee main braces were belayed, ready to be let go at a moment’s notice, and the opposite braces hauled taut. “Mainsail haul!” then sang out the captain when these preparations were completed; when the braces being let go, the yards swung round like a top. The after yards were subsequently braced up and belayed, the main sheet hauled aft, the spanker eased over to leeward, and the watch stood by the head braces.

"Let go and haul!" was the next word of command; upon which the weather fore-braces were let go and those to leeward hauled in by the men forward under the personal supervision of Mr McCarthy, after which the men boarded the fore-tack and hauled down the jib-sheet, clapping a tackle on it as it blew fresh; and the *Nancy Bell*, braced round on the starboard tack and with the wind a little more aft than when she was running eastwards just now, stood towards the boat that Kate had been the first to perceive, drifting a bout upon the wild ocean so far away from land.

At this juncture, Frank Harness sprang up into the fore cross-trees to con the ship, by Captain Dink's directions; and presently his orders to the steersman could be heard ringing out clear and distinct above the creaking of the cordage and the wash of the sea alongside—those on the poop, listening to all they could hear with intense eagerness, and waiting for the moment when they could see for themselves the object of the ship's quest.

"Keep her up a bit—steady!"

"Aye, aye, sir; steady it is!"

"Port!"

"Port it is!"

"Steady!"

"Steady it is!"

"Luff!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Keep her so!"

"There is a man in her, sir!" Frank now called out in a different tone of voice; "I can see him distinctly! He is trying to wave a handkerchief or something. He looks almost dead, poor fellow!"

The excitement on board at hearing this piece of news became all the more intensified.

"Are we nearing him?" shouted out Captain Dinks.

"Oh yes, sir; the boat bears now broad on the weather beam. Keep her steady as she is, and we can round-to close alongside. Look out, we're getting pretty close now!"

"Look out forward there!" cried the captain: but several hands were there already with the first mate at their head, a coil of rope in his hand, on the watch to heave it over the boat as soon as she was approached near enough.

"Time to come about, sir," hailed Frank from the cross-trees; and, "Hands 'bout ship!" roared out Captain Dinks, almost in the same breath.

During the bustle that ensued, those on the poop could not see what was going on forward; but when the *Nancy Bell* paid off again from the wind on the port tack—thus resuming again what had been her previous course before the boat had been sighted—it was found that the object for which they had gone out of their way was safely alongside.

It was a shocking sight!

Four dead bodies were stretched, in every conceivable attitude of agony, across the thwarts and in the bottom of the boat, which from its shape had evidently belonged to some whaling vessel; while, sitting up in the stern-sheets, close to the helm, which his feeble hands were powerless to grasp, was the living skeleton of another sailor, whose eyes seemed starting out from their deep sockets and whose lips appeared feebly endeavouring to shape the syllables of "wa-ter!"

In a second, Mr McCarthy had leaped down into the floating coffin as it towed alongside; and, lifting the body of the solitary survivor from amidst the corpses of his dead comrades, handed the light load—for the poor, starved creature did not weigh more than a child of ten, although a man of over six feet in height—up to hands that as carefully received him; and then, leaping back again on board himself, the whale-boat was scuttled by a plank being knocked out of her bottom and cut adrift, to sink with her mortal freight into the common grave of those who die on the deep, the stench from the remains being horrible and permeating the whole ship while the boat was in contact with her.

The rescued sailor was placed in a cot and given at first a small quantity of thin soup which Snowball was busily concocting for the cabin dinner, and after that, nourishment at intervals. By these restorative measures, in a day or two, he recovered sufficiently to be able to tell who he was and how he came to be in such a sad plight.

He was a Norwegian sailor, he said, and belonged to an American whaler which had been on her voyage home after a three years' whaling cruise in the South Pacific. On rounding Cape Horn, they had encountered a fearful storm which had nearly dismasted the ship and washed the master and five hands overboard. He and four others had launched the only boat they had left over the side, trying to pick up their shipmates; but, the sea was too heavy for them, and when they endeavoured to return, they found they could not fetch their vessel again, which perhaps was just as well, for soon afterwards they saw her go down stern foremost. After that, they ran before the wind for several days and nights—how long he could not tell—until his four comrades had died from exhaustion, and he himself, he believed, was just on the point of giving up his life when providence sent the *Nancy Bell* to succour him.

"Ach der goot Gott!" said the man in his half German, half English way, speaking brokenly and with tears in his eyes.

“Der lieber Gott! I shall nevere vergersen sie nevare!”

They had had, he said, a breaker of water in the boat when they quitted the whaler, but this was soon drunk out, and although they had occasionally something to eat, catching several fish, they suffered terribly from thirst. It was that which had killed his comrades mainly. As for him, he bore it better than them, but it must have been eight days since a drop of liquid had passed his lips.

“Golly, dat am bad,” said Snowball in the galley that evening, when some of the hands gathered round the caboose to have a comfortable pipe and talk over the events of the day. “Dat orful bad, eight day widout grub or liquor! dis niggah not able ‘tomach dat for sure!”

“Lor’, Snowball, that’s nothing when you are used to it,” said Ben Boltrope, the man-o’-war’s-man, who was pretty well king of the fore-castle by reason of his service in the navy and general smartness as a seaman. “What is eight days in a boat without grub, when you’ve got to go ten, as I’ve done, besides wandering about on a sandy shore after swimming for a day and night to save my life? Why, that’s nothing!”

“Goramighty, Massa Boltrope, you no swim ten day widout habin’ notin’ to eat, nor no water, hey?” said Snowball in astonishment.

“No, you blessed donkey, I didn’t say that,” replied the worthy Jack tar. “I said as how I had gone without grub or water for ten days after swimming for more than twelve hours.”

“Dat berry rum for sure,” said the darkey—“don’t know how to believ dat, no how!”

Chapter Nine.

The Cape of Storms.

The steady nor'-east wind that was driving the good ship so gallantly on her way when Captain Dinks put her about in order to rescue the Norwegian sailor, continued for days, accompanied by such magnificent weather, that the *Nancy Bell* was enabled to make very rapid progress down to those lower parallels it was necessary for her to reach before she could stretch forward, in a straight line eastward towards her port of destination.

“I guess, Cap,” said Mr Zachariah Lathrope, noticing the quick change of temperature in the air, day by day, as they left the tropics behind—the mornings and evenings becoming gradually colder—“she air making as straight tracks fur the south as them northern carpet-baggers did after our little onpleasantness, what you folks called the civil war in the States; when they used to rush down from Washington arter postmasterships and other sich like offices, which wer to be hed, they kinder thought, fur the asking! She air goin’ slick, and that’s a fact!”

“Yes,” replied the worthy captain, whose face beamed with good humour and satisfaction at the splendid run the vessel was making; “we are going ahead, working down our southing, and will soon be able to steer for New Zealand. She does walk along, and no mistake!” And then he would look aloft, perhaps, and give an order for a brace to be tautened here, or a sheet slackened there—the hours thus flying by in halcyon moments, as far as the wind and sea, and the course of the ship, and all on board were concerned—collectively and individually.

The nights in these southern latitudes were simply beautiful beyond compare.

The moon had no sooner died out than she revived again, as if gifted with perpetual youth—not an evening passing without her presence, sooner or later, on the scene—and appeared, too, to have more dignity of position and greater size than in the frigid north, ascending right up to the very zenith, instead of merely skirting the heavens, as she sometimes does here, and shining down from thence like a midnight sun in radiant splendour. The Scorpion, also, amongst the various constellations, was similarly promoted, occupying a place nearer the centre of the firmament; while the Southern Cross, quite a new acquaintance, followed by Castor and Pollux, began to descend towards the sea, becoming more diagonal as the days drew on than when originally observed, and finally vanishing from view head foremost.

As for the North Star, it had long since entirely disappeared; and only the horses in Charles’ Wain yet remained above the horizon towards that point of the compass.

To Kate Meldrum’s eyes, the sunsets were especially grand; for, as soon as the time came for the glorious orb of day to sink to rest in the golden west, a series of light amber-tinted clouds would arrange themselves all round the horizon, as if with a studied pictorial effect, like the stage grouping in what theatrical people term “a set piece;” and then, by degrees, these clouds would become tinged with the loveliest kaleidoscopic colours, all vividly bright—while the far-off heaven that lay between them was of the purest palest rose-hued gold, and the sky immediately above of a faint, ethereal, blueish, transparent green.

In the daytime, especially as the ship drew nearer to the meridian of the Cape, there was more life in, on, and about the ocean; and on passing the Island of Tristan da Cunha, which the *Nancy Bell* sailed by some three hundred miles to the northward, Master Maurice Negus was greeted with the sight of a sperm-whale.

This fellow was much smaller than the black-fish which had come to such an untimely end when assailed by the thresher, being scarcely longer than thirty-two feet. Maurice was especially credited with the cetacean’s discovery, because, when he noticed the spout of spray the animal threw up from his blow-holes in the distance, he surprised everybody by calling out that he could see one of the Crystal Palace fountains—getting much laughed at, as might have been expected, for the naïve announcement.

As those on board watched, they could see the whale every now and then heave himself out of the water, half the length of his long dark body, and fall "flop" down again, with a concussion that sent up the water around him in white surf, like breakers. After this little diversion, he amused himself with swimming backwards and forwards past the ship, as if just showing what he could do, at a great rate; exposing only a thin streak of his back and the fin and tail, but making the sea boil up as if a plough were going through it, and leaving a wake behind him like that of a paddle-wheel steamer—finally starting off suddenly due north, as if he had all at once recollected an appointment in that direction, when he soon disappeared from sight.

The flying-fish and dolphins, bonetas and sharks, like the "Portuguese men-of-war," were long since all left behind; but their places were taken by the albatross, the Cape pigeon, the shearwater, and a sea-bird called the "parson," dozens of which flew about the ship every day.

The shearwater was a larger species of tern, or sea-swallow; the "parson," so called for his sombre appearance and sedate manner, was a kind of sable gull about the size of an English crow. His colour, however, was not black, but a dusky brownish black, as if the reverend gentleman's coat had got rusty from wear. These birds had a very odd, "undertakerish" air about them, which amused Maurice and Florry very much, and some having venerable white heads, which appeared as if powdered with flour, like a footman's for a party, were so much more eccentric looking, that even the grave Mrs Major Negus could not help smiling at their appearance and queer ways.

"Do look, papa!" exclaimed Kate—who during the voyage would at one time be in the highest spirits, and the next pensive, as if occupied by a world of thought—"I declare if that one isn't the very image of Mr Trotter, our curate at Allington! He has the same little tuft of hair on top on his head; and, besides, he has the identical same way of popping it on one side when he used to speak, and staring at you with his little round eyes. Is he not like Mr Trotter, father?" and she pointed out one especially jaunty little "parson" to his notice.

"Well, there is a little resemblance, certainly," said Mr Meldrum, joining in Florry's laughter at the remark. "I don't suppose, though, my dear, we'll ever see poor Mr Trotter or Allington again."

"Dear old Allington!" murmured Kate with a sigh; and, in a moment, her memory flew back to the past, with all its sad associations.

The Cape pigeons were the prettiest of all the birds that visited the ship, being very like the common wood pigeon in the shape of their head and bill, but having webbed feet to suit their aquatic habits. They were much plumper, too, than either the shearwaters or parsons—which latter, by the way, unlike the fat cleric of popular opinion, were of very slender and delicate proportions.

In the matter of plumage, the Cape pigeons were white and downy, with the head and wings striped with brown like butterflies, a large species of which they strongly resembled when flying away from the ship, with their pinions spread.

But, of all the birds they saw, the albatross was the most wonderful to observe. Not much larger than a goose in the size of its body, it had enormous thin-edged wings, that enabled it to float about in the air, at will apparently, without any perceptible motion, for hours at a stretch. It seemed to direct its course by the slightest possible turning of its body, so as to alter the inclination of its wings, which, extending out straight and firm, bore the bird up or down, or away many miles off in a second of time, in the most surprising manner.

The albatross floats, or skims along the air, but does not fly according to our ideas, although it has an extraordinary power of launching itself from enormous heights down to the level of the sea with the velocity of lightning.

"Just like a white-winged messenger of light," as Kate Meldrum observed in the hearing of Captain Dinks, "sent out from the angelic host above on some divine mission to suffering humanity below!"

"Ah; that sounds very pretty, missy," said the captain; "but the albatross' mission happens to be fish; and I fancy that spoils the sentiment a bit!"

Eighteen days after passing the line, some seven weeks from her start, the *Nancy Bell* crossed the meridian of Greenwich, or longitude zero—at which precise time her position could not be said to be either east or west—in latitude 38 degrees south, a couple of degrees below the Cape; and the wind, which had kept steadily from the north-east and northward ever since the South American coast had been left astern, now got well round to the south-west, enabling every stitch of canvas to draw, from the spanker to the flying jib. Seeing this Captain Dinks caused the upper yards to be squared a bit and the main and fore top-gallant studding-sails set, thus helping the vessel on her way.

This sort of weather lasted for five days, the ship being steered east by south, meeting the sun and losing an hour a day by the chronometer and going twelve knots each hour out of the twenty-four; when on reaching the longitude of the Cape "a change came o'er the spirit" of the *Nancy Bell's* "dream."

The wind shifted suddenly from the south-west to the north-east; and the heavy rolling sea, peculiar to the Southern Ocean, set in, accompanied by showers of rain, and hail, and snow. Soon, sail had to be reduced, and the ship, with all her gay canvas stripped off her, had as much as she could do to stagger along under reefed topsails and foresail, the mizzen staysail being set to give her more power aft, her steering becoming very wild after a bit although two men were at the helm.

From merely looking squally, the clouds gathering on the horizon grew thicker and thicker, till they got as black as ink. The sea, also, darkened to a dark leaden hue, and the swell increased so rapidly in height that when the vessel sank down into the intermediate valley not a glimpse could be obtained of anything beyond the watery mountains on either side.

"I guess we're going to have it pretty rough, Cap, eh," said the American to Captain Dinks; "it looks all-powerful squally, it dew!"

"You're right," said the captain. "We're now in the vicinity of the Cape of Storms, and we've got to look out."

So saying, Captain Dinks showed his determination of "looking out," by having all the lighter spars of the ship sent down from aloft, besides causing everything to be made secure on deck and below for the expected storm.

Not long after the *Nancy Bell* was made snug the tempest burst upon her. The high, smooth rolling waves were torn and wrenched asunder, as it were; and their summits wreathed into masses of foam, which curled over as they advanced against the wind, and, breaking away in fragments, blew off in masses of snowy whiteness to leeward. The ship was meeting this swell nearly head on; and as the rollers caught her fairly on the bows she struck them with a sound as heavy as that with which the weight falls in a pile-driving machine, taking in some of the sea over the forecabin and carrying it aft as far as the break of the poop—washing about everything in its course until the water finally found vent from the deck through the scuppers.

One of these waves—a regular mountain of a sea, the water all green, and standing up like a huge pellucid wall before it toppled over—coming in over the bows, made a clean sweep of all that was movable lying forward of the mainmast, carrying over the side all the hen-coops, sheep-pen, water casks, as well as spare spars that had been stowed along the deck, nothing being left to show that they had ever been there! Even Snowball's galley was upset and rolled about in the waist to leeward, the sea having not been quite strong enough to carry it overboard, while its unhappy occupant, half drowned in the scuppers and not able to extricate himself from his perilous position, was loudly calling for aid.

Ben Boltrope—who had been having a confab with the darkey, and probably a "drop of something hot," his special failing, in the galley when the sea washed over the ship and fetched it away—was promptly at hand to help his sable friend; when the galley was reinstated in its proper place, and so tightly lashed down to the ring-bolts that a sea would have had to carry away the deck itself to have lifted it again. But, sad to relate, the sheep and the poultry had disappeared for ever from human ken, along with their pens and coops, and the saloon passengers would thenceforth have to fare without any such delicacies as roast mutton and boiled fowl—a terrible piece of news for Mr Lathrope when it was brought to his ears!

As the evening closed in and night came on, the force of the wind and sea both seemed to increase, and it appeared incredible that a fabric formed by human hands should have been capable of sustaining the rude shocks and ponderous blows which the ship received again and again as she battled with the waves; but the captain had in the end to let the vessel fall off her course and scud before the gale, going whither the elements listed.

"Oh, father," said Kate to Mr Meldrum, the two remaining on deck long after the others had gone below, "what confidence sailors must have in the qualities of their ship, not to be overcome with dread at such a scene, especially if they direct a thought to the frail timbers that only separate them from the watery abyss!"

"Aye, my child," replied he; "but, what greater confidence in God's protecting power!"

"True, father," said Kate, and after that she remained silent until Mr Meldrum declared it was time to go below. They did not retire, however, until it was as dark as pitch, when nothing could be seen beyond the wall of water on either side of the taffrail—the tumid mass looking like a black avalanche about to overwhelm them, while the roaring of the wind and rattling of blocks and creaking of cordage, in conjunction with the groaning of the ship's timbers, and crashing sounds of the waves as they broke against the quarter, as if trying to beat the vessel's sides in, made such a discord and concert altogether that it drowned conversation, even had either been inclined to talk in the presence of such a display of the mighty power of Him who rules the waves.

Down in the cuddy, the scene was certainly more cheerful; and, what with the bright light of the swinging lamps, and the well-spread table comfortably arranged for tea, with the cups and saucers placed between "fiddles" to prevent them from slipping adrift when the vessel pitched or rolled, it afforded a strong contrast to the barren bareness and gloomy discomfort of the deck, especially on such a cold night, with suspicions of hail, and sleet, and snow at intervals. But, still, here also everything was not quite so rose-coloured as might have at first appeared; for stormy weather at sea discounts what might be called the market value of the comforts and conveniences of everyday life to a most surprising extent!

The cups and saucers were all right, or so they seemed at first sight in their abnormal position; but, the moment those who sat down at the table began to use them, they took to flying about like shuttles in a carpet-loom. Bread-baskets and cake-dishes discharged their contents like catapults against the panelling of the cabin doors, while jugs of condensed milk—which was used not from any special liking for the article, but through default of there being a cow on board—were emptied most impartially on to the shirt-fronts and dresses of the gentlemen and ladies who unfortunately sat opposite to them.

"Durn my boots!" ejaculated the American once; "but if them air sheep hadn't gone overboard to feed the fishes, I guess we'd hev hed capers enuff goin' on down har to sarve for sass to the biled mutton!"

All put up, however, with these petty annoyances gleefully enough, only too glad to be able to joke and make capital out of them and pleased that their present calamities were not too serious for laughter; and when they separated at bedtime, it was with the cheerful wish that the weather might be a trifle brighter on the morrow. No one seemed to think for a moment of danger, or took heed of the bustle on deck, or of the quivering and shaking of everything in the saloon, which seemed suffering from what Mr Lathrope styled a "seaquake"—in contradistinction to earthquake.

But, hardly had six bells been struck in the first watch when the order "out lights" was given and the welcome gleam of the cuddy lamp disappeared summarily, plunging all in darkness—than a sudden stupendous shock assailed the

ship startling the sleepers.

There came first a stunning blow, apparently from a wave, right amidships; and then, the vessel seemed to go down to the very water's edge on one side, heeling over as rapidly immediately afterwards to the other.

Away went everything that was movable below, flung backwards and then forwards right across the ship—the thumping noise made by the heavy boxes falling in the cabins and state-rooms, combined with the crashing and smashing of glass and crockeryware in the cuddy, where the table and settle-seats had been carried away by the run, and the outcry of the sailors yelling and stamping above, not to speak of the grinding and groaning of the bulkheads and shuddering of the ship's timbers between decks, all making up a babel of sound and confusion that was worse by a thousand fold than what had previously occurred during the first storm which the vessel, experienced in the Bay of Biscay.

Naturally, the majority of those below thought that all was over, and piercing cries of terror and appeal for help resounded through the ship.

Chapter Ten.

Caught in a Cyclone.

A storm at sea is bad enough in the daytime, but at night it is terrible; for then, the peril unseen is so magnified by the terror-stricken mind as to become far more appalling than a much greater danger seen face to face and realised: — the latter can be grappled with, but the former, by its very intangibility and “unreachableness,” daunts the bravest heart and paralyses the strongest arm!

Llewellyn, the steward, managed to procure a light, which he did only after much delay—the racket and uproar having apparently sent his little wits wool-gathering—the cuddy looked the very picture of desolation, almost leading to the belief that the sea had made a clean breach through the sides of the ship in one of its rude onslaughts dashing everything to pieces.

Fortunately, however, this was not the case, although the saloon skylight had been carried away, gratings and all, and a considerable amount of water had come down through the opening, which loomed now above the semi-lighted space like a large hole broken in the deck; but, by reason of the carrying away of the table and seats from their lashings and ring-bolt fastenings and now being washed in a jumbled heap to one side of the cuddy, the cabins to leeward were so completely barricaded that their occupants were prevented from issuing forth. It was from this quarter that the cries for help proceeded—the voice of Mrs Major Negus, it need hardly be mentioned, predominating, although the American passenger, who had a berth alongside that distinguished lady, also sang out pretty loudly.

“Hullo, steward!” called out Mr Meldrum on seeing the light, having already opened the door of his state-room, which had a sliding panel and was undamaged as far as he could notice. “Why, what’s the matter!”

“Only shipped a sea, sir,” answered Llewellyn rather gruffly, for he was annoyed at being roused from his sleep, “though from the row they’re a-making one would think we were all going to the bottom!”

“Much mischief done, eh?” asked Mr Meldrum, taking in at a glance the havoc in the cuddy—“I mean on deck,” he added.

“Can’t say, sir,” replied the other; “ain’t had time to look about here yet, much less to go up and see! It’s a bad berth that o’ steward to a lot of bawling females on a passenger ship; I’d liefer—”

But, his grumblings were stopped for the moment by the renewed loud screams of Mrs Major Negus—who was his pet aversion on board on account of her giving him more trouble than all the rest combined, while Master Maurice really was the plague of his life.

“Steward—stew-ard!” she cried, “Come here at once and get me out! I’m all smothered and drowned, and nobody will help me! Stew-ard! I’m dying—I’ll tell the captain with my last breath. Stew-ard!”

“Sure I’m coming, mum, as fast as I can,” sang out Llewellyn aloud, adding *sotto voce* for his own satisfaction, “Hang that Major Madam! I’d never have shipped in the *Nancy Bell* if I had a-knowed she was coming aboard! Bless you, mum, I’m coming—everything is all right and there isn’t no cause for alarm!”

“Isn’t there?” indignantly demanded the lady in a queer sort of half suffocated voice from behind the barred door of her cabin. “If you were jumbled in a pool of water, with all your luggage on top of you, I don’t think you’d think everything right. Help, man! release me at once, or I’ll be drowned and flattened into a pancake!”

“Say, you Mister Steward, you jest hurry up and git the lady out of her muss, and come and fix me up,” chimed in the voice of Mr Zachariah Lathrope. “I guess I’ve had my innards a’most squoze out agin the durned bunk, an’ feel like a dough-nut in a frying-pan. If you leave me much longer I kalkerlate this old boss’ll be cold meat, you bet, and you’ll have the funeral to pay!”

Mr Meldrum coming to Llewellyn’s aid, the steward managed at length to clear away the wreckage from before the door of Mrs Major Negus’ cabin, and then from that of the American, when both the occupants were found more seriously hurt than either of their rescuers had imagined, they thinking that their outcries had proceeded more from alarm than any real injury.

The wife of the deputy-assistant comptroller-general of Waikato was lying, all purple in the face, with a heavy

portmanteau on the top of her, on the deck of her cabin in nearly a foot of water; and by the time they got her up from her perilous position she fainted dead away in the steward's arms.

"Here, Mary!" called out Llewellyn to his wife, the stewardess, who quickly appeared on the scene half-dressed. "Attend to this lady, while we go and see after Mister Lathrope."

The American was in a much worse plight; for, whereas Mrs Major Negus had only swallowed a lot of sea-water and had been only nearly frightened to death, Mr Lathrope's sallow face was so unearthly pale that Mr Meldrum was certain he had received some severe injury; as he was tightly jammed between his bunk and the washing-stand, while a heavy packing-case had tumbled out of the top berth on to one of his shoulders, preventing him from moving.

"I guess, mister, you jest come in time," said the poor fellow with a sickly smile, as they pulled away the case and wash-stand, and helped him into a sitting position on the bunk, "another minnit and it would have been all up with Z Lathrope, Esquire!" And he gasped for breath, putting his hand to his left side, as if feeling pain there.

"Oh, papa, are you there?" said Kate, coming out, in a charming state of dishabille, from the state-room she shared with her sister on the opposite side of the saloon, alongside to that of Mr Meldrum. "Is anybody hurt?"

"Yes, my dear," answered her father, "you'd better bring some sal volatile or something. Mrs Negus has fainted; and I'm afraid poor Mr Lathrope is in a bad way."

The plucky girl did not delay, or exhibit any of that feminine weakness or nervousness which might have been expected under the circumstances. Retiring for a moment, to throw a shawl round herself and get what was required in the emergency, she quickly reappeared again at the door of the state-room,—which she closed behind her to prevent Miss Florry, inquisitive as usual, from coming forth; and then proceeded to cross the floor of the cuddy as well as she was able—a somewhat difficult task considering the rolling and pitching of the vessel, and the fact that the table and seats, which generally formed points of vantage for holding on, had been swept away, so that there was nothing for her to cling to.

Half running, half sliding, she, however, reached the opposite side and was quickly engaged in the Samaritan task of bathing Mr Lathrope's temples with Eau de Cologne.

"Don't you bother, miss," said the American faintly, "I guess I ain't so much hurt arter all!" but he couldn't help groaning as he spoke, whereupon Mr Meldrum laid him down gently and sent the steward for some brandy, which revived him somewhat.

"I got a pretty considerable gouge in the ribs from that air wash-stand," said he, pointing out the objectionable piece of furniture as he uttered the words; "but I guess I'll be all right presently. How's Madam Negus!"

"Oh, she was more frightened than hurt," said Mr Meldrum laughing; "she was in a nice pickle on the floor of her cabin. You should just have seen her. I really don't think she could ever be dignified to me any more!"

"For shame, papa, to laugh at misfortune!" said Kate; "and now, as Mr Lathrope seems better, I'll go and look after his fellow-sufferer." So saying, the girl clambered along by the side of the saloon to where Mrs Major Negus was ensconced in state, in the adjoining cabin—now revived from her fainting fit and with Mary Llewellyn ministering to her wants, although "the Major" could not help scolding the latter at intervals, as if she were the cause of the disaster.

In the midst of all this, down came Mr McCarthy, the first mate, from the poop.

"Be jabbers and it's a foine time you are having of it, any way!" said he by way of greeting, looking round with a quizzical cock of his eye at the dismantled cuddy. "I only thought you'd have had a drop of wather or two whin the skoilight got adrift, and we've rigged up tarpaulins over it and battened it down comfortably, so that ye'll not be throubled any more by the say washing down. But, how did the table git carried away! It was fixed down so strong it's a puzzle to me entirely!"

"Goodness only knows," said Mr Meldrum; "there came a tremendous crash amidships soon after midnight, and away it went!"

"Ah that was whin that gossoon Adams had howlt of the helm. The omahdawn, he was looking up at the spars and tellin' the cap'en about taking the topsails off her, as she was carrying too much sail, instead of mindin' his own business and lookin' to the steering; and, faix, he let the ship broach to, bad cess to him!"

"And how are you getting on now, on deck?" asked Mr Meldrum.

"Will, sorr," said the mate, speaking more earnestly than was his usual wont, and dropping his voice so that no one else could hear him. "To spake the truth and shame the divil—faix it's no lie I'm telling—we're right in the centre of a cyclone, and the Lord only knows if we'll iver git out of it!"

"I thought so," murmured Mr Meldrum; "my poor children!"

"Sure and be a man now!" whispered the mate as Kate came out of Mrs Major Negus' cabin. "I wouldn't have tould you if I had thought contrariwise!"

"I was not thinking of myself," said Mr Meldrum sternly; "what sail are you carrying?"

"Sail!" exclaimed Mr McCarthy; "faix and its joking ye are! Ivery stitch of canvas, sure, was blown to smithereens when the ship broached to, and the foretop-mast was thin took out of her, too, by the same token! The divil a

hap'orth are we carrying, save a piece of tarpaulin lashed in the weather rigging to kape her hid to the say, and that's all we can do till daylight comes, if we iver say it, please God, for it's as dark now as a blue dog in a black entry, and you couldn't say your hand before your face to set any sail, if ever a man could git up the rigging—but whist now about that! Steward," he added in a louder key, "come, look alive here and git the cuddy to rights in shipshape fashion! By the powers, but the skipper'd be in a foine rage if he saw it all mops and brooms like this! Bear a hand, man, and be smart, and I'll send the carpenter to help you as soon as the watch is relayed." With these words he bustled on deck again, after changing his oilskin, which was all knocked to pieces, for a rough pea-jacket, and saying to Mr Meldrum that he thought the latter would be more handy, for it was blowing enough to take one's hair off!

"Papa," said Kate as soon as the mate had ascended the companion, "what was that Mr McCarthy was saying when he spoke so low to you?"

"Eh, my dear?" answered her father a little confusedly, with some hesitation in his voice. "Oh, only that the storm was raging violently and did not seem to lull at all yet."

"Did he say that there was any danger?"

"Danger, eh? no, I—I can't say. I think I'll just step up and see for myself;" and, anxious to escape this cross-examination, as well as really to judge whether the position of the ship was as precarious as the chief mate had indicated, Mr Meldrum likewise went up on to the poop, finding some trouble when he reached the top of the companion stairs, in opening the hatch.

For a moment, after emerging on to the deck, all was terribly dark—as black as ink, as Mr McCarthy had said; but, the next instant, the whole awful scene was lit up by the most intense and vivid flash of lightning Mr Meldrum had ever beheld—the electric fluid being quite unaccompanied by any peal of thunder, although that might have been drowned by the continuous roar and shriek of the howling wind which appeared to have gone mad with the unbridled fury of a demon.

During the brief space of time in which the zigzag stream of fire from the vault of heaven momentarily lit up the surroundings of the ship, which it did with a brightness that eclipsed the light of day, Mr Meldrum could see the vessel tumbling about amid a chaotic mass of waves, which it was no exaggeration to term mountains high, as if she were in the vortex of a whirlpool; while dense opaque black clouds hovered over her, vomiting forth wind, apparently from every quarter of the horizon, the gusts tearing at the ship with harpy-like clutches, as if they would rend her to pieces—she, like a poor human thing racked with pain, labouring and groaning, and bending this way and that to escape the relentless wind, so well aided by the clutching billows from below that leaped up to engulf the vessel when they themselves were not absolutely flattened to the surface of the water, as they were sometimes, by the force of the hurricane.

The scene was literally awful!

The next moment all was darkness again; with the night black as Erebus, and Mr Meldrum unable, as the mate had said, to see his hand before his face.

Captain Dinks, however, had noted his arrival on deck; and approached him without being seen.

"I advise you to go below, Mr Meldrum," said he, "you can do no good here, nor any of us, indeed, until morning, when I hope we'll have better weather. It's a terrible night, the worst I have ever seen at sea in all my time!"

"Aye, terrible," replied the other, shouting in the ear of the captain, but, as he was facing the wind, his voice seemed to the latter only like a whisper. "I'll take your advice, as I see I could be of no use; still, if I can be of any service, mind you call me!"

"Aye, aye," said Captain Dinks, "you go down and go to sleep. We are all in God's hands now, though I'll do all that man can—good night!"

"Good night," said Mr Meldrum; and he then went below again to give what report he could to Kate, who was waiting anxiously for his expected reappearance, as he had said he should not be gone long when he left her.

She had been certain the ship was in great danger; and she now read the confirmation of her worst fears in her father's face.

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms round his neck as soon as he came down the companion, without waiting to hear a word from him. "I thought so, I thought so!"

"Hush, my child!" said he soothingly, leading her towards her state-room and opening the door, "go in to your cabin and pray!"

And thus the weary night passed away.

Chapter Eleven.

In Unknown Latitudes.

When daylight came, through the exertions of Ben Boltrope, the carpenter, and a couple of the crew sent to aid him, the cuddy offered a more presentable appearance than it had done just immediately after the midnight scare; for,

the table and seats were fixed back in their original positions, the débris cleared away, and a portion of the skylight restored—all of which so brightened up the interior that what had passed but a few hours before seemed but a dream, at first, to those of the passengers who turned out early. The continuous sustained roar of the wind and waves had so drowned the noise of the men hammering and moving about that the repairs appeared to have been accomplished by magic.

As soon as Mr Meldrum went on deck, however, he could see little alteration for the better there.

The great rolling billows, as Maury has described them, were running high and fast, tossing their white caps in the air, looking like the green hills of a western prairie capped with snow, and chasing each other in sport; while the wind was still blowing a hurricane, and the ship, resembling a crippled bird with her foretop-mast gone, was running now before the gale under a single storm-staysail, that looked no bigger than an ordinary sized pocket-handkerchief, at a greater rate of speed than she would have done in a stiff breeze with all her canvas spread.

The outlook around, too, was by no means cheering.

The horizon was piled up with masses of blue-black clouds, whose ragged edges meant mischief, and scraps of greyish white scud were flying across the sky in all directions—now towards the same point as the wind, now against it, as if there were contending currents aloft and they could not decide what precise course to travel.

Captain Dinks, who, with the other officers, had been on deck all night, looked haggard and care-worn. The men, too, seemed worn-out, which could not be wondered at, as no sooner had the watch whose turn it was to be relieved, got below than they were roused up again at the call of "All hands"—when, of course, they had to tumble on deck again, without a moment's time for the rest and repose they needed after the exposure they were subjected to in battling up and down the rigging in the tempest of wind and rain and hail that had lasted through the livelong night.

"Not a very bright look-out!" said the captain, trying to speak cheerily, but failing miserably in the attempt. "Old Boreas, too, I'm afraid, is going to put on a fresh hand to the bellows, for the barometer has fallen again."

"Indeed?" answered Mr Meldrum.

"Yes," continued Captain Dinks; "it stood at 29.50 at three o'clock this morning, and when I looked just now it was at 29.25."

"That's bad," said the other; "it shows we've not got the worst of the cyclone yet."

"No," replied the captain; "we've got that all to come! Luckily, I sent down the topgallant-masts yesterday evening, or we'd have had every stick out of her by now:— they would have been safe to go when the foretop-mast went, if not before. However, there they are, all lashed together by the longboat, not gone yet; and I hope we shall have some use for them yet bye and bye."

"I only hope so," said Mr Meldrum sadly, the despondent way in which Captain Dinks spoke affecting him too.

The ship seemed easier running before the wind than when lying-to, although there was the risk of the heavy following seas pooping her, a contingency that had already happened when a portion of the bulwarks were carried away at the time the saloon skylight was smashed, leaving an ugly gash in the ship's side; but a spare hawser had been triced up and secured fore and aft to prevent the men being washed overboard through the aperture, and life lines were rove and passed along the deck for the same purpose.

"It's safer to carry on," observed Captain Dinks, seeing the anxious glance Mr Meldrum bent to windward. "I've heard of a ship outrunning a hurricane before; and so might we again."

"So have I," said Mr Meldrum; "but not a cyclone! Look there, ahead, at that bank of storm-clouds; perhaps we're running into a worse gale than the one we've got."

"Well, we can only act for the best," replied the captain curtly, apparently not relishing this criticism of his seamanship from a landsman—as he thought—who knew nothing about the matter; and he then moved back to his post by the binnacle, leaving Mr Meldrum standing by the head of the companion, where he was presently joined by Frank Harness, the first and second mates being both forward, superintending the bending of preventer stays to secure the masts, which seemed to be ready to jump out of the ship from the leverage exercised even by the little sail she was carrying.

By noon, when it was utterly impossible to take an observation, the heavens being black all round, with showers of hail and snow coming down at intervals, and the wind, blowing over the Antarctic ice-fields, seemed to cut the face as with a knife—the temperature of the air had become bitterly cold, while the barometer fell to 29 inches. The very spirit of destruction appeared to brood over the ill-fated *Nancy Bell*.

Mr Meldrum, after a brief visit below to look after his daughters and see how the American passenger was progressing since his accident, had returned on deck, accompanied by Kate, who pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to come that he could not resist her entreaties. She now stood, sheltered behind him, in the mouth of the companionway, watching the brewing of the fresh storm with which the vessel was about to be assailed—Frank Harness close to her side as if for additional protection, although the captain had told him he might go below and have a spell off after being up all night. The young sailor, as soon as she came up, had taken off his own monkey-jacket and fastened it round her shoulders to protect her from the wind and hail, despite all Kate's protests, to which he was obliged to turn a deaf ear by reason of the force of the gale.

Suddenly, the dark looming mass of clouds in front of the ship appeared to split asunder, showing gaping ragged

edges fringed with white, just like a shark's mouth.

Mr Meldrum at once rushed to where Captain Dinks was standing close to the wheel-house, where two men had all they could do to control the helm, although they were the strongest hands on board, the one being Ben Boltrope, the ex-man-o'-war's-man, and the other Karl Ericksen, the Norwegian sailor who had been rescued from the boat, and who was a perfect giant now that he was restored to health and strength—standing over six feet, and with long brawny arms that seemed as powerful as those of a windmill when he threw them about.

"For God's sake, Captain," exclaimed Mr Meldrum, "round the ship to, if you can! If that squall that's coming right forward catches her in the teeth, she will go down stern foremost in a second!"

"Nonsense, Mr Meldrum!" answered Captain Dinks hotly. "Who are you? a landsman, to give orders to a trained seaman! I don't allow passengers to interfere with me in working my own ship."

"Considering I have been in the royal navy all my life, and left the service with the rank of commander," said Mr Meldrum quietly, not a whit angered by the captain's somewhat reasonable indignation, "I think I am something of an authority on the point. But, don't let us argue that matter now, Captain Dinks. I apologise for interfering; but I have seen and been through a good many cyclones in the China seas, when I was in command of a gunboat there, and I advise you to do as I've said."

"Trust his honour, Capting, sir," chimed in Ben Boltrope, for once forgetting his sense of discipline, and speaking to his superior officer without leave; "I've sarved with Commander Meldrum, and knows what he is."

"I'm sure, sir, Mr Meldrum, I hardly know how to address you," said Captain Dinks, his old polite sell again, and smiling as if there was no storm near. "I beg your pardon for not recognising that you were of the same craft; but what could I think, or how could I judge?"

"Oh, never mind that now," said Mr Meldrum eagerly. "Put her about at once, as you value all our lives."

"All right!" replied Captain Dinks; "down with the helm there, sharp!"

The men strained every sinew to get the wheel round, the muscles on the Norwegian's arms standing out in relief like wire ropes, and Ben Boltrope using his utmost strength and assisting him with a will.

"Look out forward!" shouted the captain in the meantime, to warn McCarthy and the men what was going to be done so that they might hold on; "were going to 'bout ship." And although they could not hear a word he said, they judged what he meant by his motions and prepared themselves accordingly.

The manoeuvre was executed at last, but very nearly a moment too late.

As the ship came round, she met the sea full butt, and was for the instant almost buried—the water coming in high over the forecastle and falling like a cataract into the waist, engulfing the men there in a well of green wave and foam; while, at the same moment, the squall ahead struck her on the port bow, the vessel, between the two opposing forces, being like a piece of iron 'twixt hammer and anvil. The concussion was tremendous, knocking everybody off their feet just as if the ship had struck on a rock.

Crash went the remains of the foremast over the side, carrying with it the maintop-mast and the solitary scrap of sail that was set; and for a moment the ship broached to, heeling over as if she were going to founder.

However, the same expedient that had been tried in the night, that of a tarpaulin in the weather-rigging, was again resorted to; and the helm being kept down, the vessel's head was got to the sea, the wreck of the foremast, which had swung clear of the ship although still kept attached by the gear forwards, acting as a sort of breakwater, and tempering down the strength of the waves, so that after a time she rode somewhat easy.

Meanwhile, Kate had a terrible fright.

As the shock came when the *Nancy Bell* was put about, Frank Harness threw his arm round Kate's waist to prevent her from being thrown down, holding on himself at the same time like grim death to the rail of the companion; and on the ship steadying, he released the girl and let go his hold. At that moment, however, a wave came over the poop, and he, being taken off his guard, was rolled over on the deck and washed towards the opening in the broken bulwarks.



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“KATE INSTANTLY SNATCHED AT HIS COLLAR.”

Kate instantly, without hesitating for a second, made a snatch at his collar; and, clutching hold of it, in the very nick of time, saved him by a miracle—had he been carried overboard, no earthly power could have rescued him!

“Oh, Frank!” she exclaimed, “I thought I had lost you!” And, as he scrambled to his feet, pale with the suddenness of his peril and her effort to rescue him, the brave girl sank down, apparently lifeless, on the deck—all of a heap.

“Good heavens, she is dead!” cried Frank. “She has been killed in trying to save me!” and in the desperation of grief he looked as if he were going to throw himself into the sea.

“No, no, my boy,” said Mr Meldrum, who had witnessed the incident from the wheel-house, and had now come to his aid; “she has only fainted from revulsion of feeling and the strain on her nerves. Help me to carry her below.”

And, as the two descended the companion-way with their apparently inanimate burden, the young sailor could not help furtively kissing the floating tresses of dark brown hair that swept across his face as he tenderly supported Kate’s head on his shoulder, guarding it jealously in the passage below. His anxiety was soon afterwards relieved by Mr Meldrum coming out from the cabin where they had deposited poor Kate, and telling him that she was getting better.

It was a bad case with the ship, however; worse than anyone thought.

Soon after Frank and Mr Meldrum had left the deck, Ben Boltrope, who was still in the wheel-house with the Norwegian, called out to Captain Dinks:— “I think there’s something wrong with the rudder, sir,” he said.

“Wrong with the rudder!” repeated the captain. “What do you mean?” and he came nearer to look himself at the steering gear.

“Why; the wheel goes round either way, just as you please, without any strain at all, as if the ropes were parted, or the rudder gone adrift!”

“Mercy on us! That would be a calamity!” exclaimed Captain Dinks; and, watching his opportunity, when the stern of the ship rose up in the air, he looked over the rail below. “It is really the case!” he said, in grave accents. “The rudder and rudder-post have both been carried away. What a blessing that they did not go before we got her about; if they had, nothing could have saved us.”

“True for you, sir,” responded Ben in acquiescence; while the Norwegian nodded his head and said, “Ja! ja!”

“Come away from there, my men,” presently said the captain after a long silence, as if he were thinking to himself what should be done; “it’s no use your stopping there any longer. But, stay, it is best not to alarm the crew too soon. You stop, Norwegee,” calling that sailor by the name the men had dubbed him; “and you, carpenter, go and sound the well to see what water we have taken in. Mind and do it quietly, now, so as not to be seen; and you need not tell any of the hands about the loss of the rudder, you know.”

“Aye, aye, sir, I twig,” said Ben, going forwards and then down the main hatchway, slipping off the cover for the purpose.

Presently he returned aft, looking very serious.

"There's four feet water in the hold, sir," said he.

"Only four feet?" replied Captain Dinks, pretending to treat the matter with great unconcern; "why, I thought she would have had ever so much more in her, with all the straining she has gone through in the last twenty-four hours, besides the lot of seas she took in before we had the hatches battened. Still we'd better get rid of it, carpenter, as there's no use our carrying more cargo than we are obliged, eh?"

"No, sir," said Ben somewhat dubiously, not taken in by the captain's manner.

"Just what I think," said Captain Dinks. "Here, McCarthy," he cried out to the first mate, who, ever intent on duty, was busily engaged in trimming matters amidships, having the lashings of the longboat and spare spars overhauled in readiness for the next sea that might flood the decks—for nothing could be done about the wreck of the foremast till the gale moderated, as to loose it now would be to lose their sheet-anchor. "McCarthy, just have the chain-pumps rigged and pump out the hold to get rid of all that water we have taken on board."

"Aye, aye, sorr," was the hearty response, and the "cling, clang" of the pumps was soon heard resounding with a will through the ship, the men encouraged by the mate to do their best.

Still, it was a bad look-out.

The ship had first been scudding due east, and then to the northward, goodness only knew how many miles off her course; and now, here she was, drifting southwards, dismasted and rudderless, a hopeless wreck in unknown waters, at the mercy of the elements!

Chapter Twelve.

Ice Ahead!

Although the wind and sea had been doing their utmost, without, to transform the previously trim ship, that had sailed from Plymouth so gallantly, into the veritable semblance of a battered hulk, no further damage had been done below: so that, in the cuddy, all was comparative comfort—in contrast to the scene on deck.

Mr Zachariah Lathrope, who made light of his injuries, albeit his left arm was in a sling—confessing, too, that his side "felt kinder painful, as if some coon had given him a sockdolager in the ribs, or a grizzly bar put his hug on"—was seated at the replaced table, pitching into a sort of heavy lunch, to make amends for his missed breakfast, while the steward was cutting up a plentiful supply of ham for him on his plate, so that he could use his solitary hand with a fork and so feed himself. Mrs Major Negus was busily engaged in her cabin, and with the assistance of Mary Llewellyn, the stewardess, was rearranging all her numerous goods and chattels that had been so ruthlessly banged about in the night; and Master Maurice, whom the turmoil had not disturbed in the least, was still sleeping in the top bunk as composedly as he had continued doing all through the period of his mother's struggles on the floor and narrow escape from suffocation, unawakened either by the noise or her loud calls for help—the worthy lady as soon as she came to herself having earnestly cautioned Kate and the stewardess not to arouse her darling boy, for "he would be so frightened, you know, if he saw me like this!"

Kate herself, recovered from her faint, but yet feeling weak and languid from the effects of all she had gone through, was mechanically assisting Florry to dress, wondering the while, in a dull apathetic way, whether she would ever again have to tender the same offices to her little sister, for she was prepared for the worst and believed that the ship was in imminent danger—although she hoped still, with the ardent nature of youth, that they might be delivered, trusting to the loving mercy and watchful care of that God to whom she had prayed during the night, even before her earthly father's counsel, and before whose footstool she had already that morning bent the knee more than once.

As for Mr Meldrum—who had remained below from the consciousness that he could not be of any service in the immediate present on deck and from an unwillingness to having the appearance even of shoving himself forward and interfering with the management of the ship after what Captain Dinks had said—he had tumbled out a portmanteau in his state-room in order to overhaul some old papers; and he presently came out into the cuddy with a chart in his hand.

"Hillo, mister," said the American as soon as he noticed him, "jest roused up, hey? I thought you wer havin' a bit of snooze, and wondered when you were goin' to turn out!"

"Ah," said Mr Meldrum gravely, "it's no time for sleeping now for any one on board. The ship is in far too perilous a position for that!"

"Is she?" asked Mr Lathrope, most unconcernedly apparently.

"She really is," replied Mr Meldrum.

"Wa-al, if she is," returned the other, lifting a huge morsel of ham on the end of his fork, and surveying it critically with much relish of eye before placing it in his capacious mouth, "why, it's a bad business, that's all I ken say; and I'm right down sorry fur it, I am—things was going on so slick and pleasant! But if we can't help it, mister, what's the sorter use in grievin'? I don't see the good in cryin' over a spilt petroleum can, I don't! Now, dew, mister, draw up har and make yourself com'able; you'll find this bacon prime, for I knows it's the gen-u-ine Chicago brand and came out of the States."

"No, thanks," said Mr Meldrum, smiling at the other's imperturbable philosophy and epicureanism that seemed proof against everything, even the sense of mortal peril, "I had something to eat earlier, and do not care about anything now."

At that moment, Captain Dinks came down the companion and looked into the saloon, when, seeing Mr Meldrum, he beckoned to him.

"Would you mind coming on deck for a few moments," said he hurriedly, "I want to speak to you about something?"

"Certainly," said Mr Meldrum, at once getting up from the table, on which he had spread out the chart he had brought from his cabin and was engaged with a pair of compasses in picking out the ship's possible position.

"Say, mister—" commenced the American.

"Pray, excuse me," interrupted Mr Meldrum, "I'll speak to you when I come down again; I must join the captain now, as you see;" and he hurried to the companion-way, Captain Dinks standing aside and motioning to him to go up first.

"Say, Cap—" called out Mr Lathrope, not to be baffled.

"Can't stop now," curtly replied Captain Dinks; and he, too, disappeared in the rear of Mr Meldrum.

"Now, I do jest wonder what them two coons hev on hand?" said the American, when they had thus left him with his curiosity unslackened; "I'm durned if I don't go up myself and see: people must rise pretty airy o' mornin's to take a rise out of this old hoss!"

A roll of the ship, however, coming as soon as he had risen from his seat, settled his inquisitiveness. "I guess I'd better bide har," he murmured to himself, uttering his thoughts aloud. "This air vessel's a durned sight too skittish on her footing to please me, an' that air ramshackly arm o' mine might git squoze agin if I went on deck! No, I guess I'll bide har in the land of Gilead—Steward!" he added, raising his voice.

"Yes, sir," answered Llewellyn, coming out of his pantry.

"Hev you got any coffee or tea fixins?"

"No, sir, that lazy nigger Snowball says he can't light the galley fire."

"Does he? I'd make him smell fire if I'd got him out on the plantation whar I was riz! Then, bring me a glass of brandy and water, and make it stiff: I allers go in fur temperance drinks when I can get them, that is before sundown; but if I'm obleeged to take pizen, why, I likes it strong!"

When Mr Meldrum gained the deck, in company with the captain, he found the wind still blowing with terrific force and a dangerous sea on, although as the gale had not shifted during the last hour from the north-west, to which quarter it had finally veered, there was some hope that they had escaped from the worst of the cyclone and were now being hurried along its outside edge. In one of the last onslaughts of the wind, however, the mainyard truss had been carried away, and the yard swung so violently to and fro after snapping the braces like pack-thread that it seemed as if the main-mast would go; but, fortunately, in one of its mad gyrations, as it moved about like the arms of a semaphore, the yard-arm had caught in the standing rigging on the starboard side, where, through the gallant exertions of Frank Harness and the Norwegian sailor, who performed the task at the peril of their lives, it was firmly lashed and secured from doing further mischief. This operation eased the ship considerably, and certainly saved the masts.

The worst piece of news that the captain had to tell Mr Meldrum was with reference to the manner in which the ship was leaking.

"We had four feet water in her when the carpenter sounded the well at six bells," said Captain Dinks; "and after rigging the pumps we reduced it considerably; but since then, she has made nearly two feet again—all clear and clean without any bilge in it—which shows she's taking it in fresh and fast."

"There must be a big leak somewhere," said Mr Meldrum, "and the sooner we see about stopping it the better."

"Yes," said the captain, "we might keep it down certainly by an hour's spell in each watch; but it tires out the men so. I think it is coming in somewhere astern; the rudder-post must have started some of the timbers when it got wrenched off."

"Very probably," said the other; "but then, the ship has had a good deal of straining the last day or two, besides from the storm in the Bay of Biscay."

"Ah! she felt that," replied Captain Dinks. "That's what, no doubt, weakened the rudder and made it go so easily this morning; but I'll call the carpenter."

The port watch had gone below with Mr Adams, to have a little rest, for there was no need of all the crew being on deck, the ship riding out the gale to leeward of the floating anchor which providence had sent them in the shape of the broken foremast, and there being nothing to do; so, on a hail from the captain, Mr McCarthy passed the word forwards for Ben Boltrope, who soon made his appearance out of the fo'c'sle—scrambling aft as well as he could by holding on to every rope in his way, for the vessel rolled and pitched most uneasily, rendering upright walking along the deck an utter impossibility.

"Sarvent, sir," said he, touching his hat to Mr Meldrum on coming up the poop ladder; "glad to see you on deck."

"What about this leak, carpenter?" said Captain Dinks. "Please tell Mr Meldrum all you know."

"Well, your honour," said Ben, "all that can be said lies in a nut-shell! She's making water as fast as it can pour in; and if we don't find the leak and stop it, she'll founder pretty soon."

"Have you any idea where it is coming in?" inquired Mr Meldrum.

"Well, sir, the cap'en say it's by the rudder-post; but I myself thinks it's amidships or else forrard: I'd have looked, but I couldn't shift the cargo without help."

"This must be seen to at once, Captain Dinks," said Mr Meldrum. "As you have asked my aid, I would advise your calling the watch below; and I'll go down with the carpenter and see whether we can spy out the leak."

"Oh, by all means, if you think that will do any good, although I'm of the opinion that the leak is in the stern. McCarthy, call the port watch up to go below and break cargo!"

"All hands, ahoy!"

This cry soon brought up the weary sailors, who had only just retired after more than twenty hours of duty, before they had had time to close their eyes in their first sleep, but they came out of the forecabin willingly enough, well knowing the peril the ship was in; and, down below the main-hatch they bumped after Mr Meldrum and the carpenter, glad that it was not for another spell of pumping for which they had been called up.

Ben Boltrope was found to be right. After tossing to one side the bales and boxes and heavy masses of iron that filled the midship section of the hold, they found a great gap between the timbers through which the water was spouting in at the rate of some hundred gallons an hour—the cause of the hole being apparent enough in a long iron girder which had got jammed against the side of the ship, end outwards, and in the working of the ship had made its way clean through the strakes and planking—just as if it had been an auger, the hole had been bored so round and neat!

This orifice was now carefully plugged and battened over; and when the pumps were again rigged and the vessel cleared it was found that she had ceased to make water to any appreciable extent.

"Thank God for that!" said Captain Dinks heartily. "I own I was wrong, for I was certain that the rudder-post was the seat of mischief:— the ship was bound to leak there!"

"It was a very natural thought of yours," said Mr Meldrum, to soothe his sense of defeat. "I would have held to the same but for the carpenter."

"Ah! he's a roight good man, sorr," chimed in Mr McCarthy, "and a credit to the sarvice that brought him up. Sure, an' he's a sailor ivry inch ov him, from the crown of his hid to the sole of his fut!"

The sky was still obscured by clouds and the stormy billows were tossing about, striving to bear down the ship and beat her to pieces; but she bravely held her own, head to sea, and rode out the gale all that day and night, as if she had been at anchor, although drifting steadily the while in a south-easterly direction, the impulse of the waves and the force of the wind on her hull carrying her thither.

It was the same the next day; but, on the third morning, the gale somewhat moderated, although still blowing with considerable force from the northward and westward, and under Mr Meldrum's advice, which Captain Dinks now eagerly sought on every occasion, sail was got upon the ship and she was allowed to run before the wind, hoping that the vessel might reach smoother latitudes and fine weather, when they would be able to repair damages and continue their voyage.

It was but a poor pretence of making sail, however!

All they could set was a close-reefed mizzen-top-sail and a fore staysail, which latter was hoisted on a jury-mast rigged forwards in place of the foremast; while the missing rudder was replaced by an ingenious makeshift, the joint handiwork of Mr Meldrum and the carpenter, composed of lengths of a spare hawser and some of the smaller spars, sawn up, lashed together, and then planked over, so as to offer a yielding surface to the sea, and secured under the stern by guys and tackles leading from the quarter galleries, the steering gear being then attached.

This contrivance was found to work admirably in guiding the ship before the wind, although if they had tried to wear her or put her about by it, there might have been some difficulty and danger in the operation.

Towards the evening of this day, while the crippled *Nancy Bell*, so ruthlessly shorn of her fair proportions, was going along pretty bravely, nevertheless, at some six knots an hour or more under the little sail she was carrying, with the sea still rough and wintry and the sky all clouded over, the thermometer was noticed to go down again several degrees; and Mr Meldrum, who alone had made the discovery for the wind having been bitterly cold for days past the feeling in the air would not have specially attracted attention—at once warned Captain Dinks that they had run so far southwards that he was certain they were near ice, and consequently it would be best to keep a strict look-out.

"Ice?" exclaimed the captain aghast. "Why, we aren't much below the latitude of the Cape, I take it!"

"You'll find you are wrong when we're able to get an observation," replied Mr Meldrum. "I wouldn't be surprised to find that we were far below 'the Forties,' with all that drift and leeway we've had! However, wherever we are, we're not far from ice, take my word for it, whether it be a wandering berg out of its latitude or the drift from the Antarctic ice-fields."

"All right, sir," said Captain Dinks laughing, "I'll take your word for it; though an iceberg hereabouts, to my thinking,

is a rather rum visitor this time of year, and I'll believe it when I see it!"

However, the captain was wrong again.

Just before dark, the look-out in the maintop reported something ahead, which presently turned out to be an enormous iceberg, fortunately far away to leeward out of the course of the ship. It was an immense irregular mass several miles long and of great height, appearing to reach up into the clouds above as it heaved up and down on the heavy rolling sea; and its top and points, covered with snow, stood out distinctly against the dark horizon.

"Ah, we are well away from that fellow!" said Mr Meldrum rubbing his hands; but his congratulations were cut short in a moment by the look-out man forward—the Norwegian sailor, who as an old whaler was accustomed to Antarctic sights and sounds—shouting out that there was field-ice ahead, and that from the crashing of the floes he thought the ship must be near the pack.

"Take in sail at once," said Mr Meldrum, "and keep a sharper look-out than ever. If the vessel runs against the ice woe betide us all!"

Chapter Thirteen.

"Land Ho!"

"Let go the mizzentop-sail halliards, and man the fore staysail down-haul!" shouted out Captain Dinks the moment Mr Meldrum had spoken; and, the helm being put down at the same time, the ship was again brought head to wind, almost sooner than it has taken to describe the operation. However, as it was observed after a little while that the vessel drifted so rapidly to leeward, through the mere force of the wind on her exposed hull and remaining spars, not to speak of the wash of the sea, and thus ran in quite as great danger of colliding with the ice as if she had been going ahead, the fore staysail, reefed into the most attenuated proportions, was set again—so that the ship might be under steerage way and be able to avoid, under judicious control, the numerous small bergs that now hove in sight like miniature islands in every direction, making the navigation perilous in the extreme.

As night came on, too, the dangers surrounding the *Nancy Bell* increased tenfold; for, the wind not only blew with greater strength, but it was accompanied by blinding showers of hail and snow, while a thick fog rose from the freezing water, more like steam than anything else, obscuring everything and preventing the floating ice from being seen until it was immediately under the bows.

It was just about the beginning of the second dog-watch at four bells—six o'clock in the evening—that the mist came; so, after a brief consultation with Mr Meldrum, Captain Dinks told the chief mate to call the hands aft.

"We are in as tight a hole, McCarthy," said he, "as the poor old ship was ever placed in, and it will take us all our time to get out of it; so, it's best to let all the hands know it, that each may do his best for the good of all."

"Aye, aye, sorr," answered Mr McCarthy; "it's no sight o' use beating about the bush when danger's under weigh. Till 'em the truth, Cap'en, and shame the devil!" Soon afterwards, his ringing voice calling, "all hands ahoy!" was heard forwards.

The crew were not long tumbling aft; and, when they had assembled on the main deck, Captain Dinks addressed them from the break of the poop.

"Men," said he, "I'm sorry to say the *Nancy Bell* is in a position of the greatest peril. We are now, after fighting with a cyclone for five days, being carried along by a rising gale into the midst of scattered icebergs, any one of which may knock a hole in the ship; while if we should run upon one of the bigger ones we must go to pieces at once. You know how, throughout the bad weather we've had, I have tried, to spare you as much as I could, conveniently with the proper working of the ship, and I've always allowed the watches their regular spell below; but to-night, and as long as we are surrounded by the ice, I can't allow a man off duty! None of us can tell whether the *Nancy Bell* will be afloat and we alive by morning; so, no single hand must leave the deck without special permission. You may be certain I sha'n't set the example, and you can now go forwards. I am about to set fresh look-outs, and each man will have his station."

The majority of the crew gave a cheer at this, Ben Boltrope's lusty voice being conspicuously to the fore; but some, amongst whom was a lazy lout named Bill Moody, who was the chief grumbler in the fore-castle, expressed their discontent audibly; saying that they "hadn't signed articles to be worked like dogs!"

Captain Dinks' ears were pretty sharp, and he heard what was said; so he called the men back.

"I know who spoke," said he, "and I wouldn't disgrace the rest of the crew by supposing that they share his feelings; but I'll add this for his benefit, that anybody who may be discontented will find me easy-going enough when I am stroked the right way, but a pretty tough customer when anybody falls athwart my hawse!"

While this little incident was taking place, of course, the usual look-out was not neglected, the Norwegian being still aloft in the maintop, with Frank Harness and Mr Adams on the fore-castle; but now, extra men were detailed for the duty. Karl Ericksen, called down from the maintop where his range of view had become limited through the increasing darkness and snowstorm, was placed between the knight-heads; a man on each bow; Frank Harness on the fore scuttle; Mr McCarthy and Adams on the port and starboard quarters; and Ben Boltrope at the wheel—Captain Dinks being here, there, and everywhere to see that everybody was on the *qui vive*, even ascending the mizzen rigging sometimes into the top, to have an outlook from there and try whether his eyes could pierce the misty vapour

that hung over the sea by dint of looking down into it.

Thenceforward, throughout the weary night, there was little to do save looking out and conning the ship.

When a large cake of ice or berg was seen drifting perilously near, or bearing down upon the vessel, the word was passed along the deck from forward to aft and her head turned one way or the other, the yards of the mizzen-mast—now the only ones left on the ship, with the exception of the fouled main-yard—being squared or braced up to help her inclination to either side, which was also assisted by the loose mizzentop sail. This latter had only been hauled up by the clewlines and buntlines when sail was shortened, so as to be available to be dropped and sheeted home at a moment's notice in any sudden emergency when it might be necessary to get way on the ship to prevent her running foul of some giant iceberg that was trying to overtake her. From midnight the only break in the monotony of the silent watch, throughout the anxious hours that elapsed before daylight, was the warning cry of the look-outs' forward "Ice ahead!" or "Ice on the lee bow!" with the sailing directions of the captain to the steersman, quickly following the words of warning, "Hard up with the helm!" or else, "Keep her off a little, my man!" or the single word,—sometimes the most important order of all,—"Steady!"

In the cuddy, naturally, it was an equally anxious time throughout the trying night; indeed, more so, considering the state of mind of those concerned.

Mr Meldrum, on going below, had told of the course of things above, explaining the perilous position of the ship without unduly alarming the nervous susceptibilities of the women folk, and after his periodical visits to the deck he brought back the cheering news that all was as yet going on well; but still, the very fact of being unable to do anything save watch and pray, was even more exhausting and wearying than in being exposed to the bitter weather like the crew and officers of the ship were—for the sense of duty and something constantly calling on their attention prevented the latter from thinking, as those could only do who had no cause or call for action.

The American passenger did not, however, appear in the least put out or more than ordinarily impressed with the gravity of the situation, taking it, as it were, as a matter of course.

"It's no use making a muss over what can't be helped," he said with the utmost sang-froid. "The ship's in good hands, and as I can't do anything, why I guess I'll let things ride and be as comfortable as I ken." So he ate and drank with just as good an appetite as ever when dinnertime came—though it was later than usual, through Snowball not having been able to light the galley fire till nearly dark; and, on the arrival, according to Mr Zachariah Lathrope's reckoning, of bedtime, he curled himself up in his bunk, going to sleep as composedly as if he had been safe and sound ashore, with the comforting assurance to the others, as he said "good-night," that "if things should kinder turn out unpleasant, why, I guess they'll rouse me up!"

Florry Meldrum, too, and Master Maurice Negus were not one whit the more alarmed by the critical condition of the *Nancy Bell* either; but, neither Maurice's mother nor Kate closed their eyes for a moment the livelong night.

When some feeble rays of light at length strayed down through the skylight, causing the lamps over the cuddy table to burn more dimly, when the scuttles in the cabins, seen through the half-opened doors, became illumined by some reflection from without, showing that the long-wished-for morning had broken at last, Kate, unable to endure the suspense any longer, put on her cloak and went on deck.

The scene and all its surroundings had very much altered since she had last been up the companion-way; so that when she got on the poop now, so great a transformation had occurred that it seemed to her as if she were in a species of nautical fairyland.

The ship herself was cased in ice—hull, spars, and standing rigging, and all—with long pendulous icicles hanging from the main and mizzen yards. The fog or mist having also cleared away and the clouds vanished from the sky, every object glittered like jewels in the golden rays of the rising sun.

But the *Nancy Bell* was not the only object of attraction and interest.

She was surrounded by icebergs in every direction—to the right, to the left, right in front, and astern—some little mites not bigger than cockle-shells in comparison with the larger ones, baby bergs, so to speak, and others as lofty as mountains, extending as far as the eye could reach to the horizon; the ship racing by them and threaded her way in and out between the moving masses with the dexterity of a Highlander executing the sword-dance. The wind was still blowing more than half a gale from the northward and westward, and the vessel was running before it under the fore staysail and mizzentop-sail, which had been dropped again with the reef points shaken out, making eight knots good, too, at that.

Where there was no ice, the rolling sea was of an intense ultramarine blue, reflecting the colour of the distant sky; while, as the sun came up higher, different tints were displayed by the icebergs, whose shape was as various as their sizes—bergs that in their gorgeous architecture and fairy magnificence, with fantastic peaks and airy pinnacles, which glittered now in the full light of day with all the varied colours of the rainbow, flashing out scintillations and radiances of violet and iris, purple and turquoise, and sapphire blue, emerald green and orange, blush rose and pink and red—all mingled with soft shades of crimson and carmine, and interspersed with gleams of gold and silver and a frosting over all of bright white light.

"Ah!" ejaculated Kate, uttering her thoughts aloud, so carried away was she by the vivid beauty of the scene, "those who haven't seen an iceberg at sea at sunrise, have no idea of the grand loveliness of God's handiwork in nature!"

"They look beautiful enough now, missy," said Captain Dinks, who had come to her side unnoticed, and seemed much jollier than he had done the night before, when he thought the ship in her last extremity; "but we didn't think them so a little while ago, when it looked as if the poor old *Nancy Bell* would lay her old bones amongst them!"

"Ah! Captain Dinks," replied she, "there was One above looking after us then, as he is now!"

"You are right," said he earnestly; "or we should never have escaped as we did; once or twice, when we grazed a berg, I thought it was all up with us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kate with a shudder, "it was a terrible night; and you and the poor fellows on deck must have found it bitterly cold."

"Not a doubt of that," said Captain Dinks laughing. "I was almost half-frozen in the mizzen rigging; and as for poor Frank Harness, when he came off the fore-scuttle, where he was stationed all night to pass the word from the look-outs forward, he could hardly move his limbs! If it hadn't been for the hot coffee our friend Snowball served out every two hours to warm us up, I don't believe any of us would have been alive this morning. But here comes your father. How sly your were all to keep it so carefully concealed that he was in the navy; and I taking him all the time for a lubberly landsman! I'll never forgive myself; for you must all have laughed at me, especially you, Miss Kate, and your roguish little sister. Ah! good morning, Mr Meldrum," added the captain turning to that gentleman; "I was just thinking about you. I wanted to have a consultation about our course. My dead reckoning is all at sea, and I hardly can guess where we are now; but I trust we shall be able to get an observation of the sun at noon, and then we will be able to prick off our position on the chart."

"I sincerely hope so," said Mr Meldrum; "for I think we're going far too much to the southward."

"Do you, still, eh?" replied Captain Dinks. "I don't quite agree with you. I thought it best to keep the ship before the wind, not only because it eases her but on account of the gale being bound to slacken down soon; and if we run down to a lower latitude, as I have frequently done in this part of the ocean before, we will probably get fine weather and be able to tinker up the old craft and make her look all a taunto again."

"Ah!" said Mr Meldrum, "you are just as likely to run on to something else, not quite so pleasant as fine weather! Mark my words, Captain Dinks, I am as certain, and more so now than I was three days ago, as I told you then, that we are far down in the Forties; and what with the easting we have made since passing the meridian of the Cape and the leeway we have drifted, we must be pretty close to the Crozet Islands or Kerguelen Land."

"Kerguelen Land!" ejaculated the captain; "nonsense, man; why we are hundreds of miles to the westward of it."

"Are we?" replied Mr Meldrum. "Well, just wait till twelve o'clock and we'll see who is right, you or I!"

Hardly, however, had the words escaped his lips than the look-out man in the maintop—who had been replaced as soon as day broke, when the prospect around the ship became more extended, thus rendering his services useful—shouted out a cry that had almost been forgotten, and which made every heart on board leap with mingled feelings of overpowering joy, consternation, surprise, dismay! Every pulse stopped for a second spellbound! The cry was—"Land ho!"

Chapter Fourteen.

Scylla and Charybdis.

"Land!" called out the captain. "Where away?"

"On the weather-beam," answered the man aloft, who still spoke in a voice which sounded as if he had been greatly startled. "It's rising rapidly every moment, sir, out of the water."

"The fellow must be blind!" exclaimed Captain Dinks. "There is no land there in that direction, if I know it. He must be taking one of those big icebergs for an island; that's about the matter. Hanged if I don't go up and see for myself!"

Running down the poop ladder, the captain soon started up the shrouds on the port side towards the maintop where the lookout man was stationed. It was not Karl Ericksen this time, whose word he would have implicitly taken, but Bill Moody, one of the worst of the crew, and who, it may be remembered, had already evinced an unsailorlike spirit by his insubordination on an occasion when the pluck and endurance of everyone required to be tested. From this fact alone, Captain Dinks was the less inclined to trust him.

The captain, however, found mounting the ratlines not so easy a task as he might have imagined, for the rigging was all frozen hard and as unbending as iron; but he persevered unflinchingly, and disdaining to creep through the "lubber's hole," climbed over the top in the usual sailor's way, although he puffed and panted a good deal when he got there, which proved to him that the flesh he had gained on his plump little person, since he had been a youngster and first shinned up the rigging, had not improved his climbing powers.

"Now, where's this wonderful land of your's!" he asked, as soon as he got alongside of Bill Moody, taking his glass out of his pocket and adjusting the focus ready for action.

"There," answered the man surlily, pointing towards the north-east, where a faint blue bank seemed to rise out of the ocean above and beyond the ice-fields. It could be seen with the naked eye to be of a different colour to even the most distant bergs, the distinction being quite marked.

"By Jove, the man's right!" ejaculated Captain Dinks with surprise.

"I knew I were," said Bill Moody in a bragging sort of way. "I think I can see a hole in a ladder as well as most people; and if that ain't land, why, I'll eat it."

"There, that will do," interposed the captain to stop any further remarks, while he proceeded to inspect the hazy object with keen attention for some minutes, after which he replaced his glass in his pocket and prepared to descend to the deck again.

"Keep a sharp look-out," he said to Moody as he disappeared over the side of the top, "and sing out, as soon as we get any nearer, whether you can see a line of breakers at the foot of the island; for island it is, sure enough!"

"Aye, aye," grunted out the man; and Captain Dinks went down the rigging even more carefully than he had ascended, finding great difficulty in preventing his unaccustomed feet from slipping off the ratlines, which were like rungs of the smoothest and most polished ice.

"You were right, and I was wrong," he said to Mr Meldrum, as soon as he had regained the poop. "There is land in sight, sure enough, although I can at present only see it faintly towards the north-east. It must be, as you say, either the Crozet Islands or Kerguelen Land, for there's nothing else between us and the Australian continent, as we haven't yet got quite so far south as the Antarctic regions."

"It's probably Kerguelen Land," observed Mr Meldrum, "for you couldn't see the Crozets nearly so far off; but I hope there's not going to be another change of the weather. It seems clouding over again."

"Not before we get an observation, I trust," replied the captain; "I don't like knocking about any longer without knowing where I am."

"Nor I, sorr," put in the first mate heartily. "Sure it's like goin' in the dark to Bandon Fair, for all the worruld over."

"It's not what we like," interposed Mr Meldrum somewhat dryly. "We have got to put up with what we can get."

"True for you, sorr," said Mr McCarthy, not to be beaten; "sure, but isn't it best to make the best on it."

"That's incontestable," replied Mr Meldrum with a laugh; and there the conversation ended, Kate and her father going below to breakfast.

The weather got thicker, with the wind coming in gusts and now and then shifting a bit, so that the solitary mizzen-topsail of the *Nancy Bell* had now again to be close reefed, and her course directed more towards the land, which they did not seem to near so rapidly as they had thought they would—owing probably to some current that was all the time carrying them southwards while they were steering towards the east.

They were actuated, however, by no vulgar curiosity to inspect this ocean land in thus seeking to approach it.

On an ordinary occasion they would most certainly have given it a pretty wide berth; but now, should the sky cloud over so much as to prevent their getting an observation of the sun by which to correct their latitude and longitude, the identification of the land would at once prove their position on the chart without further trouble. This was why they wanted to near it.

After breakfast, when Mr Meldrum came on deck again, the wind had freshened considerably, although still blowing from the north-west, while the outlook was generally squally; but the sky above still kept clear, with the sun shining down at intervals, when the scud, which was beginning to fly about again, did not interpose to hide its beams. The land, the while, was steadily rising to the northward and eastward.

"It's Kerguelen Land, sure enough," said Mr Meldrum, when, after imitating Captain Dinks and paying a visit to the maintop to reconnoitre, he returned to the poop. "I can see the outlying rocks towards its north-west extremity called 'The Cloudy Isles,' and away to the east I noticed the snow-white peak of Mount Ross, which stands in the centre of the island and is over six thousand feet high."

"Well, you've good eyesight to see that at the distance," observed Captain Dinks in a chaffing way. "I wish my optics were as clear."

"I can see pretty well," replied the other; "and if you had had to look out as sharply as I've had to do for pirate junks up the Gulf of Tonquin, I fancy you would have had your eyesight improved!"

"All right, Mr Meldrum," said Captain Dinks frankly. "I'm sure I did not doubt your word for a moment. I've never been so far south before, and feel a little out in my reckoning. However, it will soon be time to take the sun, and that will decide the point."

A few stray snowflakes came fluttering down on the deck just then, and both he and Mr Meldrum looked aloft. No cloud was to be seen exactly overhead, but a heavy bank of haze was creeping up from the south towards the zenith that looked ominous.

"We shall have a repetition of yesterday again, I'm afraid," said Mr Meldrum presently with much concern, after a long interval of silence between the two.

"I'm afraid so," was Captain Dinks' reply; "but I hope it won't come for another hour at least." He then hailed the steward down the companion-way, telling him to bring up his sextant from the cabin.

Fortunately, it just kept clear enough for an observation to be taken; and when Captain Dinks had worked it out, both he and Mr Meldrum acting independently so as to test the accuracy of the reckoning, it was found that the ship was in 48 degrees 50 minutes south latitude, and 68 degrees 40 minutes east longitude. Consequently, the land they were approaching could be none other than Kerguelen Land.

"As we now know where we are," said Mr Meldrum, when the fact was established, "we must give the island as wide a berth as we can, for the coast is most dangerous; and in winter-time, as it is now, July being the December of the antipodes, the most fearful storms are said to spring up at a moment's notice in its vicinity. As the wind is still from the north-west, and we are well up to the northward, I should try to weather it if possible; and, if we can't do that, we must pass to the south of the land."

"Very good," replied the captain. "Only, you know the poor old *Nancy* cannot sail as well now, as she could when in full trim. I don't at all like the look of the weather, though, Mr Meldrum. It seems to me that one of those coast storms you were speaking of is brewing up. The ice, too, is getting thick round us again; and if a fog comes on again we'll be in a worse position than yesterday, for then we'd plenty of sea-room at any rate, while now, we have that blessed island almost dead to leeward."

"We must trust in Providence," said Mr Meldrum, "and keep a sharp look-out if the fog thickens; but try to beat to windward we must, if possible!"

During the bright morning, the hands, working diligently under the supervision and help of the first mate and Adams, the second, had been trying to make the *Nancy Bell* a little more shipshape, and, although they had been greatly hampered through the ropes and running gear being frozen so stiff that it was almost impossible to unbend or run them, they succeeded finally in trussing the mainyard again and splicing the braces, so that they now were able to set the mainsail reefed, a welcome addition to the limited sailing power of the ship in working to windward.

All things were proceeding very satisfactorily in the afternoon, by which time they had got the land to bear well on the lee-beam, and it looked as if they could weather it; when, suddenly, there came on a thick snowstorm, mingled with showers of hail, and the same kind of mist which had risen almost at a precisely similar hour on the previous day again enveloped them in its folds, shutting out all view of the water at even a short distance from the vessel's side.

The *Nancy Bell* was then steering nor'-nor'-east and some ten miles off the land, with the wind coming from the northward and westward in squalls. Presently, it blew so fresh that the lately set mainsail had to be taken in again, and next the mizzen, for the ship heeled over so much that it was thought at one time she would not recover her stability; but, even under the reefed fore staysail, which was still retained to enable her to weather the land, she tore through the water at such a rate, that, in spite of the continual watch, it was most difficult to avoid the heavy masses of floating ice that seemed to spring up on all sides again, and which she had appeared to have been leaving behind her in the morning.

"Sure and it's a worse look-out than last night, sorr," said the first mate to Mr Meldrum, who was peering out anxiously to windward, the gale veering round just at the most critical time to the northward. "Faix, and I don't think we can weather them islands now, with all this ice about too."

"Nor do I," replied Mr Meldrum. "Captain Dinks, we'll have to run for it. Do you think you can wear her?"

"If your rudder holds out," said the captain.

"I'll guarantee the rudder," answered Mr Meldrum. "The only thing is, I fear the spars will go."

"We must risk those, my friend. It's a case of neck or nothing now. Listen! Can you hear anything?" and the captain bent his ear to leeward.

Yes, Mr Meldrum could hear something. They all could hear something above the shrieking of the wind, and the roar of the waves, and the crash of the cakes and bergs of ice tumbling against each other. It was something that sounded like the death-knell of the *Nancy Bell*, and made their faces blanch with fear. It was the noise of breakers, distant yet, but still as plainly distinguishable as if quite near—breakers breaking on a lee-shore, the most terrible sound of all sounds to a sailor's ear!

"Stand by to wear ship!" shouted Captain Dinks, and he himself took hold of the spokes of the wheel as he uttered the words, easing it round, while the mate rushed forwards, calling the hands.

"Tumble up, men, tumble up!" cried Mr McCarthy; "don't stop for your clothes. All hands wear ship."

Frank Harness and Mr Adams had already darted towards the braces; and, the men soon joining them, the yards were braced round, the mizzen and mainsail being again dropped and sheeted home to enable her to pay off from the shore, which the vessel soon did on the other tack, although the canvas made her bury her bows in the sea and almost heel over till the mainyard dipped.

"Let her carry on, she'll bear it," said the captain. "We cannot do too much to get away from those confounded breakers; I'd sooner hear anything than them!"

"So would I," responded Mr Meldrum, still looking pale, for the *Nancy Bell* had had a narrow squeak of going to the bottom when wearing; "but we are rushing into almost as terrible a danger as the lee-shore. If we come in contact with one of these icebergs, going at the speed we now do, the shock will sink us to a certainty."

"Well," said the captain, "of the two dangers that is the least. By keeping a good look-out we may avoid the ice, which we could never do with the lee-shore, save by getting away from it, as we are doing now. By Jove, isn't she walking along—the beauty, crippled as she is—just as if she knew the peril she was in!"

"Better not holler till yer out of the wood," observed Mr McCarthy; "as for myself, I wish it was mornin' agin, sure!"

He'd no sooner uttered the words, however, than the look-out man forward suddenly gave vent to a frightened exclamation, drawn from him by the sight of something unexpected and terrible.

"Ice on the lee bow!" shouted he. "Port your helm hard!"

But the warning came too late.

Almost at the same instant as the cry reached the ears of those aft, the *Nancy Bell* struck full butt against a dark object that loomed up out of the fog right ahead of the ship, and which had been unperceived a moment before.

There was a grinding rending crash and sound of breaking timbers, the vessel quivering from stem to stern; and then, the main and mizzen masts, with all their yards and the sails which had so lately been urging the ship on to her destruction toppled over the sides, whilst a wave, washing back from the base of the iceberg and coming in over the bows, swept the decks fore and aft.

Chapter Fifteen.

Making the best of it.

All hands were on deck at the time of the collision; and, with one concentrated cry of alarm which was more a yell than anything else, the men rushed in a body amidships to where the long-boat was stowed.

Captain Dinks, however hesitating and undecided as he had shown himself frequently of late in the navigation of the ship, now all at once brought out in this emergency that courage and capacity for command which he had really at bottom but which had been before dormant.

"Back for your lives, men, to your stations!" he shouted. "Although the bows are stove in, the bulkhead forward will prevent the water from flooding us beyond the fore compartment and give us time to run the ship ashore, when we can all escape. No boat could live in the sea that's now on; and if it did, it would run a worse chance of being stove in by the ice than our poor vessel had!"

His words made the men hang back, all save Bill Moody and a couple of others, who began casting off the lashings of the longboat; but Mr McCarthy rushing down on the main deck and seizing a capstan bar with which he threatened to brain the first man who resisted the captain's authority, the unruly ones desisted for the time, slinking forwards grumblingly.

"Carpenter," called out Captain Dinks, "sound the well and see what damage has been done; and, Mr Adams, send the port watch aft to clear away this top hamper. It is thumping away alongside and may make another breach in our timbers!"

The captain's apparent calmness, combined with the sense of duty paramount on ship-board, made the men set to work with a will; besides which, they well knew that by acting together in harmony they had a better chance of escape than by any mere individual effort. Mr McCarthy, too, and Adams showed themselves equally as capable as Captain Dinks in lending a hand and encouraging the crew—Frank Harness being not one whit behindhand either; so that, within a very few minutes after the consternation which the catastrophe had caused on its first happening had passed away, all, recovering that equanimity habitual to sailors in almost any predicament or calamity, were engaged in carrying out the orders given them, as coolly as if the *Nancy Bell* were snug at anchor in some safe harbour. But, in what a sadly different position was she now!

Battered as she had been by the storm in the Bay of Biscay and crippled by the terrible cyclone off the Cape, which had left her tossing rudderless and almost demasted on the deep, her then condition was favourable in comparison with her present state—that of a complete wreck, with her bows stove in, her masts all carried by the board, and her decks swept fore and aft of everything!

Fortunately, as the mainmast had fallen over the side, it had jammed against the iceberg with which they had collided, so fending off the vessel's head that she had sheered to starboard and thus passed by the floating mountain; otherwise, probably, the poor *Nancy Bell* would have been ground down by the pressure of the ice below the surface of the sea. Ben Boltrope, too, returning from forward after a survey of the damage, in accordance with the captain's command, reported another piece of good news. The bows had been stove in, it was true, and the bulkhead smashed, filling the fore compartment and bringing the ship's head so much down that it would be almost impossible to sail her even in a smooth sea; but the jury-mast, which had been rigged forward in place of the lost foremast, had gone over on the port bow, instead of falling to the starboard side of the ship like the other masts, and the fore staysail attached to it, dragging overboard, had got sucked into the hole which the iceberg had made, thus stopping the inrun of water to any appreciable extent Ben said that he believed they would be able so to patch up the damaged place in the bows after a time, thanks to this circumstance, that they might hope to make a shift of rigging up a sail again to run the ship ashore with.

"Bravo!" said Captain Dinks on hearing this. "Take what men you like and commence the repairs at once, for there's no time to be lost Mr Meldrum, what say you to this?"

But, Mr Meldrum had gone below to his daughters, well imagining the state of alarm they would be in and rather surprised that Kate had not already made her appearance on deck. When he reached the cuddy, the reason of her absence was explained.

Poor Florry had met with an accident, the concussion when the ship had struck the iceberg having thrown her out of her berth, cutting her head against the cabin door; and Kate, assisted by Mr Lathrope, was binding up the wound and comforting the sufferer.

"I guess, mister," said the American, looking up as Mr Meldrum entered the main saloon, "I've had to act the good Samaritan, same as your gal did to me when I got jammed together t'other day in my innards agin the wash-stand! We're fixin' up the little miss finely. 'Tain't much of an injoory, I kalkerlate, missy, though thar be a sight of blood, and it'll soon git closed up agin!"

"Thanks for your kind services," said Mr Meldrum. "I would have been down before, but was too busy on deck."

"I know," replied the other, nodding his head—"helping the captain out of the muss, eh? That wer an all-fired smash, though! Done much hurt?"

"Yes," said Mr Meldrum guardedly, with a glance at the girls; "but the mischief's over now for the present, though."

"I see, I see," whispered Mr Lathrope; "I don't need nary nother explanation, mister. I hev shed my eye-teeth, I hev, and thar's no use in skearin' folks. That madam the Meejur, now, has been going on tree-men-jus, an' it has ben as much as your gal could kinder dew to get her to quiet down. Jee-rusalem! but she wer goin' to have the cap'en up on court-martial, an' the steward tarred and feathered, an' the Lord knows what! Then, too, ther wer that b'y of hern, squalling like a frog in a fit, the durned young imp, I'd lief have skinned him! If it hadn't been for your gal, they'd have raised thunder aboard, they would: you oughter be kinder proud, mister, to hev sich a sensible young woman fur yer darter! She warn't a bit skeart when the shock came; but braced herself up as cool as a cucumber, and thar she's ben, keeping them noisy folks quiet, and tendin' her little siss like a Christian!"

"Indeed I am proud of her," said Mr Meldrum, gazing at Kate fondly; "but you say nothing about yourself. You've been making yourself of use too."

"Snakes and alligators, mister, I ain't worth a corn-chuck alongside of your gal! In course, I wer a bit flabbergasted when we collided just now—with one of them hammocks of ice, I guess, hey!"

"Yes," said Mr Meldrum, "we ran against an iceberg, and a pretty big one too."

"I thought so," continued the other. "But you knows me by this time. I never gets upshot by no matter what happens, so I jest fixes on one of them life-belts I always has handy whenever I travels on them high-pressure steamboats we hev on the Mississippi—whar you run the chance of getting busted up regular every trip—and thar I turned out of my cabin slick for anything, so I wer able to help miss, har, in shaking down that dreadful old screech-owl yander, and plaster up little missy arterwards."

"How's your arm now?" asked Mr Meldrum kindly.

"Oh, the durned thing's all right, only a bit stiff. Madam gave it a squoze jist now when I histed her off the floor, whar she got throwed down and wer bellowin' like a mad bull in fly time. That made the pain grip me agin; but I dessay it's all right now for a scrimmage if needs be."

"And where's Mrs Negus, eh?"

"Thar she is, with that young imp clasped in her arms, sobbin' her heart out in her cabin; and if you go fur to comfort her, as I did just now, why, she bites your nose off like a crocodile, she dew! She sez we'll all go to the bottom; and that the cap'en and everybody else have runned the ship ashore just to spite her—she knows, she sez, it's ben only done fur that!"

And the American laughed with a keen relish of the joke, which no sense of his own peril could subdue.

"She isn't far out in thinking the ship going down," said Mr Meldrum gravely. "The vessel has a hole knocked in her bows, through which you might drive an omnibus, and her fore compartment is full of water. We'll soon have to abandon her, although, I've no doubt, she'll keep afloat for some hours yet. I advise you, Mr Lathrope, to put on the warmest suit of clothes you've got, and get together any few little things that may be of use in a boat, as I'm going to do. Kate, my dear," he added, addressing his daughter, who had been listening attentively while he had been talking to the American, at the same time that she hushed and soothed Florry, who was moaning with pain from her injured head, "you'd better do likewise; and see also to poor Mrs Negus, who appears utterly helpless and unable to look after herself. Where are the steward and stewardess?"

"The stewardess went on deck some time ago, papa, to try and get a cup of tea for Mrs Negus from the galley, and she has not yet returned," answered Kate; "I think the steward is asleep in his pantry."

"I thought him too big a coward to keep so quiet when the ship was in any danger," said her father. "However, he'll have to rouse up now, whether he likes it or not."

"Hi, Llewellyn!" shouted he, going up to the door of the pantry, which was closed, and rapping outside with his fist loudly several times.

But there was no answer; so, turning the handle of the lock unceremoniously, he looked within and saw to his astonishment the object of his quest coiled up in a corner of a locker that ran across one side of the pantry, with a heap of blankets drawn tightly over his head.

Mr Meldrum entered and proceeded to shake the human bundle, calling the man again by name; when, after a little while, he disinterred his terrified face from amidst the folds of his coverings, looking as pale as a Niobe in marble.

"Wha-wha-what do you want?" Llewellyn stammered out, with his usual stutter when spoken to sharply.

"Rouse up, man, and turn out at once," said Mr Meldrum. "What do you mean by hiding yourself here, cowering in a

corner like a frightened hound, when the ship's in danger and there's work for all hands to do."

"I thought she was going down, sir, and—and—"

"And you hadn't the pluck to face your fate like a man, eh!" continued Mr Meldrum, finishing his sentence for him. "But you must know that brave men don't allow cowards to hamper their movements! Get up at once, sir, and see about raising up all the tinned meats and cabin stores you can fetch out of the steerage. Now, look sharp!"

"Ye-e-es, sir," replied Llewellyn, crawling unwillingly out of his corner; "but, Cap'en Dinks said—"

"No matter what Captain Dinks said," interrupted Mr Meldrum, "I've got his authority for what I am doing, and order you at once to set about getting the provisions up for the boats. We'll shortly have to abandon the ship; and, if you don't obey my orders, you shall be left behind."

"I'll do it at once, sir," answered the steward with alacrity, the threat of being abandoned in the sinking vessel being quite sufficient to expedite his movements; and he at once made for the after hatch to get down into the hold, Mr Meldrum satisfying himself that he had set about the task before leaving him, and then, with a kindly word or two to Kate and Mr Lathrope, going on deck again.

On gaining the poop, Mr Meldrum found that the snow had ceased to fall, the gale having gone down a bit. There was also a clear sky overhead, and a few stars were shining out; but the heavy misty fog still hung over the water, like a curtain, preventing the view of anything beyond a limited range from the sides of the ship, while the sea was extremely rough, the waves being nasty and choppy, as if some current or tideway was working against the wind, causing the rollers to break over the battered bows every now and then in sheets of foam.

However, the outlook was better than he expected; and, besides, he could see, on looking round, that no time had been lost by Captain Dinks and the crew since he had been below.

The wreck of the main-mast and mizzen-mast, with the yards and sails attached, which had been knocking about in the water alongside the ship—bumping against the timbers and threatening a danger almost as bad as the collision—had been cut adrift, the smaller spars being first cast loose and hoisted on board in case of need for jury-masts. The carpenter and some of the hands, meanwhile, had braced up the broken bulkhead with stout beams placed across, so as to prevent it from giving way under the strain and allowing the contents of the fore compartment to flood the main hold; for, it was utterly impossible for the present to clear it of water, although the pumps, which had been kept constantly going, sufficed to keep the rest of the ship pretty free and avert the danger of sinking for a time. It was only a question of time!

The captain was just then overhauling the longboat, which, with the jolly-boat, that had been stowed inside of the former for safety and convenience, were the only two boats that had been left, the others having been washed off the beams at the time that the cook's caboose had been carried away during the cyclone; and Mr Meldrum, going down on to the main-deck, approached the skipper.

"We'll have to take to the boats soon," said the captain, turning round as he came up, "that is, when the sea moderates a bit. I don't see anything else that can be done—do you?"

"If I were you," suggested Mr Meldrum, "I would try and run her ashore first and beach her. We're not far from Kerguelen Land, and though it is now winter time on the island and desolate enough, it would be better our stopping there than wandering about the ocean in the boats, trying to get into the track of the Australian liners, or else making for the Cape, the only place we could steer for."

"It's a bad look-out any way," said the captain despondently.

"Yes, I grant that," replied the other; "but, if we land there and manage to hold out till September or October, only three months at the outside, a lot of whaling craft generally put into Kerguelen for the seal-fishery about that time, and I daresay we could get one of these to take us to the Cape."

"Perhaps that would be the best," said Captain Dinks, reflecting a moment—"but what would you advise now—how are we to get ashore, eh!"

"Why, rig up a jury-mast or two at once and make for the land!" answered Mr Meldrum promptly. "The island must be close to us now to leeward; and with this wind we ought to be able to reach the shore by daybreak, when we would be able to look about us better. It is certainly not the slightest good our remaining here doing nothing till then, for the carpenter tells me, it is only just as much as the men can do to keep down the water by constant pumping, so by the morning they'll be pretty nigh exhausted and we be no better off. Besides, as you can observe for yourself, it would be madness while that sea is on to try to launch the boats, unless we are absolutely compelled to do so in order to save our lives; whereas, if we run the old craft ashore, we will have the boats for a last chance."

"I suppose you're right," said Captain Dinks, "though I can't say that I like to leave the poor old thing's bones to bleach on this outlandish coast. What say you, Mr McCarthy, eh?"

"I agree, sure, with Mr Meldrum, son. He spakes like a sailor; and as he's a naval officer he ought to know best," answered the chief mate. Mr Adams and Frank Harness, who were both also admitted to the "council of war," having given a similar opinion, Mr Meldrum's advice was immediately acted upon.

Without delay, a small jury-mast was rigged up aft, attached to the stump of the mizzen-mast, and one on the main-deck, close to where the main-mast bitts yet remained, as it was thought better not to step the jury-masts too far forward, for fear of the vessel plunging her bows under. After this, the mizzen-topsail and topgallant-sail, which had

been cut off from the yards and saved from the wreck, were hoisted on roughly improvised yards; when, the *Nancy Bell* being brought round with the wind abeam, was cast loose from the wreckage and headed due east towards the land—in the very direction whence had been heard the sound of breakers, and which all on board had been so anxious to give a wide berth to but so few short hours before. What had been her dire peril was now looked on as a haven of safety!

Chapter Sixteen.

Almost a Mutiny.

Towards midnight, the slight surface fog, which had up to that time hung over the sea, lifted, when it could be seen that the ice had almost all disappeared—drifting towards the south, where some towering bergs, amongst which probably was the one that had done all the mischief to the ill-fated vessel, were conspicuous in the distance.

The wind, also, had diminished considerably in force, blowing now from a point to the westward of north, although the waves were still rolling heavily, as they always do for some time after a storm in the southern ocean, setting in towards the land that was just faintly visible right ahead of the *Nancy Bell*, and whither she was now proceeding steadily, but, of course, making but very slow progress through being waterlogged forwards and possessing such small sail-power.

There was no moon, to complete the description; but the heavens above were twinkling with bright stars that gave sufficient light to illumine the horizon for miles round, for they touched up the crests of the waves with coruscations of silver, and made the broken spray gleam like jets of flame above the dark expanse of water. Everything, in a word, looked favourable for their enjoying a quiet interval on board after all the anxiety and hard work of the preceding day and night.

Seeing that no pressing danger was imminent, and that nothing more could be done for the present, Mr Meldrum tried to induce Captain Dinks, who had been on deck for over forty-eight hours, to go below and have some rest, as he had a good deal yet before him to go through, and looked fagged and worn-out.

But the captain would not hear of the suggestion for a moment.

“No,” said he; “I mistrust that mutinous chap, Bill Moody, and the lot who sided with him in making a rush for the boats when we struck. I know they would be up to some mischief or other as soon as my back is turned.”

“But there is McCarthy your chief mate,” replied Mr Meldrum, “surely he can take command of the vessel, as he has so often done before, while you have a spell off?”

“Ah, McCarthy, though as good an officer as ever stepped a plank, isn’t myself, Mr Meldrum; and as for Adams, he wants backbone, while Frank Harness is too young a lad for the men to obey him if any difficulty arose. Besides, there are a lot of things to see to that want my supervision, which must be given while I have this breathing time—the boats have to be prepared and provisioned, for instance.”

“Talking of that,” interrupted the other, “I have roused up that lazy steward of yours and set him to work collecting all the tinned meats and cabin stores he can find, and getting them up out of the steerage.”

“That’s right,” said the captain. “It was very thoughtful, and just what I had intended doing myself, only I forgo it! I have got our old friend Snowball, the cook, busy here in the same way, boiling as much salt beef and pork as he can cram into his coppers, so that it may be ready-cooked when wanted and save time. The darkey has got the galley fire in full blast now.”

“A good precaution,” said Mr Meldrum; “but I do wish I could get you to go below. If you like I’ll remain on deck in your stead?”

But, no! Captain Dinks would not hear of leaving the deck until the fate of the poor *Nancy Bell* was settled for good or ill; and there he remained amidships—the mates sticking by him and lending a willing hand so as to inspire the crew with an equal energy—superintending the constant pumping operations which were necessary to keep the water from gaining, one watch at a time being engaged solely on the task. Others were preparing the longboat and jolly-boat for service, which was a tedious job, for the gunwales and bottom planking of both had been damaged greatly by the knocking about they had sustained since leaving England, even if they had been properly seaworthy then—a very problematical point, for many of the boats of merchant ships which carry passengers on distant voyages are never taken off the chocks or tested from year’s end to year’s end, in spite of all marine codes and Passenger Acts or Board of Trade ordinances to the contrary, and Mr Plimsoll’s effort notwithstanding!

When Mr Meldrum got below again he found that matters had quieted down in the cuddy. Mrs Negus, persuaded at last that the ship was not immediately going to engulf herself and her darling boy, had been induced to take some refreshment—Snowball sending in a splendid hot supper by the direction of the captain, as the regular routine of the meals in the cuddy had been somewhat revolutionised through the calamities of the vessel. If she had any scruples, Mr Lathrope set the good lady a praiseworthy example in looking after the necessities of the inner man.

“S’pose we air gwine down to Davy Jones’s Locker,” said the American, with a comical twinkle in his cunning grey eyes; “thar’s no reason why we shouldn’t go with a full stummick as well as one like an empty meal sack, hey? Look at me, marm. I treats it philosophically, I dew, fur I find thars nothin’ like feedin’ to keep up a coon’s grit.”

Mrs Major Negus murmured something about “somebody” being “shockingly vulgar,” but, whether inspired by Mr

Lathrope's "philosophical" remark or not, she could not resist a second helping of some capital "lobscouse" which the darkey cook had dished up most appetisingly; after which the good lady retired to her cabin for the night in much more cheerful spirits.

Florry's cut head was easier, too, and by Mr Meldrum's directions she and Kate turned in comparatively early. They really both wanted a good night's rest, and their father was not long in following out his own precept, advising Mr Lathrope to do likewise, to which he was nothing loth; so that, soon after eight bells had struck, all the occupants of the saloon were buried in repose and the ship quiet—with the exception of an occasional tinkering sound from the main-deck, coupled with the "clink-clank" of the chain-pumps and the wash of the waves past the sides, all of which were almost inaudible aft.

About four bells in the morning watch, Mr Meldrum awoke; and, without disturbing any of the others, he rose and went on deck.

He seemed to have a presentiment of something happening.

It was quite dark now, the stars having gone in and the sky become clouded over; while the wind had changed and was blowing in short sharp gusts from the southward, which, with the chopping sea, made the ship labour a good deal, taking in lots of water forward. She seemed to bury her head in every wave, her bows being so depressed from the fore compartment being full; and this compelled the crew in consequence to work double spells at the pumps, which caused much grumbling, for the men were almost dead beat, although Captain Dinks still kept them hard at it.

The disaffection had almost reached a head before Mr Meldrum came up, on account of the captain keeping the port watch, in which was Moody and two of his special chums—at the unpleasant task, without allowing them a turn off below, as he had done the other watch, the members of which, however, had had their spell of duty before "all hands" had been called, and thus were fully entitled to the relief. But, the grumblers, in considering their own grievance, did not recollect this, and the appearance of the passenger, whom some of them were already inclined to dislike from something Ben Boltrope had dropped of his being a naval man, and the fact of his now ranging himself alongside of the captain, as if to support his authority, brought matters to a crisis.

"Spell ho!" shouted Bill Moody defiantly, dropping his arms and striking work. "I'm hanged if I pump another stroke! The blessed old hulk can go to the bottom as soon as she likes."

"Nor I," exclaimed another, likewise leaving off. "Nor I!" chorused half a dozen more; and, in a second, the pumps were at a standstill.

Adams, the second mate, who was in charge of the men on the main deck—Mr McCarthy and Frank Harness having been sent below by Captain Dinks along with the starboard watch—stood meanwhile, staring aghast at the delinquents and not knowing what to do, "like a stock fish," as Mr Meldrum thought, looking on the scene.

It was a critical moment.

Captain Dinks, of course, hearing the steady "clink, clank" of the pumps stop, knew that something had occurred, and guessed the cause; but he waited to hear what the second mate would say before he interfered, nudging Mr Meldrum to call his attention, although the latter was already listening with keen interest.

"Do, my men," they could hear Adams entreat the rebellious gang, "do put your hearts into it and start work again! It won't be for long, you know."

"A cursed sight too long for me!" said Moody, interrupting him with a coarse laugh. "You aren't a going to come over us with your soft sawder, nor the skipper neither! I, for one, ain't agoing to have any more o' this slave-driving work! Why should we sweat our hearts out trying to keep the old tub afloat and drive her to shore, when we can reach there quite as well in the boats, without half the trouble? I votes for quitting her at once—what say you, mates?" and he turned round to the others, seeking their support.

"Aye, aye!" shouted several voices together with acclamation. "Let us have no more pumping or slaving; but quit the ship at once and leave the cussed thing to sink. To the boats! To the boats!"

Captain Dinks thought he had allowed the matter to go far enough. The time for action had arrived, and he was ready.

"Hold!" cried he, in clear ringing tones that penetrated fore and aft the vessel and which could be heard above every other sound, advancing to the top of the poop ladder and drawing a revolver from his pocket as he spoke. "The first man who touches either of those boats without my orders, I'll shoot like a dog!"

At the first sound of his voice the men had stopped speaking, and now there was a dead silence in which you could have heard a pin drop. Not a movement was made by any of the men—all standing still as if turned to stone.

"Do you know that what you are doing, men, is rank mutiny?" continued the captain, taking advantage of the occasion. "Return to your duty at once, however, and I'll think no more about it. What I am making you do is for the good of us all, and I wouldn't give you a moment's unnecessary work if I could avoid it!"

"But," interposed Bill Moody.

"Ah, I thought it was you, you scamp, ever trying to foment discord amongst the crew—a lazy hound, always grumbling and skulking, you're not worthy the name of a sailor—you are only a thing aboard a ship! I'll soon settle your reckoning, my hearty!" And, little man as he was, Captain Dinks sprang down the poop ladder in one bound; and, dashing up to where Moody was standing, knocked him senseless to the deck with a blow from the butt end of

the pistol which he held in his hand right across his temples.

"There!" exclaimed he, when the ringleader of the gang was thus disposed of, kicking his body on one side and spurning it with his foot. "That's the way I deal with mutineers! Now, man the pumps again, my lads, and set to work with a will. As Mr Adams told you just now, it will not be for long that you'll have to stick at it, for we'll soon be able to beach the vessel, and then your task will cease!"

Cowed by his summary treatment of Moody, rather than encouraged by his words, the men started pumping again, although without any heartiness, clink-clanking till daylight, when they were relieved by the other watch and went below, taking Moody with them—that worthy having regained his consciousness after a time, in consequence of the water in the lee scuppers, where he was lying, washing over him and acting more efficaciously than the application of smelling-salts or sal volatile would have done under other circumstances.

Before the mutineer went below, however, he turned his scowling face towards the poop, the blood all streaming down from a rather ugly cut on the left temple, and shook his fist in the direction of Captain Dinks, although the latter did not see the gesture, for his face was turned at the moment to the binnacle.

But, Mr Meldrum saw it.

"You'll have some more trouble yet from that fellow!" said he to the captain, relating what he had seen and telling how Moody looked.

"Pooh!" exclaimed the captain. "He's only a bully and a lazy grumbler; and all bullies and grumblers are curs at heart!"

"Ah," said the other, "but those sort of sneaking chaps are just as likely to knife you as not when your back's turned, though they would be afraid to face you pluckily, like a man."

"Let him knife away," replied Captain Dinks. "That is, if I give him the chance! I fancy he'll remember that little tap I gave him just now; and if he gives me any occasion for it he shall have another!" The skipper then went away laughing, but Mr Meldrum, from the vindictive look he had seen on the man's face did not think it a laughing matter at all.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Barrier Reef.

As the light increased, the land in front could be seen more distinctly rising steadily out of the sea with the high elevated peak in the centre which Mr Meldrum had identified the day before as the Mount Ross marked on the chart. The mountain, however, showed now on the port bow; so, the ship must necessarily have run down a considerable portion of the western coast, after they had abandoned the idea of weathering the island on the port tack—which they had done as soon as they were alarmed by the sound of breakers, letting her drive to leeward—before the collision with the berg. This was a discovery which did not appear to give Mr Meldrum much satisfaction.

"It's a great pity," he said to the captain, "that we could not get round that northerly cape I pointed out to you, before the snowstorm and sea-fog set in! There were one or two good bays there marked on the chart, such as Christmas Harbour and Cumberland Bay, which have been properly sounded and have the points laid down; but of this western coast little appears known, and it has been only from surmise that the outlines of the map have been sketched in. I really don't think any exploring party has ever visited it since Monsieur Lieutenant de Kerguelen-Trémarec briefly surveyed it in 1772—more than a hundred years ago."

"And it might have changed a lot since then," observed Captain Dinks.

"Yes," continued Mr Meldrum; "for the French discoverer narrated all sorts of wonders about a raging volcano, with geysers and hot springs like those of Iceland; and if volcanic agency has been at work since then, no doubt the place is very much altered."

"If there is a live crater there, it can't be so very cold then, eh?"

"I don't know about that," replied Mr Meldrum. "Away in the north, I have seen boiling water freeze as soon as it was exposed to the outside air; so I don't suppose it will be much warmer here than we can expect from all accounts."

But, warm or cold, it was the only haven of refuge for the sinking ship, which slowly, and more slowly still, by reason of the stormy sea and shifting wind, the latter of which grew gustier as the morning advanced, made her laboured way towards the land in crab-like fashion—half sailing, half drifting, and burying her bows deeply every now and then in the heavy rollers she was powerless now to ride over, and rising again from the water so sluggishly that it sometimes seemed impossible that she would recover herself, but must founder, whenever she took a deeper plunge than usual.

Bye and bye, Mr Lathrope came on deck escorting Kate Meldrum; although our heroine looked more like escorting him, for he was very pale and appeared much thinner than before—if that were possible to one belonging to the order of "Pharaoh's lean kine!"

It was the first appearance of the American outside the cuddy since the accident that had crippled him, and he could not help noticing the altered state of the ship—having last seen her just before she encountered the cyclone.

"Snakes and alligators, Cap, but you hev hed it rough, and no mistake!" said he to Captain Dinks, gazing with surprise at the broken bulwarks, which had been torn away when the masts went by the board, the wrecked fore-castle, and the unsightly stumps to which the jury-masts had been attached, which now occupied the place of the tall graceful spars and neatly-braced yards, with the canvas smoothly stowed away in shipshape fashion, that he had left so trim when he went below that stormy night. "Why, you're busted up entirely, I guess!"

"Not quite yet, I hope," replied Captain Dinks, smiling mournfully as he, too, looked around; "but, the old *Nancy* has been sadly battered about. Ah, Mr Lathrope, if she hadn't been a stout built one, she'd have gone to the bottom before this!"

"You bet!" said the American, humouring this little remaining bit of pride the old seaman had in the ship he had commanded for so many years, a pride that was mingled with a sorrow at her approaching end, which he could foresee and mourn over, as if the vessel had been a living thing—"she's been a clipper in her time, and made a smart fit for it; but, the winds and the waves have licked her at last, same as they done me, when they squoze in my durned ribs t'other day."

But, the captain could not laugh at what the other had said as a joke about himself, just in order to banish the poor skipper's gloom. It seemed to him a sort of sacrilege towards the *Nancy Bell* to liken her mortal injuries to the mere temporary ones of the American; so he turned the conversation.

"I hope you feel better now?" he said.

"Wa-al, I ain't downright slick and hearty agin, that's a fact; fur my innards got a'most druv into smash! But I'm picking up, I guess, and feed reg'ler; so I s'pose I'll do, Cap, for an old hoss, eh? Durned if I don't feel kinder peckish now. Hullo, my lily-white friend," added he, catching sight of Snowball, who was bustling about the galley close to him, for Mr Lathrope had gone down on the main-deck along with Captain Dinks, to inspect the damage to the ship more narrowly than he was able to do on the poop. "Ain't it near breakfast-time? I hope you've got something for us as good as that lobscouse last night: it wer prime, and no mistake!"

"Golly, massa, no time for um 'scouse dis mornin'—too busy bilin' beef; but breakfast in um brace of shakes," replied the darkey, grinning from ear to ear and showing his white teeth and full lips to great advantage.

"I'm durned glad to hear it," said Mr Lathrope. "Look alive, Ivories, fur I feels a kinder sinkin' in my stummick that tells me it's time to stow in grub. You're a prime cook, let me tell you, darkey, and hev done me a heap of good since I've ben aboard!"

"Glad massa like um cookin'," replied Snowball; and he bustled back into his galley with the intention of continuing to deserve the high encomium he had received from such an authority on eating as the steward had reported the American to be, while the latter proceeded to remount the poop ladder and join Kate. She, however, was not now alone, Frank Harness having seized the opportunity of seeing her on deck to come up and speak to her; and the two parted with some little embarrassment as soon as Mr Lathrope approached.

Towards mid-day, the *Nancy Bell* had closed with the land so much that its features could be distinguished. A bare, inhospitable coast it looked!

It seemed nothing but a series of abrupt cliffs and headlands, six to eight hundred feet high—as well as could be judged from the distance they were off—at the base of which the waves thundered, sending up columns of spray, without any bay or opening into which they could run the ship with any chance of getting ashore in safety.

There was, certainly, a projecting cape stretching far into the sea, like an arm, to the southward, to which point the coast-line trended, and beyond that there might probably be a harbour of some sort for it was to the lee of the island; but then, the wind was now blowing from the southward and westward—the very direction almost they ought to take to give the point a wide berth—and thus, unless it chopped round, it would be utterly impossible for the crippled vessel to round the headland, save by a miracle.

Captain Dinks and Mr Meldrum looked at each other in blank dismay; for, the gale seemed to be rising again, while the sea got rougher and rougher every moment, and dark masses of cloud began to pile themselves up along the horizon to seaward. If they were unable to beach the ship soon it was but only too apparent that she would sink from under them in deep water, when—God help those on board!

Suddenly, however, when hope abandoned them both, there was a break in the dark sky just overhead and a bit of blue was to be seen, followed presently by a gleam of sunshine which sent a ray of comfort into their hearts and bid them not utterly despair. This caused one, at least, to pluck up his courage again.

"It is close on noon now," said Mr Meldrum, speaking cheerfully, "we had better take an observation, so as to see where we precisely are."

"And what good will that do us?" asked the Captain disconsolately; "no amount of observations are of any use to us now."

But he fetched out his sextant all the same, as well for the mere sake of doing "something" as to oblige Mr Meldrum; and taking advantage of a favourable opportunity, he "took" the sun.

"We're in 49 degrees 10 minutes south latitude," he observed after a short interval during which he had been calculating his reckoning, "and 68 degrees 45 minutes east longitude—if that information can help us!"

"I'll soon tell you," answered Mr Meldrum stretching out on the binnacle a chart of Kerguelen Land which he had

brought up from the cabin, and marking on it the position of the ship with a pencil. "Yes, it's exactly as I thought just now. You see that headland, there to starboard? That is the promontory put down here as Cape Saint Louis; and if we can get round it, there, as you see in the chart, we'll find ourselves in a large sheltered bay, safe from the ocean swell, where we can run her ashore with ease. Why, it is the very thing! how providential it was that I put in this chart by accident along with some others of the Pacific I had amongst my papers! I didn't know I had it till the other day."

"Ah," said Captain Dinks, returning to the main question, "but how are we going to weather the point, eh? That's the difficulty."

"We may do it yet," replied Mr Meldrum, whose hopes appeared to rise the more the Captain seemed determined to look gloomily on the outlook. "You can see for yourself that we are drifting equally as much to the south as we are sailing towards the coast, and making about the same progress each way. From this circumstance I have little doubt that there is a considerable current running southwards; and if so, it may carry us round the cape—especially should the wind shift to the northward."

"Aye, if it should!" said Captain Dinks sarcastically.

"I do not really see why it should not," persisted Mr Meldrum, "it has already veered about a good deal this morning; and, if you remember, both yesterday afternoon and on the previous day it shifted shortly after sunset to that very direction."

"Yes, I recollect," said the other with grim humour, "and the shift brought a snowstorm and a fog with it on each occasion! I hope, really, with all my heart, Mr Meldrum," he added more heartily, "that the weather may be as accommodating as you seem to fancy; but, as a matter of precaution, I will go and see that the boats may be ready, in case we have to abandon the ship soon, which I think will be the end of it all. They are both patched up now, so as to be pretty serviceable; and fortunately, there'll be no difficulty in getting them over the side, as the bulwarks have been swept away, and all we'll have to do will be to launch them into the water. I am just going to superintend the stowage of the provisions and water casks. They are piled on the main-deck quite handy; and I will see, too, that the oars and sails are not forgotten."

"Very good," answered Mr Meldrum. "But I hope we sha'n't want them after all; and, while you are down there, I'll remain here and look after the pilotage of the ship—that is, if you'll send some one below in my place to see to my daughters and their arrangements. I have told Kate already that she must only take the barest necessaries with her, in case we have to embark in the boats, and above all, not to forget warm clothing for herself and Florry; so you'd better advise whoever you send down, to see that Mrs Major Negus does the same. Mr Lathrope is smart enough to look after himself."

"Aye, aye," said Captain Dinks, as he turned to descend to the main-deck, "I think I'll send down Frank Harness. He's the most of a ladies' man on board the ship, and I imagine that he and Miss Kate will get on pretty well together, eh, Mr Meldrum?"

But the other made no reply to this remark. He was too busily engaged just then in looking out across the rolling sea astern, and watching a haze which appeared to be creeping up over the water to the northward, with a dark line of cloud hovering over it, both coming rapidly towards the ship.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed at last in an ecstasy of joy, when his faint hope became confirmed into a certainty; "the wind's shifting, and chopping round to the north in our favour!"

"You don't say so?" said Captain Dinks equally excited, abandoning the provisioning of the boats and skipping up the poop-ladder like a young two-year-old; "why, yes, really! It's the best piece of news I ever heard! Put the helm amidships!" he added to the man at the wheel. "We'll have to ease her round and run before it a bit for the last time; and if the wind only holds to the northward for a short spell, we'll get round the point yet and lay her old bones ashore decently. Steady, Boltrope, steady!"

"Steady it is!" laconically answered the carpenter, whose trick it was at the wheel, obeying the captain's directions implicitly.

"Look alive, McCarthy, and square the yards," was the captain's next command; "but do it gingerly, my man, do it gingerly! If we lose the jury-masts now it will be all up with us."

"Aye, aye, sorr," was the response of the chief mate, as he aided himself in carrying out the order; and the vessel's head coming round south by west, under the impulse of the helm and the shifting of the sails, she began to exhibit some of her old powers and claw off the land, bringing the cape now to bear upon her port bow well to leeward.

In addition to this, it was perceived that she made much better way through the water than when she had been steering direct for the shore, as, from the breeze being now well abeam, it made her heel over on her side, thus elevating her broken bows somewhat and preventing her from dipping her head so frequently in the waves.

It was a moment of intense interest and suspense, everybody being on deck to witness the struggle the ship was making against the odds opposed to her.

If she got round the point, they would be comparatively safe—at least they thought so; whereas, if the wind failed, or a brace started, or the rudder proved powerless to guide her at a critical period, the vessel would be driven against the iron-bound cliff they were approaching in an oblique line—against whose base the heavy rollers were now thundering with a crashing roar that each instant became louder as they neared the point, throwing their spray high up its precipitous face; and then—Why, they were lost!

Frank Harness was at this time standing by the side of Kate and Florry on the poop; but nearer to the former, who had just asked him to save her little sister should the ship strike.

"I will," said he in a whisper close to her ear, "God helping me! and you, too; but call me 'Frank' again, Miss Meldrum. You did so once, you know, when you caught me that time I was nearly washed overboard, and saved me!"

"Do you remember that?" asked Kate.

"I do," said he; "how could I forget it? Do not fear, I'll save you and Florry too!"

"Thank you, 'Frank,' then for your promise," whispered she—in accents so low that they were almost drowned by the noise of the waves dashing against the cliff; but he heard her, and his face lightened up as brightly as if he had been redeemed from all peril and saw heaven before him.

Onward the ship sped, ever drawing closer to that terrible wall of rock and yet gaining at the same time inch by inch on the promontory, that jutted out into the sea like an arm stretched forth to stay her progress; while, as the anxious moments flew by, the northerly wind which had come so opportunely to their rescue gradually rose into a gale, threatening to destroy them—the *Nancy Bell* approaching the cliff so closely, as she skirted by, that it seemed to those on board that they might have touched it by merely stretching out their hands over the side. The sky, too, was growing darker and darker every moment.

They were now quite near the southerly point of the cape, and within half a cable's length of its precipitous face: five minutes—three minutes—one minute—would settle the question.

"Luff, man, luff!" shouted the captain, as all held their breath with excitement.

It was a case of touch and go!

"Hurrah! down with the helm! she's done it!" called out Captain Dinks again, as the vessel glided by the last spur of the promontory, and, rounding to on the other side, she seemed to get into smoother water—a fine beach stretching out in the distance a few miles away and no rocks being apparent—"the old ship has conquered, and won the race after all."

His triumph, however, was as short-lived as it was premature.

Hardly had the *Nancy Bell* rounded the cape, than the air grew dense around them, and snow began to fall heavily; while a thick fog rising, shut out the shore and every object from view. Then, as Captain Dinks and Mr Meldrum were deliberating whether it would be better under the circumstances to run the ship straight for the beach—which they had calculated to be some five miles in front of them to the south-east or the cape they had just passed—or else to continue pumping until the weather got lighter and they could see better where they were going, the matter was settled for them, in a very unexpected manner, by the ship running on to a sunken ridge of rock immediately under her forefoot; and, in a moment, there she stuck hard and fast, bumping and scraping her bottom, with a harsh, grating sound and a quivering and rending of her timbers, as if every plank below the water-line was being torn out of her piecemeal.

The *Nancy Bell* had struck on some barrier reef, which guarded at a distance the desolate and inhospitable shore, just at the very moment everything was deemed secure and all danger past! And, as she stranded, the thick-falling white snow which had already covered the decks seemed to be busy wreathing a shroud for the ill-fated ship, while the surges sang her requiem in their dull, heart-breaking roar—the sea-fog hanging over the scene of the calamity the while like a sombre pall.

Chapter Eighteen.

A Foul Blow!

Every one was on deck at the time—the crew, the officers, the passengers; but, with the exception of a slight scream from Mrs Major Negus, which passed unnoticed, not a single exclamation of terror or alarm was uttered. All seemed completely stupefied by the unexpected shock, their consternation being too great for words—they stood as if spell-bound!

Captain Dinks was the first to break the silence.

"God forgive me!" he cried out to everybody's surprise. "It is all my fault!"

"Your fault!" repeated Mr Meldrum; "how—why?"

"I should have had a man forward, sounding with the lead, but I quite forgot it—quite forgot it; and this has happened."

"Nonsense, man!" said the other to cheer him up—the captain appearing to be more concerned at his own neglect, as he regarded it, than he was at the actual fact of the ship's striking on the reef—"such a precaution would have been utterly useless! We were probably in deep water a minute before; and even if a man had been stationed in the chains, he could scarcely have had time to have swung the lead and sang out the marks, before she was on the rocks! It is one of those unforeseen calamities that are inevitable and which can never be prevented by any human foresight. I for one, and I've no doubt every one else here agrees with me, entirely exonerate you from all blame."

The captain was endeavouring to make some broken reply, as far as his deep emotion would allow, when Mrs Major Negus interrupted him.

“Speak for yourself, please, Mr Meldrum,” she exclaimed, elbowing herself forwards in front of the group, her shrill high-pitched voice sounding almost like another scream, as she waved her arms wildly about and addressed Mr Meldrum and Captain Dinks alternately. “Speak for yourself, please, for I don’t agree with you at all! I say it is the captain’s fault; and he knows it, though it’s rather late in the day for him to acknowledge it! And I’d like to know, sir, how I and my darling boy are going to get on shore now in this blinding snowstorm—in such a bleak and dreary outlandish place, too! A nice captain you are; and you bargained to take us safe to New Zealand when you took our passage-money. My poor Maurice, oh my dear boy, you’ll never, never see your father now, for we’ll all be drowned, and Captain Dinks is the cause of it!”

So shrieking, she proceeded to weep and wail in a way that made Mr Meldrum lose all patience with her.

“Peace, woman!” cried he indignantly. “This is no time for hysterics and such violent displays: you’d better keep them till the fine weather comes, and remain quiet now! The best thing you can do if you hope to escape, is to allow the captain to see about getting the boats ready to take us off, for the ship will probably break up soon.”

His latter remark, while it reduced “the Major” to a state of limp collapse that made her silent and subdued, had the effect he intended, of rousing the captain to action—thus causing him to forget for a time his grief at the *Nancy Bell’s* disaster in having to exert himself so as to provide for the safety of those on board.

“Main-deck ahoy there!” he shouted.

“Aye, aye, sorr,” answered the first mate, who had remained there, looking to the trimming of the sails while the ship was working up to the cape.

“Have the men finished storing those things in the boats yet?”

“They’re jist at it now, sorr. We were all a bit flabbergasted when the poor crathur struck; but we’re working hard now, sorr, and the boats will soon be ready to launch into the wather.”

“That’s right, McCarthy, we’ve no time to lose. Send one of the hands forwards to see how her head lies.”

“Aye, aye, sorr. Mr Adams has gone already sure: an’ I’ve sint the carpenter, Boltrope, to sound the well.”

“He’d better by far sound alongside, to see what depth of water we’re in and which would be the best side for launching the boats off!” replied Captain Dinks. “But stay, Harness,” he added, “you can do that. Heave the lead aft here, and then amidships, telling me what soundings you get.”

On returning from his mission forwards, Mr Adams reported that the vessel’s bows were fixed hard and fast between two conical points of rock, which were covered by about four fathoms of water; while Frank Harness, who had been sounding round the ship as the captain directed, stated that there were twenty fathoms of water aft and the same on the port side amidships, but on the starboard, or right-hand side, the lead only gave the same depth the second mate had found forward—consequently, the ship’s stern, being so much lighter than the flooded fore-compartment, had slewed round with the sea towards the reef, on which therefore the *Nancy Bell* must have projected herself more than half her length. Probably, had her bows not been so depressed, she would have gone over it altogether with a scrape, merely taking off her false keel and dead-wood without doing any material damage.

As it was, however, there she was; and the question now was whether the tide was at the ebb or flow at the time she struck. If the former, the likelihood was that as soon as the tide began to rise, the vessel would float off and founder, Boltrope having reported that there were eight feet of water in the hold and that it was gaining fast—the pumping operations, of course, having long since been stopped, but, should she have run on the reef at high water, there she was immovably fixed as long as she held together; and in that case they would be able to get ashore to the mainland in comfort, almost at their own convenience, should the weather remain calm, in addition to saving many articles from the wreck that would be of use to them, and a much larger proportion of the ship’s provisions and stores.

After the first bumping and scraping that had immediately succeeded her stranding, the *Nancy Bell* had remained quiet, as if the old ship was glad to be at rest after all the buffeting about and bruising she had received from the boisterous billows. Hence, the natural alarm that had been excited by the ship’s striking had calmed down, there being nothing in her present situation to heighten the sense of danger; for the vessel was sheltered from the wind under the lee of the cape, and the sea, in comparison with the rough water she had recently passed through and the stormy waves she had battled with when beating round the point, was almost calm. Everybody, therefore, inspired by the example set them by Mr Meldrum and the captain, remained perfectly cool and collected, the crew obeying the orders given them with alacrity and working as heartily as if the poor old *Nancy Bell* were still the staunch clipper of yore, careering over the ocean in the full panoply of her canvas plumage and prosecuting her voyage, instead of lying, a broke and battered hulk, hard and fast ashore on an outlying reef of rocks at Kerguelen Land, the “Desolation Island”—name of ominous import—of Antarctic whaling ships!

Even Bill Moody, mutinous as he had shown himself before and lazy to a degree, now appeared metaphorically to “put his shoulder to the wheel,” as if to make amends for the past, lending a willing hand to the preparations that were being made by Mr McCarthy for equipping the boats and laying down ways for launching them from the main-deck—there being no davits now, nor any means for rigging a derrick to lift them over the side. Indeed, when Mr Adams ordered a gang to man the pumps again on the carpenter’s reporting that the water was gaining in the hold, the whilom mutineer was one of the first to step forwards for the duty, although Captain Dinks at once countermanded the order, seeing its inutility, and saying that there was no use in working a willing horse to death!

"They could never clear her now, Adams," said he, "pump as hard as they could; and if they did it would be useless, for she'll never float again. However, if you want to give the men something to do, you can set to work breaking cargo and lightening her amidships, for then we'll swing further up on the reef and get fixed more firmly."

"Very good, sir," replied the second mate; and the hands were therefore at once started to open the hatches, getting out some of the heavy goods from the hold below, especially the dead-weight from just abaft the main-mast, that had so deducted from the ship's buoyancy when sailing on a wind during the earlier part of her voyage.

Moody's change of demeanour had not escaped the notice of the captain; and he commented on it to Mr Meldrum, saying that he thought the lesson he had given him had had a very satisfactory result. "There is nothing," said he, "so persuasive as a knock-down argument!"

The other, however, did not believe in the rapid conversion.

"I've heard of shamming Abraham before," said he. "The rascal may have something to gain, and wishes to put you off your guard by his apparent alacrity and willingness to work. If you had seen the scowl he gave you when your back was turned that time after you knocked him down, you wouldn't trust him further than you could help! I believe all this good behaviour of his is put on, and that you'll see the real animal come out by and by."

"All right!" said Captain Dinks as cheerfully as if the matter were of no moment to him; "we'll see! But we must first observe the tide and the ship's position on the rocks; I think we'll be able to decide those points before the other matter can be settled, by a long way!"

When the *Nancy Bell* struck, it had been close upon six bells in the second dog-watch—seven o'clock in the evening—the entire afternoon having passed away so rapidly while those on board were anxiously watching the struggle of the vessel against the wind and sea in her endeavours to weather the cape, that, in their intense excitement as they awaited the denouement which would solve all their hopes and fears, they took no heed of the flight of time. It seemed really but a few brief minutes, instead of hours, from the period when Captain Dinks had taken the sun at noon to the terrible moment of the catastrophe.

Now, it was midnight, or approaching to it, the intervening period having glided by much more speedily through the fact of everybody having been engaged in doing something towards the common safety of all. Not even the lady passengers had been exempted from the task, Mr Meldrum having told Kate to go below and collect whatever she saw in the cabins that might be of use to them on the island; while Mrs Negus, dropping her dignity for once, cordially assisted. As for Florry and Maurice they participated in the work with the greatest glee, looking upon the wreck as if it had been specially brought about for their enjoyment, like an impromptu picnic—it was the realisation of their wildest childish dreams.

All this while the ship lay quiet, as has been stated, save that after a time she took a slight list to starboard, as if settling down on the rocks, a fact which confirmed the captain in his belief that it had been high water when she went on the reef. This increased his satisfaction.

"She won't move now," said he to Mr Meldrum. "She's wedged as securely forwards as if she were on her cradle; and, unless a storm comes, she'll last for a week."

"How about when the tide flows again?" asked the other.

"Oh, she can't float off. That weight of water in the fore compartment has regularly nailed her on the rocks, thus preventing the only danger I feared—that of her slipping off into deep water as the tide ebbed. As she struck when it was flood and jammed herself firmly then on the reef, there she'll remain when it flows again; so, we have plenty of time before us to transport the whole cargo ashore if we like!"

"I hope so, I'm sure," replied Mr Meldrum; "but you should recollect that, from the experience we've already had, the weather is not to be trusted for very long hereabouts. If it comes on to blow again from the south and the sea should get up, we'll be in a nasty position."

"Don't croak," said Captain Dinks, who seemed to have quite recovered his spirits as the others around him became despondent. "Look, the snowstorm has ceased already and the sea-fog is rising and drifting away. Why, we'll have a fine bright night after all!"

It was as the captain had stated. The fog had lifted up and the snow stopped falling; but, his hopes of a fine night were doomed to be disappointed, for, although the sky above cleared for a short spell and allowed a few stray stars to peep out, while an occasional gleam of moonshine lit up the ship's surroundings, the heavens were soon obscured again with thick driving clouds, the wind shifting to the southward and westward and blowing right into the bay behind Cape Saint Louis, where the *Nancy Bell* was aground.

Presently, a heavy rolling sea began to sweep in upon her from the offing; and as the tide rose again, her stern swung more to the starboard side, being driven up higher on the rocks, while her whole frame became uneasy, rocking to and fro and quivering from abaft the main hatch, the fore part of her grinding and working about in a way that threatened to tear her soon to pieces.

"I'm afraid she won't last till morning," said Mr Meldrum, who had never left the deck, but was watching the course of events. "We'd better take to the boats while we can. By and by it may be too late!"

"Oh no," replied Captain Dinks, "she'll hold out all right, and it's best for us to land by daylight. Besides, I've allowed the hands to turn in, save two or three who are keeping a sort of anchor watch, and I'm not going to rouse them out again unnecessarily—poor fellows, they've had a hard time of it the last few days!"

"Not many of them have taken advantage of your permission," said Mr Meldrum drily. "I fancy they feel like myself, too uneasy to sleep, with this fresh gale springing up again and the ship rocking about so!" As he spoke, he pointed to a group amidships, where at least half the crew were gathered about the boats, while some others were standing by Snowdrop's galley and having a warm, for the night was intensely cold.

"They can please themselves," replied the captain sententiously. "If they don't choose to turn in, they needn't; but I'm not going to launch the boats yet and leave the ship while it is safe. I'm considering what is best for us all, Mr Meldrum; and, excuse me, but as long as the vessel holds together I'm captain of her, and don't intend to give over my duty to anybody else."

This was speaking pretty plainly, so Mr Meldrum had perforce to remain silent and nurse his uneasiness; the two pacing up and down the poop on opposite sides, without ever a word passing between them for some time, just as if each ignored the other's presence.

At two o'clock in the morning, however, the wind increased and the heavy waves began to break against the windward side of the ship, dashing over her amidships in columns of spray. She also lurched more to starboard, as if thrown on her bilge, the deck inclining to an angle of forty-five degrees.

At the same time, too, the group of men forward could be dimly seen in the half light moving about excitedly. They were evidently tired of their forced inaction; for, their voices could be heard occasionally between the lulls of the breaking waves and sound of the wind whistling by. They were grumbling in tones of dissatisfaction.

The climax was put to the matter by the sudden rushing up on deck of Mr McCarthy, whom Captain Dinks had told to go below until the morning watch.

"Be jabbers, cap'en," he exclaimed, "she's druv in her starboard streaks against the rocks, and the wather is pouring in like winking. Faix, it is breaking up she'll be before were out of her, sure!"

Thus urged, the captain at length gave the order to launch the boats. This was, now, a very difficult task, for the water was boiling in eddies round the ship to leeward even on her sheltered side, although a couple of hours before it had been as calm there as a mill-pond, so that a Thames outrigger might have been floated off in safety.

As soon as the men heard the tardy word of command, there was a tussle and a rush towards the long-boat, seeing which Captain Dinks, who was standing just over the break of the poop, ran down the ladder-way and stood amongst the excited group, with his arm uplifted to enforce his orders.

"Avast there!" cried he; "get away from that long-boat, and prepare to run in the jolly-boat. I want that launched first for the ladies and passengers, and I must see them all safely out of the ship before a man Jack amongst you leaves her! Go down, McCarthy," he added to the first mate, "and ask the ladies to come on deck, sharp; we'll have the boat prepared by the time you come up with them."

The crew still hustled round the long-boat, however, and showed signs of insubordination, whilst a voice called out, "Let the passengers be! I say every man for himself now!"

"What is that I hear?" exclaimed the captain. "Are you men—are you British seamen—to abandon women and children in time of peril and seek your own safety?"

"My life's as good as anyone else's, passenger or no passenger," cried out Bill Moody defiantly, pressing closer to Captain Dinks.

"Ah!" ejaculated the latter, "I thought it was you—what! you haven't learnt your lesson yet, eh?" and he made a grab at the man's neck as if to grasp it.

But, Bill Moody was prepared this time. The captain did not catch him unawares, as he had done on the previous occasion when he had knocked him down with the butt-end of his pistol.

Raising a sheath-knife, which he must have had ready drawn for the purpose in his hand, the man plunged it with all his force into the breast of the captain as he approached him.

Captain Dinks was borne back and half turned round by the strength with which the blow was delivered. Then, staggering first on to his knees, and exclaiming, "Murder! I'm a dead man! The villain has stabbed me!" he fell forwards on the deck in a pool of blood.

Chapter Nineteen.

Deserted!

There was a cry of consternation from the men on seeing the captain fall, for, although the majority of them evidently supported Moody in the rush for the boats, none had dreamt of going to the lengths he did; still, not a man stepped forward to seize the assassin, who, coolly throwing overboard the bloody blade with which the foul blow had been dealt, proceeded to carry out his original intention of casting loose the lashings of the long-boat and launching it over the side, several assisting him as he began the task.

However, Mr Meldrum had seen what had happened from the poop, not having followed Captain Dinks too closely, for fear of being again accused of interfering with the duties of the ship.

Now, single-handed as he was, he at once dropped on to the lower deck, rushing to where Moody was standing, but the other men got in between and hustled him away; so, seeing that he could do nothing towards arresting the miscreant for the present, he bent over the poor captain and lifted him on his knee to see whether life was quite extinct. Happily he still lived! moaning faintly as Mr Meldrum raised him in his arms; consequently, as it was too dark—for it was just under the break of the poop where the wounded man was lying—for him to see what was the extent of the injury he had received, Mr Meldrum called out loudly for assistance, that he might be able to carry him below to the saloon and bind up the wound properly. It was vitally necessary to staunch the blood speedily, as it was flowing copiously and had already saturated the coat-sleeve of Mr Meldrum's supporting arm.

"What are you calling out for?" shouted out the miscreant Moody in derision. "None of them will hear you through the bulkhead. Let the cursed brute bleed to death and be hanged to him! I'm sorry I didn't settle him, right out, as I intended!"

Somebody did hear, however; for at that moment, Frank Harness—who had been told to go below along with McCarthy and Adams at midnight by the unfortunate captain, who said he would take the sole duty of the ship on himself until the morning watch was called—rushed up the companion way on to the poop.

"Did you call, Captain Dinks—Mr Meldrum!" he cried, looking about and seeing nobody there. "I thought I heard someone call out for help!"

"I'm here below on the main-deck," shouted Mr Meldrum. "Call for assistance and come and help me at once. Poor Captain Dinks has been stabbed by one of the crew, and I fear he's dying!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Frank in startled surprise, staggered for the moment; but he did not stop long to think or act.

"Mr McCarthy!—Mr Lathrope!" he called loudly down the companion. "Come up here at once and leave the ladies for the present. Something dreadful has happened!"

Then, without uttering another word, he jumped down alongside of Mr Meldrum on the lower deck; where, catching up a marlinspike that was handy, he rapped vehemently against the coamings of the hatchway, some of the hands having gone to bunk down there since the cargo had been partly removed, on account of the fore-castle being quite untenable from the water that had accumulated there, besides which the waves were now washing over it freely.

"All hands ahoy!" sang out Frank. "Tumble up, men! Tumble up just as you are! There's murder afloat!"

"Stow that yelling!" cried the group around Moody, who did not wish to be interrupted yet awhile with their plans; but Frank took no notice of their observations, save that a contemptuous smile passed over his face as he compressed his lips.

"Who did it?" asked he of Mr Meldrum, looking down at the latter as he bent over the poor captain, supporting his head and shoulders still on his knee so that he might breathe more freely.

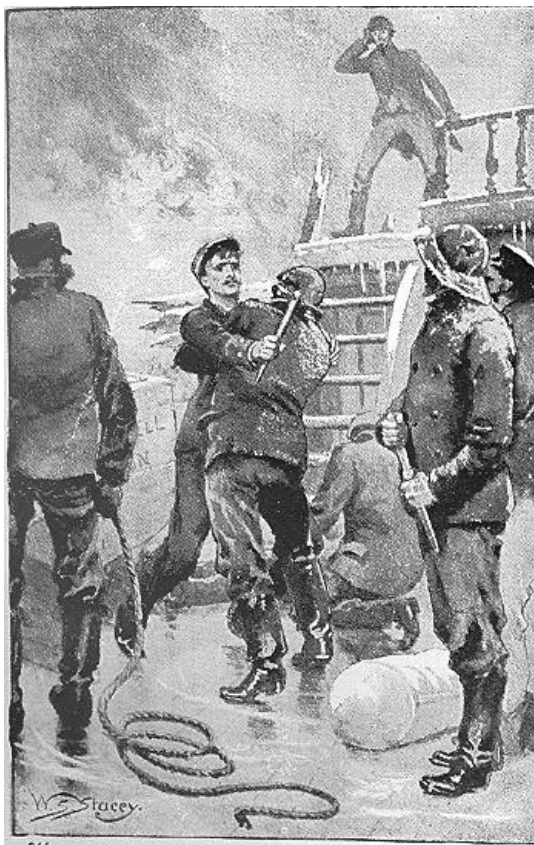
"That man there," was the answer, Mr Meldrum pointing to where Moody was standing in the centre of some ten others of the same kidney. "The same man whom Captain Dinks knocked down the other day for insubordination, and whom I saw threaten him afterwards, as I can swear. If the captain dies, he will be tried for wilful murder, and hung, for it was no accidental blow, but a deliberately premeditated deed!"

"Oh, Bill Moody? I thought it was that scoundrel!" exclaimed Frank; and in a moment he had leaped fearlessly amidst the throng—with the marlinspike fortunately still in his hand, for he was otherwise weaponless.

"Stand back!" shouted one of the men warningly, pushing him away—not in any rough fashion, but as if to keep him out of harm's way. "We don't wish to do you any hurt, Mr Harness, but I'd advise you to leave Moody alone! He's desperate now and might cause you an injury; besides which, he's one of us, and we don't intend to give him up!"

"Don't you?" exclaimed Frank, flaming up and struggling with the man who held him back; while the would-be murderer, drawing another knife from his belt, stood apparently at bay waiting for him to come on.

"Hillo! what's all this yere muss about?" called out Mr Lathrope, appearing on the poop at this juncture; "whar's everybody!"



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“HELP, HELP, THE CREW HAVE MUTINIED.”

“Here, help!” said Frank. “The crew have mutinied and the captain has been stabbed. I’m trying to get hold of the murderer; but they’re too many for me. Help, Mr Lathrope, help!”

“You will have it then, you young devil!” screamed out Moody savagely, making a plunge at Frank with the formidable knife that he had now drawn, which had a much longer blade than that with which he had stricken down the captain. “I’ll soon stop your cursed yelling, my joker, and give you something better to cry for!”

“I guess not, sez Con,” drawled out the American, the crack of his six-shooter echoing through the air at the same time that the knife fell to the deck from the miscreant’s hand, which had been neatly perforated by a bullet. The instant he raised it above his head to strike Frank, Mr Lathrope catching sight of it, had “drawn a bead on it,” as he would have expressed it, without delay. “No, sirree, I guess not, as long as old Zach hain’t forgot to handle the shootin’-irons!” he continued. “I fancy, mister, I’ve spiled your murdering little game; an’ now we’ll go in for a rough and tumble, I opine!”

So saying, the American, not shooting again for fear of wounding Frank, was down on the main-deck in a jiffey and by the side of the brave young sailor who was tackling the mutineers so gallantly—Mr Meldrum also joining in the struggle, first laying down the now nearly lifeless body of the captain again on the deck, however, and drawing off his coat to place it under his head so as to raise it up. The trio were shortly afterwards reinforced by the arrival of Mr McCarthy, panting and out of breath, with the side of his monkey-jacket half torn off by Major Negus, who had caught hold of it in trying to prevent his rushing up the companion ladder on hearing Frank’s cry for help, the good lady imploring him not to leave her to be murdered!

The first mate’s brawny fists, hitting out right and left, did yeoman’s service in the mêlée that ensued, and so did Mr Lathrope, while Frank and Mr Meldrum also fought well; but the four were powerless against Moody’s gang, who numbered a round dozen and had, by battening down the main-hatch, prevented the loyal portion of the crew from coming to their assistance—when, of course, the tables would have been turned.

Fortunately, there was no knife used in the fray, beyond the one which Moody had so unceremoniously dropped, and thus further bloodshed was prevented; but some hard knocks were given and received, and the party from the poop did not come off scathless, Mr Lathrope having his rather long nose somewhat flattened and almost turned to one side by a blow from the sledge-hammer fist of one of the mutineers. Mr Meldrum had also been considerably mauled about, and Frank had a splendid black eye. As for the first mate, who had gone into the very thick of it, he “hadn’t a sound bone in the howl of his body from the crown of his head to the sole of his fut”—that is, according to his version of it!

The struggle did not last very long, the opposing forces being so unequally matched; so, as soon as Frank and his coadjutors had been borne down by the sheer weight of numbers, their conquerors hustled them into the corner of the deck under the break of the poop, where the captain was still lying, throwing them down beside him and telling them they had better keep quiet now they had had the worst of it, that is if they valued their lives. It was no empty threat, either; for, the mutineers emphasised the order by leaving two of their number on guard over them, with belaying pins in their hands, with which they were told to “knock them on the head” should they stir or call out—a command which they looked quite capable of executing.

The gang then proceeded to drag the long-boat to the opening in the broken bulwarks on the starboard side of the

ship and launch her into the water, for it was a little smoother there on account of being inclosed like a sort of lagoon between the vessel and the reef. It was a ticklish job, for an occasional roller swelled into the boat from round the stern of the ship; while as the waves that broke over the forecastle and weather quarter of the *Nancy Bell* washed through the vessel, they poured like a cascade from the inclined deck, threatened to swamp the little raft as she lay tossing uneasily alongside until the mutineers could complete their arrangements for embarkation.

There was not much to do, for, thanks to Captain Dinks' precautions, provisions and small water casks, or barricoes, had already been stowed in the bows and along the sternsheets of the long-boat; so, after chucking in one or two articles which they had brought up from below beforehand on the sly, amongst which was a good-sized barrel of rum, they proceeded to drop down into the boat one by one, Moody going first and the others following until the whole number, a round dozen in all, had got in—the two who had remained as sentries over the poop party being the last.

Then the little craft, which appeared loaded down to the gunwales, was shoved off with a cheer of bravado from the side of the ship, and was soon lost to the sight of those left behind. The latter, however, eagerly looked after the boat as it was rapidly borne towards the shore between the heavy rolling waves that raced after it, until it finally disappeared in the night gloom.

"Sure an' it's a good riddance they are!" exclaimed Mr McCarthy, rising to his feet and shaking out his legs to see how far they were capable of movement after the mauling he had received. "May joy go wid them!"

"I hope the hull durned crowd will git swallowed up in Davy Jones' Locker afore they git ashore, I dew!" said the American fervently, stroking his nose tenderly and speaking more nasally than ever through the injury the organ had received. "Of all the tarnation mean skunks I ever kim across from Maine to California, I guess they're 'bout the right down slick meanest—not nary a heathen Chinese would ha' done what they hev! I'd tar and feather them, I would sure, if I hed the chance, right away!"

"Never mind them," interposed Mr Meldrum, whose first care after the mutineers had released him and gone over the side, was to raise up poor Captain Dinks' head again and feel his pulse. "I have no doubt they will meet with their proper deserts! Let us see to the captain now. I think he had better be moved into the cabin, for this night air is doing him no good; and, besides, we'll there be able to see to his wound better. However I shall want some assistance."

"I'll hilp you in a minit, sorr," ejaculated Mr McCarthy, who, as soon as he had satisfied himself that his limbs were pretty sound, had devoted his energies to opening the hatchway—"that is as soon as I've unkivered this limbo and let the other hands come up. Faix, an' if them divils had not battened it down and Boltrope and the Norwegee could a got at thim, it's too many for tbim we'd ha' been, I'm thinking!"

"I didn't see what they were after," said Frank, "or I would have slipped the cover before they secured it; but I wonder where Mr Adams is all this time? Surely he must have heard the row! He ought to have come to our aid."

"By the powers," exclaimed the first mate, "I niver thought of him till this blessid minnit! Where, in the name of Moses, can he be? I believe he wint down and turned into his cot when I did."

"He ain't jined them copperheads and left us in the lurch, hey?" inquired the American. "I didn't kinder think it on him, though he wer sorter quiet and sly-like."

"No, sorr," replied Mr McCarthy, "Adams is a first-rate seaman and a good officer too! He would be the last man to join a mutiny. Something must have happened to him, I'm thinking."

"I wonder, too," said Mr Meldrum, "that my daughter Kate has not come up before from the saloon! She must have known that something unusual was taking place on deck from our calls for help and the report of your pistol, Mr Lathrope?"

"I'm durned if I know! I'm all in a tangle, I guess," answered the American; "but I'll go down and see, mister."

All this while, Mr McCarthy had been fumbling at the fastenings of the hatchway, where the remainder of the crew were supposed to be imprisoned; but when he and Frank Harness, who lent his assistance, had at last got off the cover by a violent effort, not a soul appeared, rushing up as they expected, nor was there any response to their summons—"All hands on deck!"

What could have become of them all?

The mysterious silence below was a proof that something unforeseen had happened!

Chapter Twenty.

Notice to Quit!

The mystery, however, was soon solved.

Hardly had the strange disappearance of the crew from below been discovered, than the whole of the missing men, with Mr Adams at their head and Kate Meldrum bringing up the rear, rushed up the companion-ladder on to the poop with a loud "hurrah," as if with the intention of taking part in the contest with the band of mutineers:— their mortification may be imagined when they found that, as the first mate expressed it in his happy Irish way, "they were jist in toime to be too late, sure!"

But, had the mutineers not so rapidly abandoned the ship, the arrival of his rescue party on the scene of action would

no doubt have tended to considerably alter the complexion of events; and the credit of organising the force and bringing the men from such an unexpected quarter with so great a dramatic effect had to be shared equally between Miss Kate Meldrum and Snowball, the cook—Mr Adams being only admitted as a partner in the scheme at the last moment.

It seems that Snowball, while in the galley about midnight, had heard Moody talking to two or three of his especial “pals” in the port-watch; and, thinking from his knowledge of the man that he was up to some mischief, the darkey had listened—thereby indulging a propensity which was Master Snowball’s weak point, that of being inordinately curious about other people’s business!

He listened, however, to some purpose on this occasion, for he heard enough to learn that a large proportion of the crew intended, as soon as they saw a favourable opportunity, to seize the long-boat—which contained nearly all the provisions that had been got up from the hold—and desert the ship before morning.

What was their intention in doing this the cook could not guess, but he imagined that they must have thought that they would perhaps have to work to save the cargo if they remained on board, whereas if they went off, as they planned, they would escape all supervision from the officers and be under their own control. Besides, he knew that Moody was anxious to pay off the grudge he had against the captain, for he heard him specially chuckle over the fact that if they took away the long-boat, the “old man” would never be able to leave the ship with all the remaining hands and the passengers, and the rest of them would all thus “sink together, and a good job too,” as the bloodthirsty ruffian said.

Primed with this news, Snowball at first hardly knew how to make use of it for the benefit of those the mutineers intended to abandon; for, the men were all hanging about the galley, where he pretended to be asleep, and if he attempted to go aft then, where nothing was stirring and when no one called him there, it would have at once aroused their suspicions and, probably, precipitated matters.

Snowball was in a quandary. He could see no way of warning the unsuspecting captain; and yet, even while he waited, the cowardly gang who thus purposed to desert their shipmates might carry out their intention!

Presently, he heard Captain Dinks tell the mates and starboard watch that they might go below, and Mr McCarthy and the others went to their cabins aft while the “star-bowlines” tumbled down the main hatchway, all glad to have a spell of rest and be out of the bitter cold night wind which almost seemed to freeze their bones and pierce them through and through.

“Its just like the grinding old tyrant,” he heard Moody mutter at this to another of his gang, “to keep us here on deck when there ain’t no need for it!” But Snowball was quick to notice that, when the captain subsequently called out that all the rest of the hands might turn in if they liked, save two or three to keep an anchor-watch, not one of them, in spite of all their grumbling at the hardship of having to stop on deck previously, now stirred to go below. He also saw Moody and some of the others, when the captain was not looking at them, stealthily shift round the bows of the long-boat on to the top of the hatchway, in addition to battening it down on the quiet, so that those who had gone below could not easily get up again, and they would thus have things all in their own hands.

Moody’s gang evidently intended to carry out their nefarious plan; but how was he to prevent it?

At last, while the mutineers were watching for their opportunity, he saw his; and at once took advantage of it.

During the excitement that ensued when Mr McCarthy rushed on deck, declaring that the vessel had bilged in to starboard—at which time Captain Dinks at length gave his tardy order to launch the boats—Snowball crept out of the galley; and making his way aft, entered the saloon.

He was so frightened and confused, and full of what he had heard, that he did not know what to do at first, and this had prevented his speaking to the captain as he should have done; while, when he grew collected again, there was Frank Harness shouting down the companion and Mr McCarthy and the American passenger bolting up on to the poop, and no one to speak to, that he could see, who could do any good. He called out for the steward, but he had disappeared; and the darkey feared that his plan for defeating the schemes of the mutineers would turn out fruitless from his failing to find any one to help him in undertaking it, when all at once he saw Kate Meldrum, for whom he had a profound respect on account of her plucky behaviour during the storm and her kindness to him when he was discovered as a stowaway and so injured in the hold.

“Lor, missy,” exclaimed he, “help me sabe ship and capting, and all; or dey all go way and leab us drown on board!”

“Why, what do you mean?” said Kate, who was pale and excited, for she could not help hearing Frank’s call for assistance; and was just about proceeding to ascend the companion ladder to see for herself what was going on and if she could be of any aid, when Snowball thus ran against her. “What is the matter on deck; and why do you come here?”

“Dat debbel Bill Moody, an’ all him gang in port watch, say dey is goin’ murder capting and go way in long-boat, and leab us drown on board!”

“But won’t the other men prevent them?” asked Kate anxiously.

“Dey can’t, missy! Dey is down in main-hold; an’ Moody shut um under hatchway so dat dey can’t get up.”

Just then the report of Mr Lathrope’s revolver sounded above, and Kate almost screamed; but she controlled herself by a strong effort.

"And what can you or I do to help the captain and the others?" she said as calmly as she could, longing all the while to go above, although her presence there would be useless.

"Dat jus why I come here," replied Snowball eagerly. "We can get down steerage, whar I'se stow away dat time—I knows de place well—clear way traps in de way, and knock down bulkhead; starboard watch come troo de openin' and up on poop; den Moody's gang knock all of a heap, catch it hot, missy! But, really, poah Snowball not able do it all alone down dere!"

Such were the darkey's spasmodic utterances, as they came out in gasps, amidst the sound of the struggle going on on the main-deck and the hoarse cries of those engaged, which could be plainly heard in the cuddy. Kate at once comprehended the situation.

"I see," said she, as eagerly now as Snowball. "There's Mr Adams in his cabin asleep. He was so worn out, I suppose, that he couldn't hear Frank—I mean," she corrected herself blushing unconsciously—"Mr Harness call! Rouse him up at once, and I'll get a light for you to go below."

The darkey did as she told him, although he found it a difficult task to awaken the second mate, who was so fast asleep that he had to be pulled out of his cot before he opened his eyes.

He was already dressed, however, and would have rushed up on deck the moment Kate told him what had occurred had she not laid her hand on his arm and prevented him, pointing out how much better Snowball's plan would result in bringing material assistance to the little party who were still struggling with the mutineers, and fighting desperately, as they could hear.

"Do be quick and go down at once," she pleaded. "A moment's delay may sacrifice a valuable life; and then, it will be all your fault!"

So urged, Mr Adams consented against his will almost; and, following Snowball down into the after hold with the lantern Kate had procured from the steward's pantry, which she found tenantless, Llewellyn having mysteriously vanished out of the saloon, the two proceeded as rapidly as they could to work their way through the packing-cases and casks that were stowed right under the cuddy floor, towards the bulkhead that divided this portion of the ship from the main hold.

Arrived here, Snowball soon recognised the advantage of having Mr Adams along with him; for, in addition to the fact that the second mate, as is usual in merchant vessels, knew where each and every article of the cargo was stowed, he also was acquainted with the circumstance of there being a sliding door in the bulkhead, which the darkey was unaware of and had thought they would have to break it down, which would have been a rather long job.

Consequently, in far less time than either he or Kate had imagined, the imprisoned crew, who had been long aroused by the trampling on deck and the noise of the struggle immediately over their heads, and had been knocking madly at the hatchway cover and trying vainly to lift it up, were released. Eager for the fray, from which they had so long been debarred from taking part, they rushed up through the cuddy and up the companion to the poop, prepared to take summary vengeance on those who had incarcerated them but with what result has been already described.

While Kate was giving this explanation to her father of the course of events below and how the affair was planned—Frank Harness listening to her the while with glistening eyes, and squeezing her hand furtively as he pressed to her side—it was amusing to watch the demeanour of the darkey cook.

His mouth was spread open from ear to ear in one huge grin at the recital of his well-planned scheme for the defeat of the mutineers' machinations and release of the imprisoned crew. His chest expanded, too, with pride at the praise bestowed on him for his pluck and perspicacity; and when, finally, Ben Boltrope, who, of course, with Karl Ericksen, had remained loyal and been locked down below with the rest of the starboard watch, proposed "three cheers for Snowball," the cook could contain himself no longer, but burst into a loud guffaw, thus taking a prominent part in the demonstration in his own honour.

In the meantime nobody had been idle.

Poor Captain Dinks had been carefully lifted into the saloon, where, on removing his clothes, it was discovered that Moody's stab, although inflicting a dangerous cut across the chest, had touched no vital part, the sufferer's exhaustion proceeding more from loss of blood than from any imminent risk. He was therefore placed in his own cot and the wound strapped up, after which he sank into a feverish sleep, with Kate watching by his side.

Mr Meldrum, who had been urgently asked by Mr McCarthy and Adams to take command of the ship while the captain was incapacitated, a request that the crew heartily endorsed and which Captain Dinks himself confirmed as soon as he recovered consciousness proceeded in the interim to devise the best means he could for saving all on board; and, in the first place, he ordered the men to renew the lashings of the jolly-boat. This was their sole remaining means of escape, and was now in danger of being washed overboard by the heavy seas that were breaking over the ship in cataracts of foam.

Immediately the mutineers had got away in the long-boat it had come on to blow harder; and, shortly after they were out of sight in the haze that hung over the land, a tremendous squall had swept over the water in the direction they were last seen, the billows mounting so high as they raced by the stranded vessel that it was very problematical whether the boat would ever reach the shore. Mr Meldrum could not help observing that those left on board had much greater chance of saving their lives, in spite of the waves breaking over the ship, which trembled through her frame with the repeated shocks she was subjected to as she was jolted on the rocks as if coming to pieces every minute.

"The poor captain was right after all," said he to Mr McCarthy. "Those scamps in the long-boat had better have waited till morning, as he said. I don't think they'll ever get to land."

"Nor I, sorr," replied the first mate; "but it sarves them right, bad cess to 'em!"

"Well," said the other, "if they have gone down, they've gone with all their sins on their heads, for they certainly believed that they left us to perish, and did so purposely, too!"

"Jist so, the murtherin' villins!" ejaculated Mr McCarthy.

Mr Lathrope at that moment came up from the cuddy.

"Whar's that sanctimonious cuss of a steward!" inquired he. "I've shouted clean through the hull ship, and I'm durned ef I ken find him to git some grub; for I feels kinder peckish arter that there muss. I guess the critter has sloped with them t'other skunks!"

"We'll muster the hands and see," said Mr Meldrum.

This was soon done; but the steward did not answer to his name—nor could he be found anywhere on board, although parties of the men hunted through every portion of the ship fore and aft for him.

"Snakes and alligators, mister," said the American, "I guess it's jest as I sed, and the slippery coon has skedaddled with the rest of the varmint!"

"Perhaps so," answered Mr Meldrum; "but I think it far more probable that he has accidentally tumbled over the side!" In this belief, it may be added, the stewardess shared, bewailing her loss accordingly, although she was not quite so much overwhelmed with sorrow as might have been imagined to be proper on the loss of a helpmate by those unacquainted with the domestic relations of the pair.

In addition to securing the safety of the jolly-boat, Mr Meldrum ordered preparations to be made for constructing a large raft, upon which an additional stock of provisions, which were brought up from below to replace those taken away by the mutineers in the long-boat, were stowed; but no attempt was made as yet to leave the ship, all hoping that the sea would go down as the tide fell, besides which, they thought that when daylight came they would be able, as Captain Dinks had told them, to "see their way better."

And so they waited in hope till morning should come.

Just before four bells, however, and when the faint light of day was beginning to streak the eastern sky, bringing out in relief the snow-white peaks of some mountains on the mainland, which were a little distance to the left of where the vessel was lying on the reef, a larger wave than any of the rollers that had yet assailed her struck the ship right amidships; and the timbers dividing under the strain, the poor old *Nancy Bell* broke in two. Still, the two sections of the hull did not immediately separate, the seas apparently losing their force and reserving their powers after delivering such a telling blow.

"I guess, mister," said Mr Lathrope, who took the catastrophe as coolly as he did every other incident of his life apparently, "this air smash is a kinder sort o' notice to quit, hey?"

But Mr Meldrum made no reply. He saw that the end was coming.

Chapter Twenty One.

Getting Ashore.

Fortunately, the jolly-boat had been safely secured abaft the main hatchway, the very point at which the ship parted amidships; and, being lashed to ring-bolts athwart the deck, close to the break of the poop, the little craft remained uninjured in the general rending of timbers and splintering of planks that ensued when the beams gave way under the strain upon them. The poor *Nancy Bell*, indeed, seemed to fall to pieces in a moment; for, as soon as the keel broke in two and the lower works of the vessel began to separate, the hold opened out like a yawning gulf, dividing the bows and foremost sections from the stern by a wide gap. Through this the sea made a clean breach, washing out the cargo—the waves bearing away such articles as were floatable to leeward, whilst the heavier portion of the freight, after being tossed about and battered out of shape, quickly sank down to the bottom out of sight.

Some of the men had been on the forecastle immediately before this happened; but roused by Mr Meldrum's cry of warning they had just time to escape the inrush of the sea and scramble aft to where the others were grouped together on the poop, which was now considerably elevated above the level of the water, the stern having been gradually forced up more on the rocks as the fore part sank down, until it was now nearly high and dry. This circumstance enabled all hands to proceed all the more expeditiously with the construction of the raft that had been already commenced, and which they had luckily begun here, instead of on the main-deck that had just been broken up, where they would have lashed it together but for the accidental fact of the mizzen jury-mast forming the base of the raft, and their being unable to drag it forward before the keel of the vessel began to give way. The extra quantity of provisions, too, which had been got out of the hold had also remained on the poop; and thus everything providentially was in their favour.

Certainly, their chances of escape now seemed more hopeful!

No time, however, was to be lost; for, although their haven of refuge, the stern section of the ship, was high up on

the reef and almost out of reach of the remorseless waves that had already done such damage, still there was no knowing what another tide would effect if the wind should again get up. It behoved them all therefore to take advantage of the opportunity afforded them and make their preparations for getting ashore before it should be too late. Thus urged, the seamen, working with a will under the supervision of Mr McCarthy and Adams, had completed a substantial raft by eight o'clock, at which hour a spell was cried and all hands piped to breakfast.

Meanwhile, the morning had advanced; and the sky being pretty free from clouds, Mr Meldrum was able to obtain a good view of the land that surrounded the bay in which the *Nancy Bell* had come to grief.

The ship had, evidently, not merely been carried to leeward of the cape by the strong current before striking, but had also been taken some distance inshore as well; for the reef on which she was lying seemed more than two miles to the eastward of the projecting point which she had so much difficulty in rounding, close in to a range of rock-bound coast similar to that which they had passed to the northward and extending almost due east for from eight to ten miles—as nearly as Mr Meldrum could judge—the line of the shore then trending off to the south-west at an acute angle, as far as the eye could reach. High above this latter stretch of coast rose a series of snow-crowned hills, arranged in terraces the one above another, gradually increasing in height until their peaks culminated in one that towered far beyond all, like a giant amongst pigmies; while, to the right of this mountain, and apparently much nearer, on a spur of the chain projecting into the sea nearly south of the vessel's position, was one solitary peak, which occasionally emitted thin columns of smoke and which, from the fact of its summit being denuded of snow, most likely marked the site of some volcanic crater in active operation.

Altogether, the prospect was sad and dispiriting in the extreme, for, nothing was to be seen in the immediate foreground but the bare black basaltic cliffs, against whose base the angry billows broke in endless repetition, throwing up clouds of spray and tracing out their indentations with lines of creamy foam; and, beyond the cliffs, were high table-lands and hills all clad in the spectral garb of winter—with never a tree or a single prominent feature to vary the monotony of the landscape!

"We must endeavour to make for that curve in the bay to the north-east, where the shore breaks off and leads southward," said Mr Meldrum to the first mate, who, having seen the raft completed, had now come to his side for further instructions. "It is only there, as far as I can see, that there is likely to be any sort of harbour where we can land in safety."

"Be jabbers, I can't say, sorr," returned McCarthy; "sure an' it's yoursilf that knows bist. I belave, however, it'll be the wisest coorse; for the divil a harbour can anyone say ilsewhere; and, by the same token, sorr, the current is setting shoreward in that very direction. Look at thim planks there, sorr, sure an' if that's the case it'll hilp the rhaft along foinely!"

"You're right," said Mr Meldrum, glancing in the direction to which Mr McCarthy pointed, where some of the broken timbers of the ship, after being carried away to leeward, were now steadily drifting past her again—although now in an easterly direction and in a parallel line with the cliffs to the left. "The sooner, too, that we take advantage of that same current the better, as it will be hard work for the jolly-boat to have to tow us all the way. Let us see about getting the raft over the side at once, Mr McCarthy. The sea is much calmer now, and I think we'll be able to launch and load it without much difficulty. The jolly-boat won't give us half the trouble to float that the raft will, for the deck forms an inclined plane with the water and we can run her in when we please."

"Aye, aye, sorr," answered Mr McCarthy, and breakfast being now finished—a cold one for all parties, Snowball and his galley having parted company, and the waves now rolling between the two sections of the ship—the tough job of floating the raft alongside was proceeded with; purchases being rigged so as to lower it down easily, and prevent it afterwards from breaking away when it had reached the surface of the sea, which was still rough and boisterous.

The weather keeping calm and bright, and the wind lulling instead of increasing in force as the sun rose in the heavens, the task was at length satisfactorily accomplished.

It was not done, however, until after two hours of continuous labour, in which all hands were engaged, even Mr Lathrope assisting as well as his still injured arm would permit. By six bells in the forenoon watch, too, the jolly-boat had also been lowered into the water safely. Now, nothing remained but to get the provisions and whatever else they could carry that was necessary on board; for, Mr Meldrum sternly negated any attempt at taking private property, thereby incurring Mrs Major Negus's enmity, for he refused passage to three large trunks of hers which she had declared were absolutely indispensable, but which, on being opened, were found to contain only a lot of tawdry finery which might possibly have helped to astonish the natives of Waikato, but was perfectly useless, even to herself, on the inhospitable shores where the passengers of the *Nancy Bell* were about to seek refuge from the sinking ship.

Kate Meldrum was far more sensible, taking only those articles of warm clothing which her father recommended for the use of herself and Florry; and, indeed, leaving behind many things that he would probably have permitted as necessaries, in order that she should not overburthen the raft with what would not be serviceable to all. Unlike the "Major," Kate thought that it would be selfish on her part merely to consider her own and her sister's wants!

As for Mr Zachariah Lathrope, his luggage consisted chiefly of an old fur cloak, in addition to the clothes he stood up in, besides his inseparable "six shooter" and a rifle—which latter he stated had been given to his grandfather by the celebrated Colonel Crockett of "coon" notoriety, and was "a powerful shootin' iron." The rest of the men folk took with them almost as little; but Mr Meldrum did not forget charts and nautical instruments, besides a compass and the ship's log-book and papers. These latter he removed from Captain Dinks' cabin, at his especial request, that, should he ever see England again, he might be able to give a circumstantial account as to how the vessel was lost, and satisfy both his owners and Lloyd's.

In reference to the general provisioning of the raft, it may be briefly mentioned that all the bread and flour that had

not been washed out of the after-hold had been collected, in addition to several casks of salt beef and pork, and such of the tinned meats and other cabin stores that had not been stowed in the long-boat—for the benefit, as it subsequently turned out, of the mutineers.

Some casks of water were also embarked; but not many, for, in the event of a fresh supply not being found on landing they could easily melt down the snow and thus manufacture what they required from time to time.

While considering the important question of a proper supply of food, the pertinent fact was not lost sight of, that they would be exposed to a climate of almost arctic severity for, probably, many months to come; and, consequently all the blankets in the ship were collected and put on board the raft, besides spare bedding and some hammocks. Snowball also, true to his culinary calling, took care to secure his cooking utensils, clambering back into the dilapidated forecabin for the purpose, almost at the peril of his life—the darkey subsequently bewailing much his inability to remove the ship's coppers, which were too firmly fixed in the galley for him to detach them from that structure.

Finally, one or two small spars and sails were added to the general pile of heterogeneous articles that had been heaped up in the centre of the raft, whose buoyancy had been much increased, since it was first made and launched overboard, by the accidental discovery in the steerage of some empty puncheons, which were carefully bunged-up so that no water could get into them and lashed underneath the floating platform; the catalogue of stores being then completed by heaving on the heap all the cordage that could be got at and cut away, in addition to some blocks and a few odds and ends—the tarpaulin from off the broken cabin skylight, which was certain to be of the greatest use, being, like other equally serviceable articles, only thought of at the last moment.

By the time all these things were stowed on board, and the raft immersed as deeply as it was considered advisable with safety—as few things as possible being put in the jolly-boat, which was kept light in order that she might be more usefully employed in towing the other—it was close on twelve o'clock.

This was the hour Mr Meldrum had fixed for abandoning the ship, as then the tide would be at the half flood, and they would be able to utilise not only that but the current as well, which would about that time set inshore—at least, judging by its influence on the previous day in carrying the *Nancy Bell* in that direction of the reef. By these various means Mr Meldrum thought the raft might be floated onward towards the curve in the coast-line which he had pointed out to the first mate as a probable place where they might expect to discover some small bay or harbour to land at.

Besides this, Mr Meldrum believed that by starting on the half tide, in the event of the stream turning before they were able to reach an available beach in some sheltered cove—for the current which he had noticed took a southerly direction with the ebb—the retiring tide could not possibly drift them out to sea. At the very worst, it would only sweep the raft down the coast in the direction of the volcanic peak that had been observed to cap the spur of the mountain chain which stretched out right into the water at an angle with the land; and, here, there was every probability of their finally finding an opening in the breastwork of adamantine rocks that ranged along the coast-line as if to prevent any intrusive strangers like themselves from getting on shore!

Before Mr Meldrum gave the order for embarkation, however, he had one last duty to perform on board the *Nancy Bell*.

It was just noon; and, the sun being for a wonder unobscured, he determined to take a final observation to fix their position, or rather that of the reef on which the ill-fated vessel was doomed to leave her bones. This was an eventuality which evidently could not take long in its accomplishment, for the forward portion of the ship was being rapidly broken to pieces, and it would not be any great time before the stern followed suit, some of the cabin furniture below having already been shaken down, while the poop did not offer a very firm foothold, trembling every now and then from the washing in and out of the waves below, as if, the poor thing were seized with a submarine ague fit!

After a brief calculation, as briefly worked out, Mr Meldrum found that the ridge of rocks, which bore north-west by south-east, was in longitude 68 degrees 45 minutes east, and latitude 49 degrees 16 minutes south. These facts indisputably settled the point of their being to the southwards of Cape Saint Louis, put down on the chart as the westernmost point of Kerguelen Land, and that the highest of the snow-covered mountain peaks to the south-east was Mount Ross. The information, he thought, might possibly be of much assistance to them hereafter in directing their course, should such a step become necessary, to those better known portions of the island on the eastern side which whalers and seal-hunting craft were reported to be in the habit of frequenting during the short summer season of that dreary region. This period, however, would not come round for the next three or four months, as it was now only the first week in August, the midwinter of antarctic climes.

The last observation made, and the ship's ensign hoisted, upside down, on the stump of the mizzen-mast—not so much for the very unlikely chance of any passing vessel observing it, as from the special request of Mr McCarthy, that, as he expressed it, the poor *Nancy Bell* should “have a decent burial”—Mr Meldrum at length gave the word for all hands to embark, an operation which occupied even less time than that of his “taking the sun.”

First, in due order of precedence, the ladies were lowered down in a chair by a whip from a boom rigged out over the stern right on to the raft, where a comfortable place had been arranged in the centre and barricaded round with chests and barrels. Next, Captain Dinks was lowered down in his cot, which had been removed bodily from its slings in his cabin below, so that he might be shifted without disturbing him; then, Mary Llewellyn, the now husbandless stewardess, followed suit; and, after her, Mr Lathrope and the children. Eight of the remaining sixteen men of the crew were then directed to take their places around the ladies' inclosure, along with Mr Adams and Frank Harness, while the other eight hands, under the command of Mr McCarthy, were told off to the jolly-boat, which was provided with double-banked oars and attached to the raft by a stout tow-rope—it being the intention of Mr Meldrum, who

remained on the raft as deputy commander-in-chief of the whole party in poor Captain Dinks' place, to relieve the rowers every alternate hour, so that all should have an equal share in the arduous task of towing, a job which would tax all their strength.

Everything being ready, the signal was given to start, when, away went the jolly-boat, smartly at first, but more slowly afterwards as soon as the strain of the tow-rope was felt, moving gradually from the wreck of the old ship, and tugging after her the unwieldy raft, which seemed somewhat loath to go. But, not an exclamation was uttered, not a word spoken, as the survivors of the wreck glided off through the water towards the shore, leaving behind them the wave-scarred craft that had so long been their ocean home.

It was like a funeral procession.

The thoughts of all were too deep for words.

Even the children were awed into silence by the seriousness of their elders;—a seriousness that was as much owing to the uncertainty of their own fate as to their regret at parting the last link that bound them to their English home and civilisation, from which they seemed to have been cut adrift for ever in casting off from the poor, old, ill-fated *Nancy Bell!*

Chapter Twenty Two.

Desolation Island.

Kate Meldrum was the first to break the melancholy silence that reigned as they rowed away from the old ship, all looking back sadly at her battered hull, whose crippled condition could now be better seen—the bows all rent and torn by the violence of the waves, the gaping sides, the gutted hold washed out by the water, and the sea around covered with pieces of shattered planking from the 'tween-decks, besides the curved knees and other larger parts of the timber work, that had been wrenched off during the vessel's battle with the elements, and numbers of packing-cases and empty casks and barrels that were floating about, the flotsam and jetsam of the cargo.

"Papa," said she, speaking low in order that none of the others could hear her, "did you see anything of the long-boat, or of the men who went away in her, when you were looking round the coast this morning—I forgot to ask you before."

"No, my dear," he answered. "There was not a trace of them, as far as I could see with the glass; either along the shore in the direction in which we are going now, or down to the southwards off there to the right!"

"Do you think they have landed in safety, papa?"

"Hardly, Kate. There was a terrible squall which came on shortly after they deserted us, and I believe they must have gone down in it. But, why do you ask the question, my dear? I don't suppose you have much sympathy with the treacherous scoundrels!"

"No, papa," said she; "but I thought that if we got on shore at the same place that they did there might be a quarrel, or that something dreadful would happen; and I'm sure we had enough of horrors on board the poor old ship!" and Kate shuddered, as she spoke, at the recollection.

"You need not be afraid of that, my dear," replied her father kindly. "If the mutineers have managed to run in the boat anywhere during the frightful sea that was on at the time they deserted us, it must have been miles away from any spot near here, for the wind was blowing in quite the contrary direction. Besides, my child, only a few could have saved their lives; so that, in case we should ever come across them, they would be quite powerless against the strong force we have now to oppose them, in the very impossible event of their trying to molest us. I hope, however, that we may not meet."

"Isn't it shocking," observed Kate presently, as if reflecting over what had happened, "to think that, companions in misfortune as we are, we should be so anxious now to avoid them!"

"Yes," replied her father; "but the fact only exhibits a common phase of human nature, and thus affords but another proof of the inherent selfishness of the animal man. Wickedness, my child, ever begets wickedness!" Mr Meldrum then lapsed again into silence.

The raft proceeded but very slowly, in spite of the exertions of the towing party in the jolly-boat. This was on account of the current and the tideway neutralising each other, instead of being both in their favour, as Mr Meldrum had expected; so, in order to fight against the drawback, he ordered Ben Boltrope to get up a sail on one of the studding-sail booms which was rigged as a yard across the mizzen topgallant mast that had been stepped in the centre of the platform. However, the wind was so light from their low elevation in the water, that the influence of this new motive power was only faintly perceptible, the shore seeming almost quite as far off after an hour's hard rowing as before, and the ship equally near.

This would never do.

At such a rate of progress, nightfall would probably still find them afloat in the centre of the bay, in danger, should the sea again get up, of being dashed to pieces against the precipitous cliffs to the left; while, in the event of their escaping that peril, the raft might run on to some hidden shoal or reef down southwards in the darkness, or else be swept out into the offing, where they would be the sport of the waves, and could never hope to reach the land again.

They had hitherto been keeping well out from the adjacent coast, by reason of their seeing its inhospitable look, and the scanty chance there was of their effecting a landing there. This fact, indeed, was self-evident, for they could see the surf breaking in one continuous line, as far as the eye could reach, against the steep rocky face of the cliff. Besides, Mr Meldrum had thought it the best plan to take the shortest course towards the curve he had selected, where the southern shore branched off at an angle with the eastern one, in the hope of there being some sort of a beach in that vicinity. Now, however, he determined to try another way of gaining his end; and that was by going "the longest way round."

"Pull in to the left," he sang out to Mr McCarthy, "and let us see how the current will then affect us. I fancy we'll feel it all the more as we get inshore."

"Aye, aye, sorr," replied the first mate, directing the head of the jolly-boat right towards the face of the frowning cliff nearest to them; but still, for some time, there was no increase in their rate of speed, the short chopping waves that formed the backwater of the surges, which had already expended their strength on the rocky rampart of the coast, militating against any slight advantage they gained by the current taking them along with it.

At last, however, after three hours' hard work, and when the fourth relay of men had just begun to handle the oars in the jolly-boat, the raft appeared all at once to move along more briskly and smoothly, while, at the same time, the sea grew calmer.

Things looked promising.

They had approached close inshore to the rocky wall of the cliff; and, if it had seemed formidable at a distance, it looked ten times more imposing now that only a few hundred yards of sea divided them from it. Its bold precipitous face appeared to ascend right up into the clouds, while the counterscarp, or base, seemed to dive abruptly into the deep without a slope. It was really just like a gigantic iron wall, straight up and down and quite even in contour, without a fissure or break as far as could be seen; and the surf made such a thundering din as it dashed fretfully against the lower part of the cliff, that it was almost impossible for the shipwrecked voyagers to hear each other speak.

Indeed, the whole scene could not but force their imagination to picture what might be their fate should a storm arise just then and give them over into the power of the billows. These were only in play now, so to speak; but if their demeanour changed to one of dreadful earnest, the mad waves would easily toss them as high and as savagely as they did the yeasty fragments of spindrift, which circled up into the air like snowflakes—flung off from the tops of the breakers after each unsuccessful onslaught on the rocky barrier that balked their endeavours to annihilate it.

However, there was little fear of such a catastrophe at present. Thanks to the aid of the current, combined with the towing powers of the jolly-boat's crew—the sail having been found useless in the little wind there was and lowered again—the raft was proceeding steadily along at the rate of some three miles an hour; keeping all the while at a safe distance from the cliffs, in order to avoid any undertow, and rapidly losing the hull of the *Nancy Bell*—albeit, the flag of the ship could yet be seen distinctly far away astern to seaward, fluttering in the slight breeze that expanded its folds.

Each moment, too, the coast on the starboard hand rose up nearer and nearer, closing in sharply with that to port, thus showing that they were approaching the embouchure which Mr Meldrum had marked out. Soon, a little more exertion on the part of the rowers would decide whether the naval officer had judged rightly or wrongly as to there being a bay there—a veritable "harbour of refuge" it would be for them.

"I guess, mister," said Mr Lathrope, who had been for some time quieter than usual, "that air animile ain't far off its roosting peg; and whar he lands I kalkerlate we can dew too."

As he spoke, the American pointed out a species of black shag or cormorant, which had evidently been on a fishing expedition and was returning home with the fruits of his spoil in his bill for the delectation of the home circle.

"You are very likely right," said Mr Meldrum. "That sort of sea-fowl generally selects a flat shore for its habitat, in preference to high places—just as the penguins do, so that they may the sooner tumble into the water when desirous of taking to that element. I would not be surprised to find a landing-place as soon as we round that further point of the cliff, where the line of surf seems to end. Stretch out with those oars, men," he added, speaking in a louder tone to those in the jolly-boat. "One more long pull altogether and we'll be able to get ashore."

"Aye, aye, sorr; go it, my hearties," sang out Mr McCarthy; and, the hands, giving a responsive cheer and putting their backs into each stroke, made the boat race along—dragging the raft behind it at a speed that caused it to rock from side to side, and slightly startle the ladies, while the boat, too, shipped a little water that came in over the bows as it dipped forward from the jerk of the tow-rope.

At length the limit of the cliff line was reached. It terminated as abruptly as it rose from the water; for, when the boat had pulled past the last of the breakers, a long narrow fiord or inlet of the sea opened before the eager eyes of the castaways, stretching far inland and bordered on each side by shelving slopes of hills that from their shape must have been composed of the same basaltic rock as that of the cliffs, although now completely covered with snow. A sight that pleased them more, however, was a broad beach of black sand—extending up to the slope of the higher land—on which they could ground the raft in safety. It was the very thing they sought!

"Hooray boys!" exclaimed the first mate, taking off his cap and waving it round his head in excitement. "Sure an' we've rached the land at last!"

A shout of joy came from all, in sympathetic response.

A few strokes more, and the jolly-boat had touched the shore; when, the men jumping out, and those on the raft following suit, although the water was icy cold and almost up to their arm-pits, the raft was quickly hauled up close to the beach and everybody scrambled on shore. Even Mrs Major Negus was so delighted to stand once more on *terra firma* that she did not mind getting her feet wet for once, and was almost one of the first to jump off the raft.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Mr Meldrum as he stood up in the centre of the group, taking off his hat reverently in acknowledgment of the divine mercy of that watchful providence which had guided them safely through all the perils of the deep and now permitted them to land without harm—the untaught seamen around him appearing to sympathise with his heartfelt thanksgiving as they, too, bowed their heads in silence; while Kate fell upon her knees also in an ecstasy of gratitude to Him who ruled the wind and waves and had protected them to the last!

Then, all began to look about them. However, as they surveyed the strange scene, they found to their surprise that they were not the only inhabitants of “Desolation Island,” as Captain Cook so aptly named, when he first saw the place, the land which had been previously discovered by Monsieur de Kerguelen.

From the beach, the land rose up on both sides of the fiord in a gentle slope to the hills above, which latter were broken away in some places, forming flat level tables of basaltic débris that had tumbled from the tops of the cliffs; and, these stretches of table-land being under the lee of the hills, were sheltered from the snow that otherwise covered every place in sight, valley and mountain peak alike.

On these tables of bare black ground, numerous colonies of penguins had established themselves—the tenants already in possession of the island, to prove that it was not altogether deserted.

The birds were standing about in crowds in the queerest and most ungainly attitudes in the world, croaking and barking, according to their usual wont, at the unexpected visitors who had so unceremoniously come to disturb the quietude of their island home. They looked excessively funny, waddling about awkwardly on their short legs and flapping their wings as if grumbling at the intrusion, much resembling a lot of little dumpy old women with grey tippets on; and Maurice Negus and Florry Meldrum went into fits of laughter at their appearance.

The penguins were not very busy at that time of year evidently.

They were simply idling about the beach and “loafing,” as if they had nothing particular to do but gossip with each other as to what meant the outlandish creatures, who had invaded their territory. Occasionally, two or three would proceed out together to fish in the quiet waters of the creek, and these would pass another party coming back from the same errand, when they would croak a greeting; but the majority did nothing but strut about from one position to another in order to stare the better at the intruders—an inspection which, it need hardly be told, the latter returned with an equal interest.

However, the survivors from the *Nancy Bell* had a good deal to do besides watching the penguins, for it was now late in the afternoon and growing dark, with the wind rising again. A few premonitory scattered flakes of snow, too, that fell flutteringly down in a half hesitating way every now and then, pointed out what the weather might be expected to be bye and bye and reminded them that it would be just as well for them to be under shelter of some sort before night came on to interrupt their labours.

A word from Mr Meldrum was sufficient, the first mate then giving the necessary orders for setting the whole party to work.

“All hands shift cargo!” he cried, stepping back upon the raft; when, the men following him, he divided them into two gangs, the first of whom he directed to carry out Mr Meldrum’s instructions under Frank Harness, while the second remained with him to remove the stores on to the beach, where Mr Adams supervised their landing. But, before anything else was done, the cot containing poor Captain Dinks—the only one who had not as yet been ashore—was carefully lifted up from the raft and transported to a spot high up from the water and shielded by a spur of the hills on the right from the winds. This Mr Meldrum had selected as a favourable place for their camp, and Snowball was already engaged there in building up a fire with some wood that he had fortunately brought from the wreck—for not a scrap of brush or twig, or the sign of any tree, could be seen in the neighbourhood of the fiord, nor a single bit of drift on the beach!

The stores being all landed and piled up on the shore some little distance beyond high-water mark, Mr McCarthy’s portion of the crew then proceeded to take the raft to pieces and carry up the timbers of which it was composed likewise to a place of safety, for fear lest the waves should bear them away in the night-time when the tide again came in; besides which, the material was wanted for other purposes—as Mr Meldrum had foreseen when causing the raft to be constructed—although it was now too late in the day to utilise it to that end, for, even while they were landing the things, the evening had closed in and it was nearly dark.

Meanwhile, the second body of men, working under Frank Harness’s direction and Mr Meldrum’s personal supervision, were equally industrious.

The site for the camp having been chosen, a couple of the largest spars that had been brought ashore on the raft were erected as uprights, some twenty feet apart, close under the scarp of the cliff; and a block and running tackle having been previously attached to the top of each of these, a third spar was hoisted up and lashed across them at right angles. After this, a spare top-sail, which had been brought with them in the jolly-boat, was pulled over the framework; and, the ends of this being tied down by the reef points to stout pegs driven in the ground, the structure formed a good sized tent which would do well for temporary accommodation for a night or two. Of course, something more substantial would be required if the shipwrecked people were forced to remain long on the island—which, indeed, seemed more than probable, considering the time of year, and the faint hope of their rescue by any whaling vessel before the month of November.

"I guess it air prime," said Mr Lathrope, looking at the tent with much satisfaction as he walked round it. He evidently took considerable pride in the construction, in which, indeed, he had some share, his experience "out west" having been of great use in suggesting the shape and location of the shelter.

"Yes," replied Mr Meldrum, who was still busy at work on the details. "I think it will do till we can rig up something better."

"Wa-ll, all you've got to do neow, I guess," said the other, "is to stretch a rope across the hull consarn, and fix up a blanket or two to screen off the femmels from the menfolk; and the thing's done slick and handsome."

"Right!" responded Mr Meldrum, taking his advice and dividing the tent across into two portions, one of which was reserved for the ladies; when, the spare bedding and blankets having been brought up from the raft, the improvised apartments were made to look as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Really, the interior, on being lighted up by the ship's lanterns, which had not been forgotten, appeared quite cosy, especially when Snowball's fire, which was now burning up briskly from the chips shovelled on to it, could be seen sparkling and leaping up in spurts of flame through the open flap that had been left to serve for a doorway.

"And now, I kalkerlate, it's time for grub," said the American when the tent was finished and the ladies' comfort provided for—Captain Dinks, still in his cot, being ensconced in a warm corner—"I hope that blessed darkey has got something good, for I feel powerful holler, I dew!"

He need not, however, have been in any doubt as to Snowball's capacity. That worthy allowed nothing to interfere with the exercise of his culinary skill; so, when the first mate by Mr Meldrum's directions had "piped down" all hands, he had ready a repast which appeared to the hungry castaways more like a splendid banquet than an improvised meal, and one as well cooked as if Snowball had all the facilities of the galley on shipboard to prepare it. His chief dish was a well-seasoned "Irish stew," compounded of salt beef and preserved vegetables, which seemed on that cold evening a perfect *chef-d'oeuvre*, and would, as Mr Lathrope "guessed" after a third helping, have "made a man leave his grandmother for his wife's mother's aunt, any day!"

Soon after the meal was finished, night came on, when the snow began to fall heavily and the wind to blow piercingly from the north'ard and westward, just as it had done the evening before when the poor *Nancy Bell* was struggling round Cape Saint Louis and rushing on to her doom; but the castaways happily were now sheltered from the inclemencies of the weather, and as they one and all nestled into their blankets as soon as bedtime came;—man and woman, Jack tar and landsman alike!—thanked God fervently that they were now no longer on board ship.

Towards morning, a slight alarm was created by some of the melted snow finding its way down upon the sleepers through the sail that served for the roofing of their tent; but this was soon remedied by lashing over it the old tarpaulin from off the cabin skylight, which, it may be recollected, was only thought of at the last moment, although such a useful article. The leak in the roof stopped, all turned to sleep again with the greater zest, enjoying such a night's rest as they had not had for the last week at sea—not a soul indeed waking up till long after daybreak, all were so dead tired out with the fatigue and anxiety they had undergone.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Nearly a Catastrophe!

Slept till long after daybreak, did they?

Why, it was getting on for noon when Mr McCarthy roused the crew from their unusually long caulk amongst the blankets in the corner of the tent reserved for them with his cheery call of "All hands ahoy! Tumble up there! tumble up!" coupled with the information that the sun was "scorching their eyes out"—which latter observation, it may be casually remarked, was a slight stretch of his imagination, considering the feeble power of the solar orb at that time of the year on the snow-covered wastes of Kerguelen Land!

Still, late or early as they might be in rising, the first point to which everybody turned their gaze on getting out into the open, was the little spot on the horizon to seaward where they had left the ship, where she had been last seen on the previous afternoon just as the evening was beginning to close in. Since they had quitted her, however, the wind had been blowing pretty stiffly all night, although it had calmed down again towards the morning; while the last thing they had heard, ere they had sunk into the sound dreamless sleep all had enjoyed through the complete exhaustion of their frames, had been the roaring noise of the breakers thundering against the base of the cliffs beyond their sheltering fiord. So, it was with but very faint hopes of perceiving the remains of the poor old *Nancy Bell's* hull still fixed on the treacherous reef of her destruction, that they looked wistfully out into the offing!

But, lo and behold! in spite of all their forebodings, there in the distance they could yet dimly descry the stern section of the ill-fated vessel still intact, as far as they could judge with the naked eye, amidst the rocks; and about it the waves played and circled and the surf showered its spray. Above the wreck, too, there still fluttered feebly the flag which Mr Meldrum had attached to the stump of the mizzen-mast, as if defying the powers of the wind and the waters to destroy the gallant old ship and her belongings, strive how they might in all their majesty!

Every heart felt glad at the sight.

"It does me ra-al good, mister, it dew!" said Mr Lathrope to the first mate, who was intently watching the object of general interest, as if he could not take his eyes off it. "When I riz just neow, I felt kinder lonesome, a thinking we'd parted company with the old crittur fur ever and wouldn't never see her no more; but thar she is still as perky as ever, in spite of last night's gale, which I thought would ha' blown all her timbers to Jericho!"

"Ah, sorr!" replied Mr McCarthy with a heavy sigh and a troubled look in his usually merry twinkling grey eyes, "you'll never say another ship the likes of her again! If you'll belave me, Mister Lathrope, sorr, she'd sail ten knots on a bowline; and I'd like to know where you'd bate that now?"

"I'll not deny she had her good pints," said the American sympathisingly; "but I guess the poor thing'll soon be bruk up."

"Yes, son, more's the pity," responded the other; "sure an' I wish we had her safe ashore here and we'd save ivory plank of her."

"It wouldn't be a bad notion," observed Mr Meldrum, who just then came up to where the two were talking, "to take another trip out to the ship in the jolly-boat and see whether we could not land some more things that might be of use to us?"

"Sure the hould's gutted now enthirely," said the Irish mate sadly, "and the devil a hap'orth we'd get by going. Look at the say that's running, too; and considther the long pull out there and back again—not that I wouldn't be afther going, sorr, if you were to say the word!"

"Oh, no, never mind," replied Mr Meldrum. "There's not the slightest necessity for it, for I believe we brought away all the provisions that were left in her, and we'd find little enough now! I only thought we might secure some more of the timber work, as there doesn't seem to be a particle of wood on the island."

"We'd better wait till she breaks up, sorr," said Mr McCarthy; "sure and it'll float in thin to us, widout the throuble of fetching it."

"All right!" answered the other. So the contemplated last trip to the stranded vessel would have been abandoned, had not Florry at that moment rushed up to her father.

"Oh, poor puss!" she exclaimed, half-crying and almost breathless with excitement as she clung to his arm and looked up into his face entreatingly.

"Puss!" repeated Mr Meldrum in astonishment; "what puss?"

"The—the—poor pussy cat we used to play with in the cabin," sobbed Florry. "It was shut up by the stewardess, and has been left behind in the ship!"

"Yes, sir," said Mary Llewellyn, who with Kate had followed Florry. "I clean forgot the creature in the flurry of coming away. I locked it in the pantry, as it seemed frightened and was scurrying about the cuddy; and when we went on deck, I didn't think to take it out, so there it'll be starved to death, or drowned!"

"It was my fault as well," interposed Kate, looking quite as unhappy as her sister and the stewardess. "I told Mary to lock it up."

"Be jabbers!" ejaculated the first mate, "it'll never do to lave it there. Sure and we'd be onlucky altogether if a cat came to harm in the old ship! I didn't know it was aboard at all, at all. Sure an' there's no knowing but what all our misfortunes have been brought about by the same baste, bad cess to it?"

"Oh, Mr McCarthy!" exclaimed Kate, "how can you believe that?"

"Sure, and I mane it," answered the Irishman promptly, as if he put the greatest faith in the superstition.

"Well," said Mr Meldrum, "I'm sorry for the poor animal; but it will have to stop there now! The sea is very rough, and I would hardly like to risk men's lives to save a cat!"

"I'll go back for it, sir," volunteered Frank Harness with a look at Kate, which said as plainly as looks could speak that he was ready to do a good deal more than that to please her. "You were speaking just now of sending off the jolly-boat to fetch what we could from the wreck; so we can bring the poor cat on shore at the same time."

"Yes, I certainly did suggest that just now," said Mr Meldrum; "but, as Mr McCarthy pointed out, there is a good deal of sea on, and—"

"Sure, but I said, sorr, I'd go if you liked," interrupted the first mate eagerly, not wishing to be behindhand when Frank had offered; "and, faix, I'm ready at once."

"Let the durned animile slide," put in Mr Lathrope. "It ain't worth a cent, much less such a tall price as yar life."

"No, we won't," said Mr McCarthy, all anxiety now to start. "Who'll volunteer to go back to the wreck and save the cat!" he called out aloud.

"I will," and "I," and "I," cried out several of the seamen, laughing and passing all sorts of chaff about the expedition; and soon there were more than enough offers to man the jolly-boat twice over if all had been taken who offered.

Ben Boltrope was one of the first to stand out; but Mr Meldrum at once motioned him back.

"You must not go," said he. "I shall want your carpentering aid very soon, and can't spare you." It was the same with some others amongst the hands, Mr Meldrum picking them out as they stepped forwards.

Before long, however, a crew was selected; when, the jolly-boat being run down into the water by the aid of a dozen other willing hands, besides her own special crew, she was soon on her way back to the scene of the wreck of the

Nancy Bell—McCarthy steering her, and Frank Harness, who would not relinquish his privilege of going in her after having been the first to volunteer, pulling the stroke-oar, no idlers being wanted on board. Kate looked at him and waved her hand in adieu as the boat topped the heavy rolling waves and got well out into the offing; and, after that, Frank did not mind what exertion he had to go through.

It was a long pull and an arduous one, although, in spite of Mr McCarthy's warning to the contrary, there was nothing dangerous in the accomplishment of the feat. The first mate had probably felt a little lazy when he endeavoured to set Mr Meldrum at first against the expedition, for after a couple of hours' hard work, having the tide to contend with most of the way, they easily managed to approach the reef and bring up the boat under the vessel's stern, where the side ropes and slung chair, which they had omitted to remove on board the raft remained just as they had left them, swinging about to and fro as the wind brushed by, causing them to oscillate with its breath.

On climbing up to the deck, they found the poop pretty much the same, but the forward portion of the ship had all broken to pieces, hardly a timber being left, save part of the forefoot or cut-water, which had got jammed in between the rocks along with the anchor-stock, the heavy mass of iron belonging to which must have fallen down below the surface when the topgallant forecastle was washed away.

Going down into the cuddy, Frank could hardly at first believe that its former tenants had quitted it for good and all, for the cabin doors were thrown wide open, and dresses and other articles of feminine attire scattered about—one special shawl of Kate's, which he readily recognised as the one she had on her shoulders the night they had watched the stars together in the South Atlantic, being placed over the back of the captain's chair at the head of the table, as if the owner had just put it down for a minute and was coming back to fetch it. He at once took charge of this, besides collecting sundry other little articles which he thought Kate might want; but he was soon interrupted in his quest of feminine treasure-hunting by a mewling and scratching at the door of the steward's pantry, which made him recollect all at once what had been the ostensible object of his mission on board the vessel.

"Gracious goodness!" he exclaimed, speaking to himself, for Mr McCarthy was busy raking amongst his clothes in his own cabin, also oblivious to the fate of the poor feline for whom they had come aboard the ship. "I almost forgot the cat after all. Puss, Pussy, poor Puss!" and he wrenched open the pantry door, setting the animal free.

If ever mortal cat purred in its life, or endeavoured to express its pleasure and satisfaction by walking round and rubbing itself against a person, raising and putting down its fore-feet alternately, with the toes extended, as if practising the goose step or working on some feline treadmill, why that cat did then. The poor animal could not speak, of course, but it really seemed to utter some inarticulate sounds that must have been in cat language a paean of joy and praise and thanks at its deliverance; and, finally, in a paroxysm of affection and endearment, it turned itself head over heels on the cabin floor in front of Frank.

"Poor Puss; poor little thing!" said the young sailor, taking it up in his arms. "I believe I would have come back for you even if it hadn't been to oblige Kate—my darling!" and he kissed the fur of the animal as he held it in his arms, as if he considered it for the time being her deputy.

Judging by several well-picked bones that could be noticed lying on the deck of the pantry, Frank assured himself that Puss had not been starved since she had been locked up; and, indeed, she could not have been in any serious want, as there was a freshly-cut ham on one of the shelves and a round of spiced beef, which she had not touched, both of which Frank took the liberty of appropriating for the benefit of those on shore.

Then, still in company with Puss, who would not leave his side, he imitated the example of the first mate, and selected a coat or two and a change of clothes from out of his own sea-chest. He did not forget the others either, but gathered together various garments which he saw lying about in the captain's cabin and that of Mr Meldrum, thinking that both might perhaps be glad of them bye and bye.

Beyond what Frank had found in the pantry, however, neither he nor Mr McCarthy could discover any provisions, or other things that might be useful on shore, save the unbroken half of the cuddy skylight. This they carefully lowered down into the jolly-boat, for the glass framing would come in handy for the windows of any house they built—Mr Meldrum having hinted on the previous evening of some more substantial structure being necessary than the tent, which had been only put up for temporary accommodation on their first landing on the island.

The several articles that had been collected being now put on board the jolly-boat, in addition to the accommodation chair, which was cut from the slings, at McCarthy's especial request, and lowered down on board—"jest to plaze the meejor," as he said, alluding to Mrs Negus's weakness for sitting in high places during the voyage. Frank then descended with the cat in his arms and took a seat in the stern-sheets, the first mate very good-naturedly pulling the stroke-oar on the return journey in his place; and, all these little matters being thus arranged, Pussy's rescuers started again for the shore. The tide, luckily, was with them all the way; so they accomplished the distance back to the beach inside the fiord in very nearly half the time they had taken in rowing out to the ship—getting everything ashore and the jolly-boat hauled up safely beyond high-water mark with none of the trouble they had anticipated on setting out, the wind and sea having both calmed down in the interim.

Kate's thanks to Frank need not be alluded to:— they were simply inexpressible; but, if Puss is described to have been pleased when she was first released from captivity and an untimely end on board the shipwrecked vessel, what can be said for her raptures now that she was landed on *terra firma*—which she probably had never expected to see again—especially when she recognised the bevy of old friends amongst whom she found herself alive once more.

"I guess," said Mr Lathrope, as he watched her affectionate antics, "the stoopid old cuss will purr herself to potato parings, and rub all her darned fur inter a door-mat with joy!"

Chapter Twenty Four.

An Afternoon Call.

"I'm glad you brought the skylight," said Mr Meldrum to the first mate when the excitement attending the return of the boat's crew with Miss Pussy had somewhat calmed down. "Its the very thing we'll want presently!" He then proceeded to show Mr McCarthy what he and those who had remained ashore had done during the absence of the others.

Adjoining the site of the tent, and under the lee of a sort of gable-end of the cliffs, a piece of ground had been cleared of the snow close to a freshwater tarn some little distance above the sea-shore, where it was not affected by the tide; and here the land had been levelled in the form of a parallelogram, some thirty feet long by twenty wide, round which a trench had been dug about a foot deep.

At the four corners of this, stout posts, selected from some of the deck-beams of the *Nancy Bell* that had been secured for the under-structure of the raft, were set up in holes excavated of such a depth that they would firmly resist any lateral pressure brought to bear against them by the wind; and, round the top of these uprights, a scantling of deal had been nailed on, thus making the framework of a good-sized cottage.

Mr McCarthy was quite surprised at the progress made.

"You've been pretty busy, sorr," he said. "Be jabbers, you'll have a cabin built in no time!"

"Yes," replied Mr Meldrum, "we have got along; but you must remember we've had fourteen hands at work besides the carpenter, including Mr Lathrope and myself; and such a number of men, when their labour has been systematically divided, can accomplish a good deal in a short time. I wish we had some more timber, though! We've got the roof yet to make, and a partition or two in the inside for the proper division of the building. I have planned out a separate room for the ladies, and one for us men; in addition to a general sort of apartment, where we can all have our meals together, and which will serve as a store-room as well."

"Sure an' you don't think, sorr, we'll have to live here long!" said the first mate, a little alarmed at the magnitude of the other's plans.

"Indeed I do," answered Mr Meldrum. "It is now only the beginning of August, which is the worst season here, as I mentioned to poor Captain Dinks; and the winter will probably last from four to five months; during which time, according to all accounts that I've read of the place, we may expect to experience the most bitter weather, and have to depend entirely on our own resources; for, none of the whaling schooners that go seal-hunting in these parts ever visit the island, as far as I know, before November or December—and even then they go generally to the eastern side and do not come here! Before that time, however, that is as soon as the snow melts and the spring sets in, we'll have to try and cross over the land to one of the harbours which the whalers frequent, and which I've got marked on the chart. Until that period, Mr McCarthy, as you must perceive, we will have to remain here; so it is best for us to try and be as comfortable as we can under the circumstances. Last night, as you know, it was cold enough in all conscience; but that will be nothing to what we may expect later on when the regular gales and sea-fogs and snowstorms set in, and they continue for weeks, I believe!"

"Begorra, it's a bad look-out!" said the mate,—“a bad look-out, anyway!”

"It is; there's no good of our blinking the fact," replied the other,—“but, still, other shipwrecked crews have borne worse hardships than we'll have to contend with, and, you know, what men have done men may do! I wish we had some more of the poor old ship's planks, however. Besides their being necessary for completing our house properly, we shall want a large supply of them for fuel during the next four months.”

"Sure and they'll float ashore," said the mate.

"I don't know about that," responded Mr Meldrum. "You said just now, when you returned in the jolly-boat, that all the bows and forward parts of the vessel had been washed to pieces; and yet, of all that wreckage not a single scrap came ashore here to tell the tale before you brought the news:— what do you think of that, eh!"

"Be jabbers, it's all that blissid current that takes it back agin! Sure an' I've sane it floating in foreninst the land myself.”

"Well, we'll have to try and baulk the current, then," said Mr Meldrum. "We must keep a good look-out on the ship; and, as soon as we see that the stern has broken up, the jolly-boat will have to be manned and cruise about to pick up and tow ashore whatever timber and stray planks may be seen.”

"Right you are, sorr," replied Mr McCarthy. "I'll say to that!"

"Say, mister," interposed the American, who had remained silent during the deliberations of the other two, although he was supposed to be present at the council and a deliberative member. "How'll the grub last all that air time! Twenty-seven folks all told, as I've kalkerlated 'em, take a powerful lot of feedin' in four months!"

"Ah!" said Mr Meldrum, "that's a serious consideration. However, with that lot of penguins there,"—and he pointed to the little colony of the quaint birds, which were still croaking and grumbling at them, not having yet become accustomed to their strange visitors,—“I don't think we'll starve! Besides these gentry, too, there will be lots more sea-fowl, and perhaps some land ones as well. Still, it will be advisable, Mr Lathrope, as you have introduced the subject, to take stock of all the stores we have, and Master Snowball must be instructed to be not quite so lavish in his display at dinner-time as he was yesterday.”

"Sorry I spoke," said Mr Lathrope, rather chop-fallen at the way in which his suggestion had been taken. "I didn't want you to cut short the vittles, but only to kinder kalkerlate!"

"I'm just doing that," replied the other, "and we'll see what we've got to depend upon at once."

As the American had remarked, they were just twenty-seven souls in all: *Imprimis*, Captain Dinks—whose wound evidently was progressing favourably, for he had lost all those feverish symptoms that were apparent the day previous and was now in a sound sleep, after eating some thin soup which Snowball had concocted for him by Mr Meldrum's direction—Mr McCarthy, Adams, Frank Harness, Ben Boltrope the carpenter, and Karl Ericksen the rescued Norwegian sailor, besides Snowball and thirteen others of the crew of the *Nancy Bell*, making twenty of those belonging to the ship; while, of the passengers, there were six—Mr Meldrum, Kate, Florry, Mrs Major Negus and her son and only hope Maurice, and lastly, though by no means least, Mr Lathrope—the grand total, with the stewardess, who must not be forgotten, coming exactly to seven-and-twenty.

Now, to feed all this large family, they had brought ashore on the raft three barrels of salt beef and four of pork, six hams uncooked, besides the one which Frank had removed from the steward's pantry along with the round of spiced beef on his visit to the ship in search of the cat; some four dozen eight-pound tins of preserved meats and vegetables; about a couple of hundredweight of flour; five bags of biscuit; a few bottles of spirits; and sundry minor articles, such as pickles and salt, and one or two pots of preserves—not a very considerable amount of provender, considering the number of souls to be supplied, and the length of time Mr Meldrum thought it wise to estimate that the provisions would have to last.

Just as they were rolling back the casks under the shelter of the tent, Maurice Negus rushed up to Mr Meldrum in company with Florry, both of the children being intensely excited evidently about something they had seen or heard.

"Oh crickey!" cried out the former before he had quite got up to the party, so as to have the first voice in the matter,—"Do come! There's an awful long thing just crawled out of the sea, and it is creeping up to the tent as fast as it can!"

"Yes," chorussed Florry, "and it's like the seals we saw in the Zoological Gardens; only it's twice as big and has a long trunk like an elephant!"

"Jeehosophat!" exclaimed Mr Lathrope, feeling for his revolver. "It must be a rum outlandish animile, if it's like that!"

"Zee-oliphant," said Karl Ericksen, the Norwegian sailor, in his broken English. "He is not harmful:— he good for man eat."

"Snakes and alligators! that's prime anyhow, I reckon," put in Mr Lathrope. "I guess this air animile'll save your old stores, mister, hey?"

"I hope so," answered Mr Meldrum. "Although I've never tasted seal beef myself, I have heard it's very fair when you can't get the genuine article; the whalers generally use it, at all events, some of them even thinking it a dainty. But, let us go and see this sea-elephant that the children have discovered!"

They did not have to go far; for, the queer-looking amphibious creature had by this time crawled up on to the rocks close outside the tent, and was quite near to where they were standing—the Norwegian sailor having already seen and recognised its species before he spoke.

The animal was a gigantic sort of seal, some twenty-five feet in length and quite five high. If big, it was certainly also most unwieldy, for it appeared to waddle up from the shore with the greatest difficulty. Its body was covered with a short brown fur, with lighter hair of a dun colour under the throat; and, what gave it the singular appearance whence its name of "sea-elephant" was probably more derived than from its size, was the pendulous nostrils, which hung down over its mouth, just like the proboscis or long trunk of the children's old friend, "Jumbo."

Karl Ericksen had managed to rummage out a harpoon one day amongst the odds and ends in the forecabin of the *Nancy Bell*, and the sailor having been familiar with its use from long whaling experience, had not forgotten to bring it ashore when they abandoned the wreck—looking upon the weapon with almost as much veneration as Mr Lathrope regarded the rifle he had inherited from the celebrated Colonel Crockett.

This harpoon Karl now brought forth, approaching the seal with the obvious intention of despatching it summarily; when another evidence of its elephantine character was displayed, well justifying its title.

As the sailor came up to it and raised the harpoon to strike, the animal raised itself on its fore-flappers, snarling and emitting a hollow roar which startled everybody near, causing them to jump away, and give it a wide berth; while at the same time it erected its nose so that it stood out quite stiff, more than a foot long, and, opening its mouth, it exposed the bright scarlet palate and gullet, from the bottom of which its hoarse bellow proceeded. Karl, however, was not frightened by the sea-elephant's rage, but with a single swinging blow from his harpoon on the snout stretched it lifeless on the ground, when all were better able to appreciate its enormous size. Its girth alone exceeded sixteen feet, and the animal appeared all the more imposing when dead than alive.

The Norwegian sailor cut out the tongue, telling Mr Meldrum that this portion of the sea-elephant and the snout were considered great delicacies by the whalers; but none of the party relished either, although Snowball served up both at dinner in his most *recherché* fashion. The flesh of the body, too, was of a blackish hue, and had an oily taste about it, which made the sailors turn up their noses at it and wish to fling it away; but this Mr Meldrum would not allow.

"We will probably be glad enough to get it bye and bye," he said; and he then caused the despised seal "beef" to be cut up in pieces and salted down in one of their spare casks in case of future need.

During the time Mr Meldrum had been taking stock of their stores, before the coming of the sea-elephant—"to pay them an afternoon call," as Florry said—the carpenter, with a number of the hands working under him, had been proceeding with the house-building operations; but he had to stop at last, more from want of the proper timber wherewith to complete the job than through the darkening of the afternoon on account of the approach of night.

"I can't get along nohow," Ben explained to Mr Meldrum, who was now regarded as the head of the party, and the one to look to in every difficulty. "I'm at a standstill for planking, sir. I can manage the roof part pretty well, by breaking up those old puncheons we brought under the raft and using the staves for shingles; but the joists and rafters bother me, sir."

"Well, we must hope to get some more to-morrow from the wreck," said Mr Meldrum. "The ship cannot last much longer; but, recollect, we can't get any ashore till she breaks up."

"Aye, aye, sir, I knows that," replied Ben. "Still, I hopes it won't all drift away to sea when she do go to pieces."

"We'll try to prevent that, Boltrope," said the other. "Mind, Mr McCarthy, and have a look-out stationed in the morning to keep an eye on the ship, with a man to relieve him watch and watch, the same as on board! She's all firm now, for I saw the flag still waving when I looked before the light began to fail; but if the wind and sea get up again, as they very likely will towards midnight, tomorrow will tell a very different tale!"

"I'll have a look-out, never fear, sorr."

"And, McCarthy—"

"Yes, sorr!"

"See that the jolly-boat is ready and a crew picked for it to put off the moment any wreckage is observed floating inshore. We must not neglect any chance of securing all the timber we can for fuel, putting the house out of the reckoning entirely!"

"Indade I will, sorr," answered the mate cheerily; and then, all struck work for the day and retired into the tent, not sorry to have another easy night's rest. Every one was anxious to turn in, for really there was nothing else to be done.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Breaking up of the Vessel.

They did not sleep so soundly, however, on this occasion as they had done the first night of their landing on the island; for, soon after dark, the wind rose into a tempestuous gale, making the tent flap about in such a way that it seemed as if it were about to be carried off bodily!

As it was, indeed—through the blowing in of the sides, and the jumping up and down of the tarpaulin on the roof every now and then as the boisterous gusts got under it—a lot of snow, which had begun to fall before they retired to rest and was now coming down in a regular storm, as fast and furious as the flakes could succeed each other, managed to find its way inside, not contributing much to their comfort; and this, combined with the roar of the breakers against the base of the cliffs, which seemed louder than ever now that the men were lying down with their ears to the ground, tended to keep the majority of the castaways awake and made them long for the morning to come again.

At last, the day broke; and, as the faint light gleamed through the chinks in the tent, telling all that the dreary night was past, they quickly bestirred themselves—Snowball being one of the first to turn out, and at once hastening to kindle up the fire, which he had left carefully banked up the previous evening, besides wisely hedging it in with heavy pieces of stone so that the wind should not scatter it away, as would otherwise probably have been the case.

"Soon get drop hot coffee, massa," said he to Mr Meldrum, who was an early riser too and not far behind the darkey; "Um berry good for de tomack fust thing in mornin'!"

But the other was too much concerned about the fate of the ship to think of coffee then; and, long before Snowball had finished his remark, he was actively ascending the highest rock near to get a good view out to seaward. Here he was shortly joined by Mr McCarthy and Ben Boltrope, who were also equally anxious in the matter; although the others, not having been called, did not hurry themselves to leave the warm atmosphere of the tent for the cold and raw air without.

The lookers-out, however, could not see much as yet; for the usual surface fog—which in these regions generally creeps up in the evening and hangs over the sea till broad daylight—had not yet completely cleared away; and so, a curtain of haze shut out the offing from their gaze. Still, as far as the eye could reach, the sea was very rough, with heavy rollers rolling in landward. The gale of the night had not abated much, albeit the wind was not so gusty as it had been, while its force seemed to be lessening as the morning drew on.

"I'm afraid," said Mr Meldrum, after vainly trying for a long time to peer through the impenetrable veil of mist which hid the reef from sight, "that this last blow has settled the old ship."

"Faix, and I'm thinking just that very same," responded the first mate. "It blowed tremenjus towards four bells, sorr, an' the poor crathur must be clane smashed up by now!"

"It's very unfortunate if that has happened," replied the other. "The sea is running too high for us to launch the jolly-boat, and so we'll lose all chance of saving the wreckage."

"True for you, sorr, save and onless it drifts ashore."

"There's not the slightest hope of that," replied Mr Meldrum. "Nothing has come up on the beach here yet, that I've been able to perceive!"

"But, sure an' the wind's bin blowing on to the land, sorr, all night. P'r'aps that might make a difference!"

"Perhaps it might," said the other; "but I very much doubt it."

"Well, sorr, we'll say," retorted the mate. However, the argument was settled offhand by Ben Boltrope, who had clambered up to a higher ledge of rock from whence he could see further out to seaward over the fog, which hung low on the water and did not extend to the upper regions of the air.

"There she is, your honour, bless her old heart!" he exclaimed. "She's still hard and fast on the reef, and never another plank sprung from the stern, as far as I can see!"

This was good news; and Mr Meldrum, with the mate, hastened to join the carpenter on his perch above.

Yes, there in the distance, rising out of the mist, could be seen the upper portion of the poop of the *Nancy Bell*, although the wreck was still occasionally obscured by a wave breaking over it; and, presently, on the lifting of the fog, as the clouds cleared off from the face of the sky and a gleam of sunshine stole out, lighting up the sea and landscape around, it could be observed that the remains of the vessel were nearly in the same condition, apparently, as when last noticed on the evening before—save that the poor ship was now surrounded by a line of breakers which dashed over the stern continually, looking as if they meant to pull it in pieces before they had done with it!

"She's shifted more on to her side," said Mr Meldrum, who had taken out a glass from his pocket and was now inspecting the remains of the old ship more carefully. "I can see the deck clearly. The waves are spurting up through the hole where the skylight was removed, so the cabins must be pretty well washed out by this time."

"Ah! that's the rayson we couldn't say the flag, sorr," observed the mate.

"It is there still," replied Mr Meldrum; "although it is now all to port, instead of right amidships as it was when we left. This is on account of the mizzen-mast stump leaning over into the water, for I couldn't see it myself till I took the glass. She can't last much longer, though. Those seas are breaking over her with frightful force, judging by the amount of surf they send up, and they must soon make an end of her!"

"I hope it'll calm down a bit, sir," said Ben Boltrope. "I'm nervous about them timbers for the roof of the house."

"Be aisy with you, man," put in Mr McCarthy. "Sure an' all the anxiety in the worruld won't dhrive a pig to market! If we're to have the crathur's planks we'll have thim sure enough; and if we aren't, why we won't, that's all about it!"

"The sea may run easier at low water, Boltrope," said Mr Meldrum to console the carpenter; "and if she should be broken up by that time, we'll send out the jolly-boat and pick up what we can."

"Begorrah, you won't have to wait long," cried the mate; and almost as he spoke, a heavy roller was seen to lift up the wreck on the top of its crest and roll it over, after which the dark body they had observed on the reef with the little scrap of a flag fluttering over it was there no longer!

The *Nancy Bell*, or rather the remaining fragments of her hull, had disappeared at last beneath the waves!

"I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to save anything," said Mr Meldrum, after a moment of silence, in which each of the three witnesses of the vessel's end had drawn a deep breath, showing how affecting had been the sight. "It is such a long distance out there, and the sea is running so heavily besides, that I wouldn't like to risk the boat."

"Sure and we could thry, sorr," pleaded the first mate eagerly.

"No, Mr McCarthy, it would be hazardous in the extreme; and we ought not to peril the men's lives unnecessarily! Still, if you want to do something—"

"Bedad I do," interrupted the other, as if ready at once to dive into the sea if required.

"Well," continued Mr Meldrum, "you can post a man on the watch here and one or two other places along the cliff, to notice if anything floats inshore; and then, of course, we'll make an effort to bring it to land should the wreckage drift near."

"Aye, aye, sorr, you may dipind upon me that same," said Mr McCarthy; and, rushing down from the rock, he was soon in front of the men's compartment of the tent, rousing them out with a cry of, "Ahoy there! All hands on deck to save ship! Tumble up, tumble up there, my hearties, there's no time to lose!"

The men coming out with alacrity, half bewildered by such a hail under the circumstances and surroundings, four were picked out and posted to look out like sentinels—two on the beach and two on the ridge above—and all with strict injunctions to report anything they saw at once, just as if they were put to the same duty on board ship.

"Now, mind ye kape a good watch," said the first mate, as he left them to their own devices, "and out if you say a single hincoop floating in the say foreninst ye—though it's little enough of them you'll say, sure, considerin' they

were all washed overboard off the Cape!—I mane if ye say any timbers or spars from the wrack drifting inshore, just you hould your eye on thim, or the divil a mother's son ye'll have a roof over his hid or a pace of foire to warm hisself! Faix, ye needn't snigger, ye spalpeens; it's the truth I'm afther tellin' ye!" and Mr McCarthy then went off, shaking his fist good-humouredly at those who laughed at his quaint speech.

Four other men he selected as a crew for the jolly-boat, which was hauled down on the beach in readiness to shove off as soon as any of the wreckage was reported in sight; the remainder of the hands being directed to place themselves under the orders of the carpenter until their services should be required to relieve the look-out men at the end of their watch. The duty of these latter, however, was for some time a sinecure, as the breakers were still breaking angrily against the cliffs and keeping up the hoarse diapason in which they expressed their impotent rage; while the wind, though blowing with less force than during the night time, was yet strong enough to sweep off the tops of the billows when it caught them well abeam, carrying the spindrift away to leeward and scattering the surge with its blast as it transformed it into fairy-like foam bubbles and wreaths of gossamer spray.

Noon came before there was any change.

Then, soon after the end of the ebb and just as the tide began to flow again, the wind died away into a dead calm; and the sea settling down somewhat—the rollers still rolling in, but only breaking when they reached the shore, instead of jostling one another in their tumultuous rushings together and mimic encounters out in the open—every eye was on the *qui vive*. It was either "now or never" that they might expect anything coming inshore from the wreck!

"Sail ho!" at length shouted one of the look-out men on the ridge. The sailor evidently could not help using the nautical term from old habit, although he well knew that there was little chance of his seeing a "sail" that quarter!

"Where away?" called out Mr McCarthy, who had the jolly-boat's crew round her, running her into the water the moment he heard the cry.

"Right to leeward of the reef, sir, about a mile out," answered the look-out, adding quickly afterwards, "it looks a pretty biggish bit of timber, sir, and rides high in the water."

"All right, my man," said the mate; "mind you kape still on the watch, and fix any other paces of planking you may say in your mind's eye! You can till me where to look for thim whin I come back agin within hail. Shove off, you beggars!" he then cried out to the boat's crew, as he jumped in over the side. "Arrah put your backs into it, for we're bound to save ivery scrap of the ould vessel we can come across, in order sure to tow it ashore!"

Watching for an opportunity, the boat's head was shoved out on top of a return wave, when, the oars being plied with sturdy strokes, the little buoyant craft was soon well out of the broken water and making steady progress in the direction that had been pointed out. No object, however, could be seen as yet by Mr McCarthy; for the rollers were still so high that when the boat was sunk in the hollow between them nothing could be noticed beyond the curving ridge of the next wave and the broken wash of the one just overtopped.

"Go it, boys, kape at it with a will," cried the mate, rising up in the stern-sheets after a while to look round better, steadying himself by holding on to the yoke-lines and leaning forwards. "Ha! I can say it now, right in front! We'll soon have it—one more stroke, and we'll be there, sure!"

"Aisy, now—avast—row of all!" he cried out in turn; and then, with a sullen, grating sound the boat brought up against a large mass of broken timberwork which the men had no difficulty in recognising as the larger portion of the poop deck. It had the combings of the companion and skylight still attached, as well as a part of one of the ladders, and was in every sense a treasure trove.

"Sure we're in luck, boys, anyhow," said Mr McCarthy joyfully. "Be jabbers, I niver expected to git so much ov it all at once without any trouble!"

The first mate proceeded without delay to attach the small hawser which they had used for towing the raft to a ring-bolt, left as if for the purpose on the floating mass; and then the men, backing water on one side, and pulling sharp on the other, soon had the boat on her way back to the land, with the mass of broken timberwork trailing behind her. It was in itself, without picking up another plank, more than sufficient to supply all the carpenter's needs for the roof of the house, "besoides making the ladies a prisint of a staircase for the front door," as Mr McCarthy observed!

It was fortunate they came across this, for little more of the wreckage was secured, the tide having evidently carried out the lighter portions of the planking too far to sea for it to be brought back again by the returning flood. It was probably only owing to the weight of the poop-deck that they had been able to make certain of that.

Still, on making a trip out to the reef later on, to see whether any more of the timbers remained there, a "find" was discovered which greatly rejoiced Snowball's heart when it was brought on shore.

This was nothing less than one of the ship's coppers, which had become detached from the galley framework and in falling on to the reef had managed to get securely fixed between the rocks, just a little below the surface of the water. A couple of the men were easily able to pull it up into the jolly-boat, where, on being inspected, it was found perfectly sound and as good as ever!

"Golly, massa," exclaimed the darkey, when Mr Meldrum presented him with the recovered copper—which Snowball looked upon almost as the apple of his eye—"me able cook pea-shoop now, sah, and bile de beef in 'spectable style, sah! Dat sospan, massa, no good for ship's company. Um bile, and bile, and bile, and nebbah bile enuff!"

"Ah! mind you don't go cooking too extravagantly," said Mr Meldrum. "If I see you wasting anything, I'll taboo the

copper.”

“Lor, massa, I’se too careful for dat,” replied the negro cook, with a grin which displayed his ivory-mounted mouth from ear to ear; “when de men sing out for more thoop, why, sah, I just water um grog! Yah, yah! ho, ho!” and he burst into a roar of laughter in which those around could not help joining, the darkey’s hearty merriment was so contagious.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Kerguelen Cabbage.

While Mr McCarthy and the jolly-boat’s crew were thus trying to save all the “flotsam and jetsam” they could from the wreck, Ben Boltrope and those of the crew told off to help him, as “carpenter’s mates,” were as busy as bees house-building, if running up the shanty which Mr Meldrum had designed could be so designated; while the rest of the party were lending all the aid they could in fetching and carrying what the actual workers required.

It was only a rough wooden hut, or rather “composite” structure; but as it was more than probable that it would have to be the home of the shipwrecked people for some five months at the least, no trouble or pains were spared in endeavouring to make it as substantial and comfortable under the circumstances as Ben and his active assistants could effect with the limited means at their command.

The gable-end of the cliff, under whose lee the hut was erected, so as to gain shelter from the southward and westward winds, which seemed to be the most prevalent on the coast, presented a flat and even face, just like a slab of black slate standing up perpendicularly from the ground. The wall of rock, which was of a hard volcanic material that was evidently not porous, was made to serve for the back of the building, a niche or groove being excavated along it, about ten feet from the bottom, for the insertion of the ridge poles. This was a task of some difficulty, owing to the toughness of the stone; but it was a necessary one in order to prevent the moisture from above trickling down into the interior between the roof and the face of the cliff. The lower ends of the ridge poles, which sloped down from the top at an angle of some fifteen degrees, were then firmly fastened to the posts placed in the holes dug for them and lashed together with stout seizings of rope and sennet, so strongly that it would almost have taken a hurricane to have blown them away.

The next proceeding was to fix, at equal distances apart across the rough framework of the roof, a series of slender scantlings cut from the deck planks by splitting them with an axe, which Ben was forced to make use of on account of his having no saw, that and other similar useful instruments having been left in his tool-chest, which had been placed in the long-boat when the first preparations were made for abandoning the *Nancy Bell*.

The scantlings were secured to the ridge poles diagonally, not only for greater security but on account of the shortness of some of the pieces of timber they had and the necessity there was for their economising it; and, over the scantlings were laid in due order, the one overlapping the other to prevent any crevices in between, the shingles which the ingenious carpenter had improvised out of the staves of the empty casks—although, as the space to be covered amounted to some seven hundred superficial feet or thereabouts, every one of the casks had to be broken up save the six containing their beef and pork and the salted-down flesh of the sea-elephant, Ben even then hardly having enough shingles for his purpose.

However, casks or no casks, the roof of their house was a consideration that stood at the moment before all others; and, being now properly shingled, it was rendered additionally watertight by spreading over it the old tarpaulin and sail that had already temporarily done duty above their tent, and then giving them a good coating of pitch. A supply of this article had been fortunately thrown on to the raft along with the other odds and ends that had come in so usefully and it was now melted down in Snowball’s recovered copper. The finishing touch was given to the structure by piling several big boulders over the upper row of shingles along the ridge pole, for greater stability and to prevent boisterous Boreas from playing any of his rude tricks to its disadvantage.

The roof done, all hands turned their attention to raising the sides of the shanty. This was a much easier job, consisting in nailing rough pieces of planking at intervals across the corner-posts from end to end, both inside the building and without, and then filling up the interstices, or intervening hollows, with the basaltic débris that was scattered around—just as rubble is thrown in between skeleton brickwork by what are termed “jerry-builders” to form party-walls of modern tenements. The side walls were then carried up to within a foot or so of the eaves of the roof, the sail-covering of which after being allowed to lap over was now tucked in at the top, thus closing up the chinks and making all snug.

The front of the shanty was afterwards finished off in the same way, although more planking was employed as greater nicety of detail was necessary in order to arrange for the doorway and windows, for which latter the remains of the cabin sky-light Frank thought of bringing ashore supplied the material; but it took a couple of days to complete the building to the satisfaction of Ben and Mr Meldrum, notwithstanding which drawback the whole party took possession of it the night after the wreckage had been landed, the recovered timber enabling the carpenter and his crew to proceed with the work—all declaring that the house was perfect and ever so much better than the discarded tent, in spite of many things being still wanting.

In the interior, of course, a flooring had been dispensed with, from the simple fact of their having no wood to spare for such a luxury; but otherwise it was made to look very comfortable.

Through the aid of canvas curtains suspended from the roof, it was divided, as Mr Meldrum had originally planned, into three tolerably commodious apartments, the cosiest and most sheltered of which, at the extreme end of the building, was apportioned to the ladies some sailcloth being spread on the bare ground to render it warmer; while the

middle and larger room was reserved as a store and place of general assembly for eating and carrying on such avocations as were required when the weather was too rough for out-of-door work.

The third apartment, at the beach end of the building, was devoted to the dormitory accommodation of the men folk, who slept on the bare rock below in their blankets—Mr Meldrum, with the American and the officers of the ship swinging above the crew in hammocks.

They had a tight fit of it altogether, some one-and-twenty sleeping in a space of not more than twenty feet by eight, according to the dimensions of the floor; but Captain Dinks' cot was hung for the present in the general compartment, on account of his wounded condition and the necessity of his having free air and ventilation, lest there should be a return of his feverish symptoms, which a confined atmosphere might have brought about.

When all these arrangements were completed, and the stores neatly ranged round the central division, which Ben Boltrope had further adorned with a rough deal table and some settles placed in the centre, the place presented quite a homelike appearance to the castaways. The children, indeed, declared that it was like the cuddy of the poor old *Nancy Bell*—that is, when things went well with the vessel. This resemblance was especially apparent on the second night after taking possession of the new house, when it was "declared open" in state, on which occasion it was lit up by no less than two of the ship's lanterns as a sort of house warming in honour of the event. Snowball was also allowed by Mr Meldrum to spread the festal board with as luxurious a feast as their scanty supplies permitted, a bottle of wine being subsequently produced for the ladies and grog served out to the men.

"I guess, mister," said Mr Lathrope, who took quite as much pride as Mr Meldrum in the building—indeed had an equal share in planning its construction, although he did not work quite so hard in carrying out the details—"I'd a sight rayther have this air shanty than a brown stone front in Philadelphia—yes, sir!"

"Well, we've got a roof over our heads at all events!" replied Mr Meldrum, "and I confess I was anxious about that point. We've had exceptionally fine weather for the time of year here, however, and there's no knowing how soon it will turn off; so, now that our house is finished, the next thing to be considered is the state of our provisions."

"Ah!" said the American, "I kalkerlate that's coming to hum."

"The food question is a vital necessity in most cases, and especially now in ours,"—continued the other—"taking into account the many mouths we have to feed."

"But the Lord filleth the hungry, we're told," said Mrs

Major Negus, who had developed, since landing on the island, what had evidently been a strong religious trait previously dormant in her character, if quoting Scripture texts were any proof of this disposition.

"Ah ma'rm," responded Mr Lathrope, "don't you believe it, unless the hungry work for it."

"And much you've done to earn your food!" said the lady tartly.

"Wa-al, ma'rm, if it warn't for me, as Mr Meldrum here will tell you, I've no doubt yer wouldn't have a chimbley, nor nary fire to sot by inside haar!"

"A fine smoky chimney it is too!" retorted Mrs Major Negus. "It is quite suffocating, I declare."

"That's better nor bein' friz," said the American, with some little heat. He was rather annoyed at having his special contrivance sneered at, for it was only after repeated attempts and failures that the building party had at last managed to rig up a fireplace against the back wall of the shanty—running up through the roof of the "general" room a chimney-shaft of loosely piled stones, enclosed within a framework of planks to which was nailed on the sea-elephant's skin in order to prevent the wood from catching fire. This served the purpose of warming the whole of the interior, as the other apartments opened into this room, which indeed also provided the only means of communication with the outside of the hut, the principal and solitary door of the establishment being here.

"I'd sooner be smoked any time fur chice, myself, than friz!" said Mr Lathrope again, as if to provoke his opponent.

"No wonder," retorted the lady, eager to have the last word, "when you're at it all day long, smoking your brains out with that vile tobacco!"

"What were you going to say about the provisions, papa?" interposed Kate at this juncture, in order to give a turn to the conversation, which seemed to be getting a trifle too personal between Mr Lathrope and "the Major."

"Well, my dear," said her father, glad of the interruption, "I was about to call a council of war. What we have can't last us very long, at our present rate of consumption. We shall have to eke it out, as far as it is practicable, by the native products of the island."

"That's snow and pumice-stone, as fur as I ken see," put in Mr Lathrope; "and I guess I must be durned peckish fore I tackle those!"

"You forget the seals and the penguins," said Mr Meldrum.

"Waal, mister," rejoined the American, "we've only seed one seal, as I reckon. That was that air 'Sea Olly-fant,' as the Norwegee called it, and the animile's meat warn't 'zackly what this child ken stomach! As for them penguins, I guess they're kinder fishy."

"My dear sir, we can't be squeamish," said the other. "Perhaps we'll be only too glad to get anything we can

presently! Besides the seals and birds, however, there's something else I shall have to look after to-morrow. It is what I should have thought of before, only we were so busy about the house—some vegetable food to eat with our salt beef. We must use some antiscorbutic; and we haven't a tin of our preserved stock left, I think."

"And whar'll you find vegetables haar, mister?"

"Why, there's one specially distinctive of the island and I daresay we'll not have to hunt far for it. From the accounts I've read it ought to grow quite close to the seashore."

"And what's that, mister?" asked the American.

"Kerguelen cabbage," promptly answered Mr Meldrum.

"Snakes and alligators, mister! Do you expect to find sich kitchen stuff haar?"

"I do," replied the other; "and intend to search for it to-morrow morning, as soon as I turn out!"

"It was lucky we have poor puss, papa," said Florry just then. "We would have had all our things eaten up by the mice only for her."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mrs Major Negus, drawing her skirts closer to her in alarm, "you don't say so? Mice! gracious goodness that I ever should have come to such a place. Of all the things I hate, those nasty creatures are the worst."

"Ah! ma'rm," put in Mr Lathrope, seeing his chance of revenge for the lady's comments on his chimney; "if all Mister Meldrum kalkerlates comes true about the shortness of our provisions, I guess you'll be glad to eat 'em bye and bye! I've seed the Chinee immigrants gobble 'em up in Californy often enough!"

"Disgusting!" ejaculated Mrs Major Negus, raising her nose in the air with an expression of intense scorn. "I for one, sir, will never descend to adopt Chinese fashions and live on rats and mice, whatever you may have learnt to do in your travels."

"Pray, do not alarm yourself," interposed Mr Meldrum, laughing. "Can't you see that Mr Lathrope is only joking! I do not dread our being reduced to such a sad extremity as he pictures! Are you sure about the mice, Florry?"

"Oh yes, papa," answered that young lady. "Pussy killed four not long ago, and brought them purring, one after another, to Kate and me—as if to show us what she had done! Besides, I'm sure I heard them squeaking behind the boxes last night."

Florry's statement was true enough, for on hunting amongst the stores it was found that the corners of the bags containing the small supply of biscuits they had left had been nibbled through and their contents scattered on the ground; in addition to which there were other evidences of the presence of the little depredators. The mice must have been originally introduced into the island by some whaling ship; and, they had evidently multiplied considerably since then, for they were now very numerous and puss would have all her work cut out for her in keeping them down.

In spite of the mouse diversion, Mr Meldrum did not forget what he had said about the "Kerguelen cabbage."

Instituting a search next day, it was not long before he came across the plant in a little hollow, close to the fresh-water tarn adjoining their hut and just peeping out from a thin covering of half-melted snow that lay on the ground.

This peculiar vegetable production, which was first noticed by Captain Cook a century ago and is indigenous to the island, is termed by botanists the *Pringlea antiscorbutica*, and belongs to the order of plants classed as the *Cruciferae*, which embraces the common cabbage of every household garden, the radish, and the horse-radish—to the latter of which the Kerguelen cabbage is the most closely allied, on account of its hot pungent taste when eaten raw as well as from its habit and mode of growth.

Mr Meldrum could not have failed to discover and recognise it at first sight from the description he already had, for the leaves of the plant grew thick about the root and put forth an upright stem, some two to three feet high, from which proceeded shoots, like broccoli sprouts on an enlarged scale, the outer petal-like leaves of which were six to eight inches long, and of a dark olive-green hue and fleshy nature, rounded and ciliated at the margin; while the inner leaves were of a paler green that approximated to yellow in the centre, where they were crumpled together, exactly like as in the "heart" of the well-known cabbage, to which the vegetable bore a very close likeness on being first seen.

"Begorrah, it's a cabbage, all the worruld over!" exclaimed the first mate, who had accompanied Mr Meldrum in his quest. "Sure you'd hardly know the hid ov the baste, if it was cut off, from one grown in Connemara!"

"Not quite so strong a resemblance, perhaps," replied Mr Meldrum, smiling. "Still, there's likeness enough to recognise its membership to the general cabbage family; but, we have yet to try how it tastes!"

"Aye, aye, sorr," said Mr McCarthy. "The proof of the pudden's in the aiting, sure!"

However, the Kerguelen cabbage stood this test well enough.

It was tried that very day at dinner; and, although tasting slightly acrid and hot flavoured when raw, on being cooked in the same water in the copper in which some salt pork had been boiled, it seemed not very much dissimilar to the native home-grown article commonly known as "greens."

"I guess, mister, it air downright prime, an' no mistake," said Mr Lathrope, passing opinion on its qualities; "and

more'n that, it fills a feller up fine!"

"Begorra, it's jist like bacon and greens!" observed Mr McCarthy.

The majority of the men, too, relished it greatly. It was a long time since any of them had tasted fresh meat much less vegetables, by reason of the *Nancy Bell* not having stopped at any port on her way after leaving England; so, thenceforth, both on account of its antiscorbutic as well as from its "filling up" qualities, the plant invariably formed a leading feature in the dietary scale of the castaways; Snowball never failing to have a plentiful supply of "cabbage" to cook when meal times came round, or else he or somebody else in fault for its absence, would have to "tell the reason why!"

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Colonel Crockett's Rifle.

Captain Dinks was gradually getting better; but his recovery was so very slow that it would be weeks before he would be able to quit his cot. His wound had been a severe one, and had narrowly missed his heart.

Under these circumstances, therefore, Mr Meldrum still retained the position of chief of the party—not only the first mate and Mr Adams acquiescing in the arrangement, which the poor captain desired; but the general bulk of the men themselves, who were prejudiced in his favour from Ben Boltrope's frequent yarns of his ability when an officer in the navy, requested his continuing to be their leader by acclamation, when he expressed a wish of surrendering the command as soon as they had landed safely from the wreck and things had been made comfortable for them on the island. This was only a repetition of what they had done when they were in peril of their lives on board the *Nancy Bell*, at which momentous time, it may be remembered, Mr McCarthy, speaking on behalf of all, had asked him to assume the direction of things and endeavour to extricate them from danger, looking upon him as the most competent person to guide them in the emergency.

Just so, now, on his speaking of relinquishing the leadership, he was requested to retain it for the common benefit, at least until Captain Dinks should be able to get about. This was the more desired from the fact of Mr Meldrum having managed matters so well for them already that they expected him to "see them through" all present difficulties.

As on the previous occasion, Mr Meldrum did not hesitate to retain the post, believing from his training and experience in commanding bodies of men that he really would be the best leader they could have, in default of the captain; but, before consenting to the general wish, he addressed all hands, impressing on them the necessity of implicit obedience to his orders and a rigid attention to whatever duties he might set them—adding that they might be certain he would not tell them to do anything which was not, to the best of his impression, for their own good.

To this the men assented with a cheer of acquiescence, and he then dismissed them with the assurance that he would endeavour to deserve the confidence they had displayed in him. But, prior to separating from Mr McCarthy and Adams, Mr Meldrum drew up a code of rules for their guidance, premising that where a large party of seamen such as they had under them were thus thrown ashore with no regular duties to perform, such as they had on board ship, it was most urgently necessary that employment of some sort should be made for them; not only to keep them out of that mischief which the evil one is proverbially said to find "for idle hands to do," but also to prevent them from dwelling on the misery of their situation.

"We must keep watches, turn and turn about," Mr Meldrum explained, "just the same as we did on board the ship; for, although there'll be no sails to attend to, in the cold nights which we will shortly have the fire will need careful looking after to prevent it from going out and leaving us all perhaps to freeze to death, while, in the daytime, there will be seal-hunting and water fetching to employ the hands, besides seeing to keeping the rooms clean. These and such similar duties must be performed regularly, so that through their aid the long hours will pass the more rapidly, until we are able—as I trust we shall about November, when the snow melts here, I believe, and we can travel—to start towards the other side of the island, where I hope we'll fetch some harbour where the whalers touch, and get taken on board and landed at the Cape or some other civilised spot. But, mind, in order to do this," he added in conclusion, "we must all work together in harmony; and, to prevent discord, and all sorts of unpleasantness, we must keep the men constantly employed—not too onerously, but so that they shall always have something to do—in order that the weary time of waiting shall not hang heavy upon them. However, my friends, to encourage them, you must likewise find something to be busy at for yourselves, as I shall find for myself! Excuse this little bit of a sermon, gentlemen," said Mr Meldrum at the end of his discourse; "but I thought it necessary to say it, as I've seen the evil of having a lot of men about me with nothing for them to do on a foreign station before now, and I've learnt wisdom by experience!"

"True for you, sorr," replied Mr McCarthy, stretching out his brawny fist; "and there's my hand on it to say I'll attend to your orders, if it's to holystone the face of that ould cliff there."

"All right, my friend!" said Mr Meldrum, shaking the hand outstretched cordially. "I see we understand each other; and, believe me, I'll not be a hard taskmaster."

"I'm certain of that, sir," responded Mr Adams; and the trio then parted company to carry these arrangements into effect, the first result of which was that everybody looked more cheerful than they had been since the completion of the house, after finishing which some dulness and lassitude had been observable in the men, coupled with a tendency to idle about and mope.

This soon disappeared now when the first mate and Mr Adams, in pursuance of Mr Meldrum's directions, made them bustle about here and there.

They did all sorts of jobs. They scraped the jolly-boat's planking, and pitched her inside and out; after which they collected all the stray blocks of basalt they could find and built a "shebeen," as Mr McCarthy called it, to contain her, and then housed it and her over with all the spare planks they could get hold of—marching miles along the black sandy beach for the purpose of seeing what stray timber might be stranded. In addition to this work achieved, they rigged up a flagstaff on the head of the cliff and used to signal from thence at stated hours of the day. In fact, they were employed in doing everything that could be thought of to give employment to their minds and bodies, McCarthy and Adams finding them fresh jobs continually.

Amongst all these various tasks, however, the very needful one of replenishing their gradually diminishing larder was not forgotten.

"We've got some green-stuff," said Mr Lathrope—whom the question of eating, or rather what to get to eat, seemed more materially to affect than anyone else—"and I ain't a-going to gainsay but what it's fust-rate green-stuff of the sort, and right down prime filling stuff too; but, mister, we ain't all ben brought up to live on sauerkraut, like them German immigrants as I've seed land at Castle Garden, New York. I, fur one, likes a bit o' somethin' more substantial, that a feller can chew. 'Spose we goes a-huntin', hey?"

"Very good," replied Mr Meldrum to this exordium; "but what shall we hunt!"

"Anything you durned please, siree," said the other. "There's seals and them penguins besides lots of cormorants and sichlike."

"Well, I don't think the seals will want much hunting or shooting," said Mr Meldrum; "for, if we come across any, a stroke over the nose with a stick will settle them, and the same can be said of the penguins—although I don't want them to be disturbed yet, as it will soon be their breeding season and I hope to get a lot of eggs from the little colony adjacent to us. As for the cormorants, if you complained about the former birds having a fishy taste, you'll find these fishier still. However, to relieve your mind, I believe that there are a number of wild rabbits on the island, so we'll try to shoot some of those."

"Bully for you!" exclaimed Mr Lathrope. "We'll go rabbit-hunting, mister, as soon as you please. If there wer one thing I liked in the old country it wer rabbit-pie, and it kinder made me lonesome to think I'd never fix my grinders through another 'fore I got played out!"

"I've heard, too," continued Mr Meldrum, "that there's a very fine sort of tern or duck here that is good eating; and I fancy I saw a brace fly across the creek the other day. We might come across some!"

"If we dew," said the American complacently, tapping the barrel of the old rifle he had brought ashore as his most valued possession, and spoken of as the gift of his deceased grandfather, "I guess Colonel Crockett haar ken give a sorter good account of 'em. When I draws a bead with that thaar rifle, mister, what I shoot at's as good as a gone coon!"

"I hope you'll have plenty of practice with it then, to the advantage of our dinner-table," replied Mr Meldrum pleasantly, preparing for the expedition by loading carefully a double-barrelled gun which he too had saved from amongst the various goods and chattels he had left on board the wreck. "You can have all the rabbits I kill if you let me have the ducks."

"That's a bargain, mister," said Mr Lathrope; "though I guess you'll gain by the swop."

"Sure and it sames to me you're both countin' your chickens afore they're hatched," observed the first-mate with a huge grin at his own joke.

"You're not far wrong, Mr McCarthy," said Mr Meldrum. "I, for one, don't expect to come back overladen with game; but of course I can't answer for my friend here, who may be another American 'Deerslayer,' for all I can tell, though he'll find rabbits his biggest quarry on this island."

"Sir," retorted Mr Lathrope, "I ain't goin' to let out all I ken dew, fur a leaky sieve's gen'rally bad for holdin' water, I guess; but, you jest wait and see what you jest see!"

"Arrah sure and we will, sorr," said Mr McCarthy, bursting into a regular roar of laughter, in which Mr Meldrum and the others joined—Mrs Major Negus being especially prominent in her merriment, as she always was when anything was said to the American's disadvantage, he being apparently her direct antipathy. "But I hope, sorr, though it goes agin my own counthry to say it, what you bring back won't be as much as Paddy shot at."

"You slide along with your durned brogue," was all the retort that Mr Lathrope condescended to make to this hit. It touched him, however, on his tenderest point, for he certainly prided himself on his proficiency in the use of "the lethal weapon;" so, when he turned round and observed that Master Snowball had heard the remark and was indulging in a quiet guffaw at his expense, he rounded on him a little more sharply. "I guess you'd better stow that, you ugly cuss!" said he menacingly; "or else I'll soon make you rattle your ivories to another toon!" Whereupon the darkey reduced his grin to a proper focus and endeavoured to look as grave as he could.

This appeased Mr Lathrope at once.

"Oh! durn it all, nigger, laugh away," he said, his wrath passing away as quickly as it had risen. "I guess those ken laugh who win;" and he handed Snowball a chaw of tobacco to show that he did not harbour any ill-will.

Leaving their house on the creek—which, by the way, Florry had christened "Penguin Castle," in consequence of its propinquity to the colony of queer sea-fowl—Mr Meldrum and Mr Lathrope, with Frank Harness, who was also of the

shooting party as well as two men to help in carrying back home the fruits of the sport, all pursued their way in company up the valley in a north-easterly direction to the right of the cliff against which the house was built.

The ground here rose gradually as they went along, and the walking became rather heavy after a time, in consequence of the snow having partly thawed and the soil beneath it being of some sort of peaty substance, into which their feet sank deeply at each step.

Presently, Frank, to whom Mr Meldrum had lent a second gun he had brought ashore, saw a bird just like a little bantam cock, which he at once shot.

This bird was pure white, with strong yellowish feet, that were not webbed like those of aquatic habits, rather short wings like those of a game bird, a strong black bill, stout spurs, and a bold black eye, which latter seemed to reproach Frank when he went to pick it up. Mr Meldrum said it was what was called a sheathbill, and not good for eating, which made Frank regret all the more having killed it, especially when its mate hopped up to him presently—as if asking him why he had shot her husband!

It was next Mr Lathrope's turn, a wild duck flying right over his head; but, somehow or other, "Colonel Crockett's rifle" didn't happen to be just ready in time, and the duck would have escaped but for Mr Meldrum's bringing it down with his right barrel. It was really very curious.

The same thing resulted when a second teal, or widgeon—the wild duck appearing to partake of the characteristics of both varieties—came by. Strange to say, the American's weapon again missed fire, and Mr Meldrum had to kill the bird with his left barrel. These repeated failures to bring down anything made Mr Lathrope use rather strong language anent the rifle.

"Burn the old thing!" said he; "I can't make out what's come over it. My old grandfather's shot scores of deer with the tarnation weppin, and I guess it's jest cranky, that's all. I bet I'll shoot the next fowl that comes across haar, or I'll bust it."

Unfortunately, however, no more ducks were to be seen; but as they ascended a rather steep and bare hill at the back of their own cliff, and somewhat sheltered, like that, from the ocean winds, they noticed one or two little objects, jumping up and down out of holes in the ground and then scuttling back again—not from any alarm at their appearance, but as if only in play, for they did not interrupt their pastime for a moment as the shooting party approached.

"By Jove! there are the rabbits," said Frank, levelling his gun.

"Jeerusalem! so they air," exclaimed Mr Lathrope. "Dew let me hev the first shot!"

"All right; fire away!" replied Mr Meldrum, who was ready to aim at a couple of the little creatures that were sitting up on a fragment of rock right opposite the three sportsmen, apparently combing their whiskers and eyeing them curiously the while. So near were they, indeed, that the most unskilful marksman in the world could hardly have missed them.

"Here goes, mister!" ejaculated Mr Lathrope, pulling the trigger of his piece with as strong an effort as if he were wrenching back a gate-post. "I guess you'll soon see the fur fly."

Instead of this, however, the phenomenon was witnessed of the fragments of the rifle dispersing in all directions the moment it was discharged, the American being at the same time knocked backward to the ground by the kick of the weapon, which went off with a loud report.

"You're not hurt, I hope?" asked Mr Meldrum, who with Frank had at once hurried to the American's side and taken hold of his hand to raise him up.

"No, I guess not," replied Mr Lathrope slowly, getting up on to his feet and proceeding to feel himself carefully all over. "No, I ain't hurt; but I feels flummuxed by the durned old shootin'-iron. I kalkerlate my grandfather was a fraud, and took me in on that job. I would ha' betted my bottom dollar on the weppin, and now it ain't worth a cent!"

There was a pretty good laugh round at "Colonel Crockett's rifle," and what it had brought down, but the American took it all with very good temper. After that, Mr Meldrum and Frank handing him their guns alternately, so that they all three could have a fair number of shots apiece, they managed to make a very good bag out of the rabbits, which were not in the least dismayed either by the bursting of the rifle in the first instance, or by the rapid disappearance of their companions subsequently, although each discharge of the sportsmen's guns laid many of them low.

Indeed, they might have shot the lot had not Mr Meldrum observed that they had secured enough; besides which, the two sailors who accompanied the party said they could not cram any more into the sacks they had brought. Thereupon all set about counting the spoil, and found that they had bagged no less than sixty-three brace.

These, with five wild ducks—Mr Lathrope bringing down a pair right and left, on their way back, in a fashion which amply retrieved his character as a shot, and Frank securing the odd one—were the nett result of the day's sport, in addition to the little sheathbill; and the shooting party returned to the house under the cliff as well satisfied with their own prowess as the home party were to welcome them, especially as they were now so plentifully provided with what all had been longing for since the last sheep had been washed overboard the *Nancy Bell* when she was off the Cape—fresh-meat!

That very day Mr Lathrope had a pie made for his own special delectation by Snowball as a sort of *amende honourable* for the darkey's laughter at Colonel Crockett's celebrated rifle, which had come to such a deplorable and

dangerous end; and, for some time after, the entire community of "Penguin Castle," with the exception of the penguins themselves, feasted upon bunnies *ad libitum*, until they could say, as did the servants of that parsimonious nobleman who fed them without change on similar fare:—

"Of rabbits young and rabbits old,
Of rabbits hot and rabbits cold,
Of rabbits tender and rabbits tough,
Thank the Lord, we've had enough!"

Chapter Twenty Eight.

A Confidential Communication.

In spite of the abundance of their supply of rabbits, however, Mr Meldrum would not allow them to be prodigally wasted.

Wisely "providing for a rainy day," he caused a considerable quantity to be split open and cleaned; and, after the skin was removed, had them rubbed over with dry salt, of which fortunately they had plenty. The carcasses were subsequently hung up on lines across the general room, adjacent to the fireplace, the warmth of which in a short time cured them like hams, so that they would keep for weeks, and even months if not required for culinary purposes earlier—as, it eventually turned out, they were.

It was a lucky thing that the shooting party went on their excursion when they did. Had they delayed it, as might have been the case, until they had turned their attention to the seals—which it had been Mr Meldrum's intention first to have hunted, in order to obtain as many furs as possible before the severe cold weather, that he expected soon to set in—they might have starved; for, the very day that succeeded the one on which they brought home the rabbits, a heavy fall of snow commenced that completely blocked up all the approaches to the creek, and compelled them to remain indoors during the ensuing week. The wind blew so terribly keen and strong from the north-east, right over the cliffs on the opposite side of the bay, during the whole time the snow continued to fall, that it was painful in the extreme to be exposed to it; while, if the door of the house happened to be left open but for a few minutes, the driving snow-flakes made their way within and banked themselves up like a heap of frozen drift in their midst.

"Ah!" said Mr Meldrum, "I told you that the fine weather we had was very exceptional, and could not last. It was providential that we were prepared for this, or we should have been in a miserable plight."

"You're right, boss," observed Mr Lathrope. "This air snow-storm is jest like one of them blizzards I told you about when we were aboard the old ship that I had noticed in Minnesota. I didn't kinder think then that I should come across another o' them this side of the globe! I'd ha' bet agin it any day."

"Aye," responded the other, "it is a fortunate thing for all of us that we cannot foresee the future, and that our strength is apportioned by degrees to the burdens sent us to bear. The great majority of us would succumb at once if we only knew the struggle that lay before us, the griefs, the trials, the mental weariness, the physical pain!"

"Oh, papa," said Kate, "don't speak so sadly! Let us rather think of the joy and unlooked-for happiness which so frequently comes to our lot when we have the least cause to expect them; and—and—" but here the girl's voice faltered.

Kate well knew the reason of her father taking so sombre a view of life, and she shared the sorrow that filled his heart, for her mother had but died a short period before they left England.

"Think, papa," she added, after a pause, "of the glorious hope of eternity, and the city within the golden gates, where we shall all of us meet the loved ones who have gone before!"

"Thank you, my child," replied Mr Meldrum, drawing her fondly to his side, and speaking as if they were alone together. "You have taught me a lesson, and I will repine no longer about the immutable. It is best to look forward, as you say. We ought to recollect that all our days must not necessarily be gloomy because for the moment they may happen to be overcast!"

"No, sirree," interposed Mr Lathrope, "and I guess this air blizzard ain't going to last for ever:— it looks now raily as if it wer' goin' to leave off snowing."

"I think you are right," said Frank Harness, who had been sitting on the other side of Kate, listening quietly to the conversation between her and her father. "I don't see any flakes now coming through the chinks of the door, as they were doing a short time ago. It is either leaving off, or the wind has chopped round to the southward and westward again."

So saying, Frank got up and went to peer without the portal, the others that were in the general room not stirring, for the greater number of the seamen were asleep in their dormitory. It was getting towards evening and most of the limited duties which it was possible to give the men to do, now that they were continuously confined indoors, had been already got through for the day.

Only Ben Boltrope and Karl Ericksen, amongst the hands, were up and awake; and they were engaged in playing a game of chequers with a set of counters which the Norwegian had skilfully carved out of black basalt and white pumice-stone, both of which had been found lying close together at the bottom of the creek. The board that they played on was made by the carpenter, but it had been divided into proper squares through the aid of Mr Meldrum's

compasses and parallel ruler, wielded by Mr Lathrope; so that all of them, so to speak, had a hand in the construction of the complete article.

Both Mr Lathrope and Frank were right as to the weather, for, although the snow-flakes came down more slowly and were much smaller than they had been, the shifting of the wind had created the change. This was now blowing into the bay straight from the sea; and while the gale was still as high and fierce as at the beginning of the snow-storm, it was not quite so cold.

The waves, however, were rolling against the cliffs just as they had done when the *Nancy Bell* struck on the reef, and the reverberation of their roar was fearfully grand out in the open. The piled-up snow against the sides of the house had so deadened the sound within, that the party ensconced there could hear little beyond the whistling of the wind round the eaves of the house.

Frank returned to those within, after carefully closing the door again behind him, just like the dove messenger came back to Noah and his imprisoned family in the ark!

Like the bearer of the olive branch, he too was a herald of glad tidings.

"There is a change," said he, addressing himself to Mr Meldrum, "and I think, sir, we'll soon be able to get out again."

"I'm glad to hear that," replied the other, getting up to look; but he came back even sooner than Frank, and did not seem quite so jubilant.

"I'm afraid the shift of the wind will not do us much good, as far as getting about is concerned," he said. "It will only tend to drift the snow where it has not penetrated before; and may very probably shut us in more firmly than ever. I notice one good thing, however, that the snowstorm has done. It has covered over the house, and we will be all the warmer should it start freezing again!"

"But won't it break down the roof?" said Mrs Major Negus, alarmed at this.

"Oh, no!" replied Mr Meldrum, "the roof is too strongly built for that; besides which, we're under the lee of the cliff that protects us from this very wind. Still, I hope we'll have a chance of getting some more Kerguelen cabbage before the snow commences to fall heavily again, as I've no doubt it will. I ought to have laid in a stock when we went rabbit shooting that time. In this sort of treacherous climate one should take advantage of every fine day and provide for the next."

"You forget," said Mrs Major Negus, "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof!"

"But it don't say the good, only the evil, ma'rm; mind that," put in Mr Lathrope. "Some folks seem to take a pleasure in twisting Scripture contrariwise, jest to suit their own squintin'-one-eye-skimmin'-the-pot-and-t'-other-lookin'-up-the-chimbley sort of conscience!"

"Some people," retorted the lady, "never apply the parable of the mote and the beam, because they can't see their own faults."

"We should live and let live," said Mr Meldrum, trying to put a stop to a sort of argument which was endlessly going on between the pair of combatants, much to his annoyance generally, when Florry created a diversion.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Puss has caught another mouse!"

"Thar, boss," said Mr Lathrope laughing, "is a case in pint, to illustrate yer saying about lettin' folks be. I'm afeard me and Missis Meejur is unkimmon like the mouse and the cat!"

"Speak for yourself, please," interposed the lady, thinking that he meant to designate her as the feline animal. "If you've a mind to liken yourself to one of those dreadful creatures that are always nibbling, I don't choose to be called a cat."

"I aren't a bit pertickler what you call me, ma'rm," replied the American very good-humouredly, "although I confess I am a bit partial to nibblin' when thar's anything good to eat!"

"That's you all over," said Mrs Major with much satisfaction; when, as she appeared pleased, Mr Lathrope allowed the conversation to rest there, which satisfied Mr Meldrum also, as he did not like these continual bickerings going on before the younger members of the party, besides their being, as has been said, especially distasteful to himself.

The next day it stopped snowing altogether; consequently a vegetable-hunting expedition was organised, a small party which started up the valley managing to bring back with some difficulty a few heads of cabbage, which with the dried rabbits alone now constituted their daily fare—both the beef and pork getting so low that Mr Meldrum had to stop their issue, although the men were not so hard pressed yet as to take to the salted sea-elephant.

Had the cabbage not been out of the line of drift, in a more secluded portion of the creek, the vegetable-seekers would have been unable to find it; for, the entire landscape was covered with a deep snow that was evenly distributed over hollow and hill alike—the lower lying land and the higher eminences so running into one another that they could not be distinguished. The tops of the loftiest peaks, indeed, seemed to be dwarfed down to the monotonous level of the plain; and, where elevated at all, they resembled more a cluster of little round mounds like sugar-loaves than anything else!

During the cessation of the snow-storm, the castaways contrived to secure another sea-elephant which visited the bay, Karl Ericksen harpooning him in the water. This time the men did not despise the flesh, but appeared to relish it

very much when Snowball fried it fresh—a considerable portion of it being eaten in this way; while all the fat and blubber was melted down, and the remainder of the meat salted and packed in the cask with the other seal beef which was as yet untouched.

On one of these days, too, Ben Boltrope went fishing from the lower cliffs, just above the bay at the head of the creek—on account of the sea there being calmer, and no breakers ruffling the water near.

This pursuit would have been tried before, only that amongst the various articles that had been brought away from the ship there was not a single fish-hook. The old man-o'-war's man, however, had at length managed to overcome the difficulty, manufacturing in his leisure moments a very good substitute by beating out some small nails that he had previously made malleable by putting them in the fire. After spending some hours angling, Ben returned home with some half a dozen fish about the size of a small haddock. These had their heads armed with stout strong spines; but in spite of this peculiarity, they proved under Snowball's manipulation to be very palatable, and Mr Lathrope, "for one," as he himself said, regretted that the carpenter had not caught more; he "guessed" he would have "gone for 'em!"

The interregnum of fine weather did not last long; for, soon the snow set in falling again as if it would never stop. The days, consequently, grew unutterably dreary, from the misfortune of all being perforce confined, as before, to the house by the bitter cold wind; and, to make matters worse, the snow-flakes now seemed to penetrate through the tiniest crevices within the hut, so that the air in the interior of the dwelling was of the temperature of freezing, no matter how great a fire was kept up!

While this lasted, Mr Meldrum devised all sorts of amusements for the men.

Amongst other things tried was music, one of the crew having made a banjo, the strings of which were twisted from the smaller intestines of the last sea-elephant they had killed; and by the aid of this instrument harmonic meetings were organised in the evenings, Mr Lathrope developing an almost forgotten talent he possessed, and coming out as a comic singer. He absolutely bewitched even the "Major," with his version of "Buffalo Gals," and the "Cackle, cackle, flap your wings and crow," chorus of the Christy Minstrels, who certainly, in his person, did perform on this occasion out of London!

It was at this period, when the days seemed as if they would never end and the nights longer, that a memorable event occurred for two, at least, of the party.

Ever since that night of the storm on board the *Nancy Bell*, when she had, as he firmly believed, saved his life by catching hold of him as he was on the point of being washed away by the sea, Frank had become deeply attached to Kate; and the more he saw of the true-hearted girl—her fond affection for her father, her anxious solicitude towards her little sister, her kind sympathy for everybody—the more his affection ripened, until at length he thought he could conceal his dawning love no longer.

Then came the wreck; and, in the trying scenes which subsequently arose, in which the two were each in their own way actors, the more Frank saw to admire in his fairy ideal, the prompt courageous woman of action. Subsequently they were thrown more closely together in the enforced companionship of the castaway community on the desolate shores of Kerguelen Land, when every moment increased their intimacy, while it enabled him to study more closely those salient points of her character which appeared to develop themselves as circumstances called them forth—her filial love, her devotion to her sister, her unconquerable faith, her unbounded hope and cheerfulness in the most despondent situations—but, above all, her innate sense of religion, a feeling that seemed to underlie her nature and yet which in no wise detracted from her superabundant animal spirits, which harmonised themselves to the moods and weaknesses of all. Seeing all this, and noting what he saw and revered, Frank could not but love Kate Meldrum with all the warmth and passion of his heart. So loving her, and dying for the want of some response to the wealth of affection he had so long treasured up in his breast, he could not refrain from seeking from her a word of hope.

It was one evening when, save to him and her, it appeared to be the dreariest of all the dreary ones they had already passed in their extemporised dwelling—"home" they called it, as people will style any shelter to which they can retreat from all the trials and exposures of the outside world, "no matter how homely!"

The seamen had all retired to their dormitory, as had likewise Mr McCarthy and Adams; while Mr Lathrope was nodding in one corner of the general room by the fireplace, and Mr Meldrum immersed in thought in the other.

Florry and Maurice Negus had both gone to sleep long since. Mrs "Major," and the stewardess had also retreated to their sleeping chamber; and thus, Frank and Kate were, so to speak, alone. The opportunity was propitious.

They had been talking for some time in a low tone of voice, so as not to interrupt the others. In a desultory way, they had thus chatted about all sorts of things and had at last lapsed into silence—a silence that remained for some time unbroken.

At length Frank spoke.

By a strong effort, he at once went to the point

"Kate," said he suddenly, in a voice rendered so thick by emotion that she could not help starting, although she made no reply.

"Kate, do you remember you promised to call me 'Frank' that night on the wreck when we expected every moment that the *Nancy Bell* would go down with us and every soul aboard?"

"Ye-es," she murmured, very softly and in a hesitating way.

"Well, I want you to call me always so—that is to have the right—you know what I mean."

Her tender blue eyes were raised to his inquiringly.

"I love you," he cried passionately, "and I want you to promise—"

"Hush!" said she, putting her hand over his lips; but he only kissed the hand, and went on with what he was about to say when she had interrupted him.

"I want you, Kate, my darling, to promise to be my wife!" he said. "I love you more than I can tell—I have loved you since ever I first saw you—and I shall love you till my dying day; will you promise, Kate, to be my wife? but, if you can't yet do all I ask, will you try to love me a little? Oh, Kate, I do love you so dearly!"

Her head bent lower and lower, so that he had to bend his too in order to see what her face said, for she would not speak; and, as the firelight danced upon the dear face and lightened up the blue eyes which so shyly looked into his, Frank seemed to read an answer there that was favourable to his hopes, for he passed his arm round her waist without another moment's hesitation, and ventured to imprint a kiss upon her lips.

"My darling, my darling!" he murmured in an ecstasy of joy; but just then Mr Meldrum raised his head from between his clasped hands and looked at the pair.

He evidently realised what had happened, and, as evidently, he was not taken by surprise at the event. Nor, indeed, would anyone else have been in the whole community; for Frank's love to Kate had been as palpable to all as the famed ostrich of the story was when it hid its head in the sand and imagined itself invisible to its pursuers!

"My children," said he kindly, coming over to them and holding out his hand to Frank, who at once grasped it, "I expected this; and I cannot say I am displeased. I know you have an affection for each other—"

"We love each other," interrupted Frank eagerly.

"Well, you love each other, if you prefer it being so put; but you are both very young, and you must wait for some time even after we are released, as I hope we shall be by and by, from this desert isle. I have seen enough of you, Frank Harness, to feel confident that I can trust my daughter's happiness to your keeping; but you must first secure a name and a competence for yourself before you can dream of asking her to be your wife. You see, my boys I may perhaps have overheard more of your whispered conversation than you thought! I can give Kate nothing, for I am a ruined man, and was going out to New Zealand to try and retrieve my lost fortune when this untoward disaster happened!"

"Mr Meldrum," said Frank respectfully, standing up by the side of the other and facing him like a man, "I want nothing but Kate. She is the greatest fortune I could ever crave! My father is a rich man, one of the largest ship-owners in Liverpool, and my taking to the sea has been strongly against his wish, although he consented to it when he saw how bent I was upon being a sailor. He could make me independent to-morrow if I asked him."

"I prefer you as you are, Frank," responded Mr Meldrum; "and I'm sure so does Kate, eh?"

Yes," said she shyly, and blushing as she looked up for an instant.

"Then keep as you are, my boy,"—continued her father—"and as soon as you are captain of a vessel of your own—and Mr McCarthy tells me you are quite competent to pass the Trinity-House examination for a first-mate's certificate; why, you may come to me and claim Kate's hand!"

"Is that a bargain?" asked Frank anxiously, looking from one to the other.

"It is," replied Mr Meldrum, while Kate faintly whispered another "yes."

"Then," said Frank triumphantly, "she shall be my wife before another year goes over our heads; for, I can pass as soon as I go home for a first officer's certificate, and get a ship to command immediately afterwards if I like. Look out for me to make my claim within that time, according to your promise!"

"And I guess I'm witness to that thaar agreement," exclaimed Mr Lathrope, starting up.

The artful old fellow had been "playing 'possum," as he termed it, all along; only waiting for the dénouement of the little drama before disclosing himself. However, he seemed so genuinely pleased with what had taken place that neither of the principal performers could be angry with him for listening.

"I'm downright real glad," said he after a bit, congratulating them both and wringing poor Frank's hand well nigh off in the exuberance of his delight. "Say, if yer don't believe me, may I never eat another clam chowder agin—durn my boots if I ever will, thar!"

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Black Snow!

By the middle of September, the worst of the winter weather was over, the snow gradually ceasing to fall and the drifts that had accumulated in the valley up which the creek entered, and where the shipwrecked people from the

Nancy Bell had built their house—beginning to melt under the influence of the milder winds and increasing warmth of the sun's rays.

But, everywhere the landscape still remained wrapped in the same white mantle it had worn ever since the castaways had first taken up their residence on the island, the bare spots then apparent in some places, which was a circumstance owing to the shelter of the cliffs and crags in the immediate vicinity of the sea, having been subsequently covered by the heavy storms at the end of August.

It would take a long time, all saw, for the snow to clear away even if the most rapid thaw were now to set in; and this the climate did not permit of, the transition from winter to spring being carried through a course of progressive stages that were as disagreeable as they were prolonged.

There was balm in Gilead, however.

Not long after the last of the heavy snowfalls, and when the days began to grow brighter, thus enabling the castaways to crawl out in the open and have a little more exercise than they could obtain within doors, the bird colony adjacent to "Penguin Castle" became largely increased, their numbers swelling continually by fresh accessions; so that, in a short time, it was impossible for any of the people to stir out of their habitation without stumbling across a batch of penguins, ever continually grumbling, croaking, chuckling, and otherwise expressing their indignation at being, as they seemed to think, so unjustly interfered with by the castaways.

It was evident that the building season of the birds had arrived; and it could not certainly have come at a more auspicious time, for their provisions were almost exhausted and Mr Meldrum was in great straits how to supply the party with food. The despised flesh of the sea-elephants, even, had by this time been consumed and all hands placed on short allowance, it being impossible to go out hunting again as yet, or to penetrate up the valley to the rabbit warren, on account of the snow blocking the way and rendering the ascent of the hills impracticable.

The influx of the penguins, therefore, for which he had been looking out for the last few weeks and had almost despaired of, was hailed by Mr Meldrum with the deepest joy, for it solved his greatest difficulty at once, taking away the fear of starvation that had been haunting him. With such a plentiful supply of the birds, they might now hope to last out until they could procure more palatable food; and those who were "squeamish" in objecting to the fishy odour of the penguins themselves, would *faut de mieux* find plenty of sustenance in the eggs that there was no doubt would soon be laid in much greater abundance than they either required or could consume.

As the penguins mustered their forces, each day seeing some fresh arrivals to fight for the occupation of the rookery, they were a constant source of amusement to the snow-bound party, who, not being able to stir far from the doorway of the "castle," had nothing hardly to occupy their attention save the movements of the birds.

The penguins, they observed, were of four different classes or varieties, although all belonged to the same family, partaking of the common characteristics of such; but, even as they differed in size and appearance, so they presented diverse modes of conducting their domestic arrangements and varied in their habits.

Some were of the most retiring nature. These, isolating themselves in a separate encampment, drew a strong line of demarcation between the abode of their neighbours and their own retreat, as if they were of too exclusive a temper to associate with the common herd; while others, of quite a different species, appeared to have no false pride which prevented them from associating with the rest, of whatever class they might belong to, for they were "hail fellow well met" almost on their arrival with every bird in the rookery.

"Them's republicans, I guess," said Mr Lathrope, noticing this trait of character. "They don't care a cuss for social distinctions!"

Mr Meldrum, having had some previous acquaintance of the penguin family when on board a ship which had been employed in surveying duties in the Straits of Magellan and round the Falkland Islands, was able to give the others a good deal of information about the birds.

There were four varieties, he said, on Kerguelen Land, as far as he could see, namely:— the "king penguin," the aristocrat of the community, who kept aloof from the rest; a black-and-white species that whaling men call the "johnny;" a third, styled the "macaroni penguin," which had a handsome double tuft of rich orange-coloured feathers on their heads; and a fourth variety, distinct from the last-mentioned only from its smaller size, and the fact of its plume or crest being single instead of double, and of a pale sulphur yellow in lieu of orange.

Amongst the penguins, too, were to be seen numbers of little sheathbills—just like small bantams, similar to the specimen Frank Harness had shot, and which he was so sorry about. The little birds went about in pairs and appeared to act as the scavengers of the larger ones, for they haunted their breeding-places, scraping about the nests and dung, clearing out the rotten eggs, and making free with the insects that properly appertained to the penguins. Indeed, they were impudent enough sometimes to seize upon the freshly-laid egg that some lady macaroni had laid, right under the eyes of its owner, feloniously appropriating it to their own use; while they thought nothing of giving an occasional peck to one of the king penguins if he got in their way, regardless of his exalted position!

Flocks of shags, or cormorants, also visited the bay at the same time. These were found good eating, although not so fleshy as the penguins; and, before the end of the month, there came a large family of seals, which would probably have taken up their abode in the creek had not some of the sailors frightened them away so effectually by their indiscriminate slaughter that they never returned, nor did any others come subsequently to the place.

The coats of these seals were of a fine iron-grey hue, something like that of an otter, only with much more delicate hair. Mr Meldrum was very anxious to secure as many of them as was possible, so he was much chagrined when they disappeared and left him fur-less.

Another visitor was the pretty little Cape pigeon, which Kate recognised as an old friend and was delighted to see. It reminded her, she told Frank, of "old times," when they grew acquainted with each other on board the *Nancy Bell* and watched the stars at night—and all the rest of it!

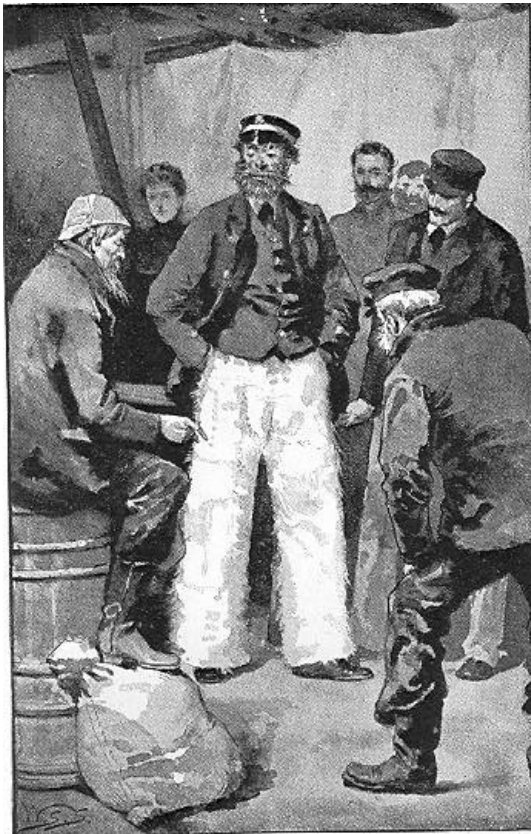
But the penguins were the great attraction.

They were "food for the mind and food for the body as well!" the American would say, as he watched Snowball picking the feathers off some scores of the birds when preparing the dinner. The darkey would persist in putting himself to this trouble every day, in spite of Mr Meldrum telling him that the easiest plan was to skin them, when the feathers would come off in a lump in a quarter of the time; but Snowball would not be persuaded to adopt this course, although the majority of the sailors did so when preparing the penguins for storing up, and there was consequently a large accumulation of skins, which came in very handy presently for tailoring purposes.

Through constant wear, the trousers of the majority of the menfolk were into such a dilapidated condition that it became absolutely necessary to try and restore them—none of the entire party having a single change of clothing with them, excepting the ladies; while the only material available for their rehabilitation was sailcloth, which, besides not being enough for all, was rather too stiff a material for either comfort or warmth.

In this dilemma, the happy thought struck Mr McCarthy of fashioning a pair of "unmentionables" out of penguin skins; and he had no sooner "hatched the idea" than he carried it into practical effect by instructing Ben Boltrope, who was by a long way the smartest and most ready-witted of the men, to make him the trousers.

The deed was accomplished; and, really, the garments did not look at all bad when finished, for, on the removal of the outside feathers, the skin of the bird was found to be coated with a fine down like that of the eider-duck, which lent an originality of appearance to the trousers that could hardly be described.



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"THEY'RE JUST LIKE BARNUM'S WOOLLY HORSE."

"They're just like Barnum's woolly horse," said Mr Lathrope, criticising them calmly. "If I were you, Mac, I wouldn't go nigh the rookery with them on, or them birds will take you for a fledgeling, mister, I guess!"

"Begorrah, I don't care, for they're worrum and comfortable," said Mr McCarthy, "and it's raal white ducks they are, anyhow!"

They certainly looked it; but, as the first-mate would not be put out of any conceit with the garments, in spite of their appearance, and as others began to be similarly in need, they had perforce to follow his example, when penguin trousers may be said to have "become the rage" on the island—even Mr Lathrope, who had laughed at Mr McCarthy for wearing them, having to follow the fashion and don the "ducks."

Owing to this new demand on the feathered colony it would seem like exaggeration to state how many thousands came to an untimely end, in addition to the numbers that were killed to supply the daily necessities of the table and the large quantity which Mr Meldrum had caused to be prepared and dried, like the rabbits, "for a rainy day;" while, as to the eggs that were eaten—well, the least said about these the better!

From all of this it may be gathered that the penguins made a bad move when they came back to their old breeding-place; but the stupid birds never seemed to be aware that they could at any time save themselves by flight if they

liked, although they must have been somehow or other acquainted with the deplorable fact—in a bird-like way—that their rookery was becoming rapidly depopulated! No, notwithstanding that they saw their friends and relatives repeatedly slaughtered before their very eyes—their penguin parents, children, godfathers, godmothers, and first cousins thus perishing at the hands of miscreants in human form, and subsequently converted into food and clothing and to other “base uses” by those who took their innocent lives—they never appeared to make an effort in self-defence, either by executing a “strategical movement” or otherwise!

The spirit of penguinism, so to speak, was dead, the bird colony contenting themselves by grumbling, an infallible resource for all similarly constituted creatures—in which respect, as Mr Lathrope was pleased to put it, they resembled a class of modern politicians who need not be alluded to here.

Amongst those included in the list of penguin slayers was one who pursued them to the death—although rather through a desire for malicious sport and self-gratification than from any actual necessity—and this vindictive enemy was Master Maurice Negus.

The young gentlemen had developed many pleasing traits of character during the comparatively short period during which he was brought into public notice as one of the passengers of the ill-fated *Nancy Bell*; but in none of these had he so well exemplified his natural and ingenious bias of mind as in the little predilection, if it may be so termed, for bird slaughter *in ovum*, which first saw the light in Kerguelen Land.

Soon after the penguins came to breed there, Master Maurice noted them carefully, and it pleased him much thereafter to go “bird-nesting,” as he called it. He would go by himself and remain away for hours, no one knowing what “the imp,” as all spoke of him, was up to; but one day it was discovered that the fancy for “collecting eggs,” according to his own explanation, consisted in swallowing as many raw ones as he could get hold of unseen—he being observed on the occasion in question to get rid of a round dozen of the eggs deposited by the penguins, just as he would have done so many oysters, saying afterwards when taxed with the gluttony that he felt delicate, and had heard that eggs were recommended by doctors for consumptive patients!

But, later on, the young gentleman “caught a tartar.”

On his last bird-nesting excursion he happened, fortunately or unfortunately, to shove a half-hatched egg down his throat; and, the embryo bird nearly choking him, his poultry-fancying propensity was transformed into an inveterate dislike towards the entire penguin tribe—a slightly lucky mistake for the creatures in question, as thereby the list of their enemies became decreased by one.

Time thus slipped by with the inhabitants of the house on the creek.

Melting by degrees, the vast piles of snow began to vanish from the valleys and low-lying lands, although still clothing the distant hill-sides and mountain-peaks, from the loftier ones of which it probably never entirely cleared away even in the height of summer; but, the ground around was naturally so damp and marshy, and had become so soddened now with moisture, that it was almost as impracticable for Mr Meldrum or any other of the party to get away from the vicinity of the hut, as it had been during the heavy storms of August when the snow had drifted up the gullies and levelled the country.

In fact it was more so, for, the accumulated water, proceeding from the thaw and the rain, which came every now and then to aid it, had swelled the fresh-water tarn near them so greatly that it had overflowed its banks, which now extended on the right to the base of the furthest hills at the head of the valley that penetrated the creek; while, to the left, the water was pouring down, a foaming torrent, into the sea—the house being almost surrounded and separated by the newly-made river from the little building in which the jolly-boat had been housed on the beach.

They were thus threatened with a flood, for the water was rising every moment and slowly creeping up to their feet, narrowing the little peninsula on which their habitation stood.

That was not the worst either!

While they were pondering as to the best means for extricating themselves from the danger of being washed away, a new one arose.

Through the melting of the snow on the mountains above, a sparkling cascade commenced all at once to leap down the face of the cliff at the back of the house, right on to the roof over their heads.

This was serious; for, should this peril not be guarded against and some sort of pent-house put up as a shield, the slight timber work of the roof would soon be crushed in and swept away by the ever-increasing weight of the falling water.

In the midst of these imminent dangers, a phenomenon occurred which for the moment appalled everybody, not even excepting Mr Meldrum—it was so strange, so awe-inspiring!

It commenced snowing again; but there was nothing unusual in that. What was unusual was, that the flakes which fell, instead of being white, were as black as ink!

What could the awful portent foretell?

It was inexplicable.

An Apparition!

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs Major Negus in accents of genuine terror, "the world's coming to an end!" and she sank down in a heap on the ground, close to the door of the general room, where she had been standing uncertain whether to go out or in.

There was ample reason for the good lady's consternation, for danger seemed staring her in the face in either direction.

On the one hand, the flood in the valley appeared approaching as if to swallow up the hut and all its belongings; while, on the other, the deafening noise of the water pouring down from the cliff above on to the roof made everybody feel impelled to quit the house.

Mary Llewellyn, the stewardess, generally a quiet and retiring person, was driven into a fit of hysterics by the concatenation of horrors that all at once surrounded them.

As for the children, they shared the fright of their elders, Florry clinging convulsively to Kate, who had dropped on her knees and was praying in the corner—believing really that the last supreme moment was at hand.

The men, too—they had been hastily called together the moment the dangerous predicament of the roof was noticed, and had begun to knock together a sort of wooden shield to interpose between the cliff and the top of the house, so that the water might rim over it in the fashion of a spout—stopped in their task with one accord, staring as if bewildered at each other the moment the terrible black snow began to fall from the sombre pall-like clouds which hung over the creek. This was immediately after the cascade of water came down the cliff; and so frightened were they, that not one of them uttered a word, nor did Mr McCarthy, who had summoned them together, urge them on with their work. All remained spell-bound and tongue-tied.

"It air orfull," said Mr Lathrope, drawing a deep breath, and looking up at the sky as if to peer into its mysteries. "I guess I never seed such a fall before—no, nor nobody else in the land of the living!"

No one answered him, however; for, at that moment, there was a strange concussion in the air, the earth shaking beneath their feet, and they were all thrown to the ground. At the same time, the black flakes descended faster and faster as if to bury them, and some of the men, imitating the example of the women, cried out in positive alarm.

Mr Meldrum was the first to recover his self-command.

"Silence!" he shouted, making his powerful voice heard above the chorus of groans and shrieks that arose from the frightened men and screaming women. "It's only an earthquake; and God will protect us here against the perils of the land, the same as he did through the tempests of the deep! Let us meet what may be in store for us with the courage of brave men and faith of Christians!"

His words at once checked the tumult—even the stewardess and Mrs Negus hushing down their wailing outcry to an occasional moan or faint muffled sob, which they could not quite stifle; but the strange rocking motion of the ground, which seemed as if they were again on shipboard, prevented the yen from at once regaining their feet, only a few being able to scramble up into an erect position by holding on to the supports of the house, which fortunately stood the shock of the subterranean commotion without giving way.

"The worst is past now," said Mr Meldrum presently, as the throbs of the earthquake grew less and less potent and the quivering sensation, which appeared to jingle through every nerve in their bodies, died away into a faint rumbling in the distance, that finally disappeared a few seconds afterwards—the whole thing not lasting longer than a minute altogether, although it seemed more than an hour to the terror-stricken people. "I don't think we'll have another shock."

He stood up firmly as he spoke; and those of the men who were still lying on the ground rose too.

"But the snow, sir," said one. "What does that mean?"

"Why, look—can't you see!" replied he, drawing his hand over his face and showing it to the speaker.

"Lor' bless us!" ejaculated the sailor. "It's only smut from the chimbley."

"Ah! it came from a bigger chimney than we have here," said Mr Meldrum. "There has been a volcanic eruption on the island; and what we all thought was black snow was only the ashes thrown up from the crater, and these have now been brought down from the higher air by the descending ram."

"Snakes and alligators!" exclaimed Mr Lathrope, who was one of the last to get on his long legs and when he did so appeared to touch the ground as tenderly "as if he were a cat treading on hot eggs," as Mr McCarthy said. "If I wurn't clean took in, and thought the outlandish thing wer nat'ral, like the red rain I've heerd folks tell o' seeing in some parts of the world! I guess you was startled, too, mister, and kinder frit!"

"I confess I was, at first," replied Mr Meldrum, "till I felt the earthquake. Then I recollected about the volcano."

"Oh! the one down south, that we seed to leeward when the old ship poked her nose on the reef?"

"The same," said the other. "It was smoking then; and we've just had the eruption. It is pretty nearly over, I think, however, for the ashes are not falling quite so thickly now."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Mr Lathrope. "Gin it didn't stop soon, we'd all be transmogrified inter blacker niggers

than the cook haar!”

“I ain’t no nigger, massa!” interposed Snowball, feeling his dignity insulted by the remark.

“My crickey!” ejaculated the American, emitting a shrill whistle of astonishment at the naïve assertion. “Then what, in the name of George Washington and Abe Lincoln rolled into one, air you, sir-ree!”

“I’se a ’spectable collud genlemun,” replied the darkey pompously.

“I guess you’ll do,” said Mr Lathrope laughing. “Jest hear that, now! Waal, never mind, my Ethiopian serenader,” he added good-humouredly. “You’re none the worse fur your colour, as fur as I ken see; and I will say this fur you, that you’re the slickest and smartest ship’s cook I ever came across from Maine to Californy; and that’s saying something!”

“Tank you, massa,” replied Snowball, much flattered by the compliment. “I make you one good rabbit-pie next time I’se get rabbits.”

“That’s a bargain!” said Mr Lathrope; and there the incident ended.

“Rouse up there with that spout!” shouted out Mr McCarthy, who had at once turned back to tackle the roof as soon as the alarm caused by the earthquake had passed away. “Bedad, if you don’t look pretty sharp, there’ll be no ruff to put it on, at all at all!”

“That’s right!” said Mr Meldrum. “In the fear of a greater calamity, I had forgotten the lesser danger! Do you think the roof will bear the pressure on it?”

“Sure, sorr,” replied the other. “It has borne it all this toime, and the ould house has stood the airthquake; so, there’s hopes that it’ll last out yit! It is more frightened of the flood coming up and swaping it away I am, than that the wather’ll do it any harm.”

“Then we’re safe, thank God!” said Mr Meldrum. “The river has not swelled any more since I last marked it. It seems to have worn a channel deep enough to carry off all the overflow from the valley, without spreading further and threatening the house. I think we are out of danger now.”

“We’ve much to be thankful for, papa,” observed Kate thoughtfully.

Frank had joined her within, after the last shock of earthquake, having been engaged before in helping Mr McCarthy on the roof; so his prayers had ascended to heaven along with hers, the two kneeling side by side in silent worship and praise to Him who had watched over them.

Coming out of the house together, they had approached the spot where Mr Meldrum was standing.

“Yes, my child, we have much to be thankful for,” said he in answer to Kate’s observation. “You need not fear now, my dear,” he added.

“I was not frightened, even when the earth trembled, papa.”

“No!” said he inquiringly.

“No, not a bit,” she answered quietly; “although, I confess, I thought we should all be killed. I can’t tell what sort of feeling seemed to possess me; but I felt quite peaceful and happy, as if I were prepared to die!”

“Ah!” said her father, “you had that peace which the world cannot give! I—I—”

“I felt happy, papa,” continued Kate, as if uttering her thoughts aloud, “because I thought we would see mamma again—you, and I, and Florry.”

“And didn’t you think of me too, Kate; and wish me to be with you?” asked Frank eagerly.

“Yes, you too,” said she. “Don’t you belong to me now?” Mr Meldrum did not hear Frank’s answer; for his attention was at that moment called away by Ben Boltrope, who had come up to report that the roof had been made snug, the water from the cliff now arching over it in a cascade, and not pouring down directly on to it as it had done before, when it fell with terrific force right upon the shingles, displacing some which were now repaired as soon as the spout was put up.

The weather improved very much after this, the sun appearing and shining with increasing power each day, while the snow disappeared entirely from the valleys and lower portions of the hills. The water below, however, did not drain off sufficiently to allow of any excursion for some days towards the rabbit warren they had visited before, or of their going anywhere, indeed, far from the little stretch of beach before the creek.

But, in spite of this drawback, the castaways’ stock of provisions was most unexpectedly added to, a very agreeable change of diet from penguin fricassees being introduced, by the coming of large flocks of wild ducks, which visited the valley a few days after they were all in danger of being flooded out. The water evidently was the attraction, for, previously, none of the water-fowl had ever come near the place—with the exception of a solitary couple of teal that Mr Meldrum had noticed flying over the creek shortly after they landed from the wreck.

The first day that they had roast duck for dinner, everybody thought that Mr Lathrope would have said something about the unexpected treat; but he did not, and Mrs Major Negus seemed somehow or other much vexed at his

silence in the matter.

"You generally speak a good deal about eating," said she at last impatiently. "I wonder why you've nothing to say now!"

"Ah! marm," replied Mr Lathrope, "don't you be surprised at anything! I'd advise you never to measure other people's corns by your own chilblains! Because you happen to set your fancy on a thing, that's no reason for other folks to do the same!"

"No," said she; "though I can't see the application of your remark about chilblains, for I never had one in my life."

"Ah! that's a sort of metaphorical conundrum, which I leave you to find out bye and bye! But, if you'd really like to know why I ain't satisfied with having roast duck to dinner, I'll tell you; it makes me feel kinder lonesome, it dew!"

"Why!"

"'Cause there ain't no green peas with it, marm," said Mr Lathrope, with a melancholy smile. "I guess I'm a whale on peas, I am!"

It was now the end of September; but the month was not fated to pass without another event happening to break the monotonous life of the little party. On its very last day, something occurred which took them all by surprise.

It may be remembered that when Mr Meldrum assumed the command of the party in the place of Captain Dinks, who was still on the sick list and recovering slowly but yet far from well, he established certain regulations for the employment of the men.

Amongst the several duties they had to perform, in accordance with these regulations, was the one of keeping watch, as if on guard, for a certain stated number of hours at the foot of a short flagstaff which had been erected on the top of a little eminence overlooking the beach in front of the creek—a man being stationed here regularly to report anything that might come in sight. This duty, it may be added, had been a sinecure from the date of its institution, nothing having ever since been seen.

On this last day of September, however, all hands were electrified by the look-out man calling out, just about noon.

"Sail ho!"

"A sail!" cried Mr Meldrum, quite as much astonished as the rest; and he hurried out to scan the offing. However, he could not see anything, and thought the man must have been asleep at his post and dreaming. "Do you know what you are saying?" he called out to the look-out. "Where away is this sail, my man!"

"Far off on the port side of the reef, sir," answered the sailor, speaking quite composedly.

"What do you make it?" asked the other, as he hastened to the look-out station, which commanded a larger stretch of the coast than could be seen from the house—Mr McCarthy and the others following after him with anxious curiosity.

"Looks like a boat's sail, sir; but, it's so far to leeward, I can't quite make it out yet."

"I see," said Mr Meldrum, who had now reached the man, taking his glass from his pocket and looking in the direction pointed out. "Yes, there is a small boat, sure enough. By Jove," he added presently, "I wouldn't be surprised if it were the missing mutineers in the longboat turned up at last! Look, McCarthy, and see if you don't recognise the *Nancy Bell's* boat by the white streak below the gunwale."

The first-mate took the telescope and gazed intently at the approaching object for some few moments. He then turned round and stared at Mr Meldrum.

"Be jabbers, it is the longboat, sorr!" he exclaimed at length; "and faix, sorr, I belave I can say that baste Moody lookin' out over the gunwale, as if tellin' thim where to steer, with his long black hair and ugly mug, and the cut across his hid which the cap'en giv him wid the butt end of his pistol! The murtherin' villin! won't I be aven wid him if iver he comes ashore, and pay him out—bad cess to him!"

"Are you sure," said Mr Meldrum, "that it is the long-boat?"

"As sartin as there's mud in a ditch, son—the divil a doubt of it!"

Chapter Thirty One.

A Terrible Tale!

By this time, the news having rapidly spread amongst the little community that the longboat was in sight, every one—save of course poor Captain Dinks, who could not yet move—had come out of the house.

The castaways were gathered together in little groups, some near Mr Meldrum and the first-mate, who stood by the flagstaff, others along the ridge which ran from thence above the beach, and the remainder on the shore; but all were intent on one object, and looking down the bay at the little speck in the distance that was said to be the boat, which was steadily making its way towards the creek. The tide was on the ebb and against its onward progress, although the wind was in its favour, so it approached only very slowly.

Mr Meldrum's first intention on having his suspicions confirmed by the mate's opinion, had been to haul down the flag—a little white ensign made out of portions of some old silk handkerchiefs which had been mustered amongst the party and sewn together by Kate; but, he dismissed the idea as soon as the thought occurred to him.

"No," said he to Mr McCarthy, belaying the halliards again, "it is too late now, for they must have seen it. Besides, what have we to fear if they do come? We can easily prevent them from landing, if we like, for we're nearly two to one against them in numbers should they try force; and we are stronger by far in moral as well as physical courage!"

"True for you, sorr," replied the first-mate. "It's a good larrapping they'd git, if they thried that on anyway. Bedad, I'd die aisy an' I could only give that baste Moody the bating I've had in store for him since he and his gang abandoned us, the dhirty schoundrels!"

"We must forget the past, considering we've been so mercifully preserved," said Mr Meldrum. "Perhaps it was all for the best that we were not able to leave the ship when they did."

"Maybe; but faix, they didn't have the dacency to ax us!"

"Well, we'll see what they have to say for themselves when we've a chance of speaking to them," said Mr Meldrum. "The boat's coming on a bit quicker now. It has got out of the set of the tide and has the wind well abeam, just the thing for that lugsail she carries."

"Sure and she's a smart sailer, sorr," observed Mr McCarthy after a few minutes' interval, during which time the longboat, which had been heading up the coast, hauled her wind and was steered towards the entrance of the little creek at the top of the bay, close by where the flagstaff was erected and the Penguin Castle people were on the look-out.

As she came nearer, however, it could be seen that Mr McCarthy's imagination had been quicker than his eyesight, for there was no one looking out over the gunwale—least of all Bill Moody, whose tall herculean form and peculiar visage would have been easily recognisable even at some distance off.

Indeed, there seemed to be very few persons in the boat at all, only two being observed in the stern-sheets, one of whom was steering with an oar, while a third was sitting on one of the forward thwarts attending to the sheet of the lugsail, slacking it out as the wind came aft occasionally, and hauling it in taut again when the sail jibed on the boat's head falling off a point or two through the alteration of her course now and again.

The castaways were all in a state of the greatest expectation and surmise, as the longboat gradually grew more visible and the small number of its occupants became noticeable; for, as she rounded the point of the ridge, those on the beach could now observe her as well as Mr Meldrum and the first-mate, who were by the side of the look-out man at the signal station on the higher ground and were the only ones able at first to see the boat.

"They look as if they'd had hard times," said Ben Boltrope, who was one of those who could now have a look at the boat, "and some of them seem to have lost the number of their mess."

"And a durned good job, too!" exclaimed Mr Lathrope; "the mean skunks, to scoot away and leave a lot of wemmen and children to drown, as they thought. They've well arned any troubles they've come by, I guess!"

"Poor creatures!" said Kate, who was standing near the American, with Frank, of course, the inseparable, by her side; "please don't say that! If all of us only just got what we deserved, we should have a sorry reckoning!"

"Very proper, and just what I think," observed Mrs

Major Negus in a sort of condescending and approving way. "I do not consider it right myself to condemn others, and never do it on principle, for—"

"Thar you go agin, measurin' other folks' corns right away by your own chilblains, marm," interrupted Mr Lathrope. "It's allers what you'd do; and you never kinder give a thought to what t'other people would have to say in the matter! I guess you're a bit narrow-minded, excuse me, marm."

"Narrow-minded, humph!" snorted "the Major," highly indignant at the accusation. "The idea of the thing! to be sure, Mr Lathrope, I ought never to be surprised at anything you choose to say; your manners and conversation are so very—ah, well—elegant!"

"Much obleeged, marm, I'm sure," said the other, chuckling at making her angry. "I took fust-class when at school in the States for elegancy and deportment."

"I'm sure I wish you had stopped there!" retorted the lady; but any further amenities were arrested from passing between them by the nearer approach of the longboat, and the fact of Mr Meldrum and those with him coming down from the ridge so as to be on the beach when their unexpected visitors got in to shore.

Closer and closer the boat came, until at last its keel touched ground, when, slewing round broadside on, it was left stranded on the beach.

"Snakes and alligators!" exclaimed Mr Lathrope, the lugsail swinging aside and enabling him and the others to see into the boat clearly, a thing which had been previously impossible from the boat's coming up end on. "They air a ruin lot, mister! Of all the starved, God-forsaken critturs as I've ever seed they're 'bout the worst!"

They were.

Only the man who had been steering with the oar and the one who was on the thwart amidships were apparently able to sit up, for three other figures were observed stretched in the bottom of the boat in a lump together; while one was by himself in the bows, doubled up in a crouching posture, quite dead and with his ghastly eyes staring out sightless from the retreating sockets. The closely-drawn features and general appearance of this latter miserable object showed that he must have expired in the last stage of starvation!

"Why, this is almost worse than you were when we picked you up off Pernambuco," said Ben Boltrope to Karl Ericksen.

"Ja, ja!" replied the Norwegian. "It var sehr kalt, and we was expose as mooch as starve; but it vor bad, very, and so is dese, it remind me, oh! so much;" and he turned away his head, as Kate had already done, from the hideous spectacle, quite unable to gaze any longer at it from its association with his own rescue from a similar horrible death.

The men by Mr Meldrum's side, however—forgetting the past conduct of the survivors of those in the longboat and the fact of their not only having deserted them but even locked them below to drown in the hold of the sinking ship—rushed into the water, eager, in the common exercise of that humanity which is common to us all, but especially noticeable in English sailors, to relieve the misery that was so apparent, and to separate those who were living from those who had ceased to suffer; and, of all these Good Samaritans, Mr McCarthy, who had been so bitter in his denunciation of the mutineers, was the first to go forward, with Frank and Mr Meldrum, you may be sure, not very far off.

"Only six out of the dozen that left the ship!" exclaimed Mr Meldrum to the man in the stern-sheets, to whom he extended his hand to aid him in getting out of the boat. "Where are the rest of your number?"

But the emaciated wretch—who seemed to have suffered considerable bodily injury as well as want of food, for one of his arms hung down powerless at his side, and there was a broad cut across his face from some weapon—was as incapable of speech as he was apparently of moving. His lips only worked feebly, without any sound coming from them, and he stumbled and fell forwards on his face when he tried to rise by the aid of Mr Meldrum's arm.

"Bedad, they're in a bad way, sorr," said Mr McCarthy sympathisingly, coming up and helping Mr Meldrum to lift the man out and place him on the beach, where he had already laid down the corpse that had been in the bows, throwing a bit of the sail over it to hide it for the time from observation. "The poor divil can't spake, sure. I wondther which of them it wor? I'm blest if I can make him out, and I knew all the men purty well, most of them being in my own watch, by the same token."

But just then, the stewardess saved him from puzzling over the man's face any further.

"It's Llewellyn, my husband!" she cried out, pushing Mr McCarthy away, and taking the almost lifeless figure he was supporting tenderly in her arms, oblivious of everything save of her natural womanly pity and love. "The poor fellow! the poor fellow!" and she burst into tears over the miserable semblance of the man, who, coward and deserter as he had proved himself to be, had yet once been dear to her as her husband.

"Ah! then he accompanied them too!" said Mr Meldrum reflectively to the first-mate, as the last man was raised from the bottom of the boat and carried as tenderly ashore as if he had been one of their own party and a loved shipmate. "So there were thirteen of them altogether, instead of twelve, as I thought! That makes seven unaccounted for. I wonder what became of them!"

"Sure and the divil only knows," replied the first-mate laconically, "for Bill Moody, the baste, must be along o' them, as he's not with these here; and he was sartain to be will looked afther by the ould gintleman in black down below!"

"Hush!" said Mr Meldrum. "If he is dead, let him rest in peace!"

"Aye, aye, sort; so say I," answered Mr McCarthy; "and may joy go with him, for he was the broth of a boy!"

Bye and bye, when Llewellyn, the steward, recovered sufficiently to be able to speak, he had a terrible tale to tell.

On the outbreak of the row on board the ship, he said, between Captain Dinks and Moody, he was about to slip forward to join Snowball in the galley to have a warm, for he found it cold in his pantry; and, besides, he had no one to speak to there, and he felt dull and cheerless.

Frightened at the altercation and afraid of getting hurt in the scuffle that arose, he hid himself in the bows of the longboat; and, as luck would happen, he was there when the boat was launched and went away from the side of the vessel with the mutineers, for he could not scramble out in time.

Bill Moody, said the steward, wanted to chuck him over board when he was discovered; but the rest of the men overruled him, and he was allowed to remain.

The boat was carried far to leeward, and so pitched about by the heavy sea which was running, that every moment they thought she would be swamped. They had to bale her out continuously, for the waves broke over her each moment, half-filling her on many occasions.

Fortunately, they were not dashed ashore in the darkness against the cliffs, which they could faintly see through the haze to be quite close; and towards daylight they were able to get up the fore-sail and steer her along the land, which stretched far away down to the southward, miles away from where they had left the ship. The mutineers tried all they could to find some place where they could beach the boat without risk of getting her stove in on the rocks; but their efforts were vain.

At last, they came past a mountain which was smoking, and as the shore seemed to shelve down here, Moody

determined to endeavour to land there, saying that they would find the vicinity of the volcano warm and comfortable—better than some frozen ice-glaciers which they had noticed further north.

After many attempts and failures, they managed to run the boat on to a black sandy stretch of beach which opened out beyond the smoking mountain; and here, they unloaded her in safety.

They had then more provisions than would have lasted them for months with care.

“All of ourn!” ejaculated Mr Lathrope, interrupting the steward at this point of the narrative. “We would ha’ swopped some o’ them penguins and Kerguelen cabbage fur the lot, I guess.”

But, continued Llewellyn, the men wasted all the stores, recklessly destroying much more than they ate; for they pitched away half-consumed cans of preserved meat, opening fresh ones with the greatest carelessness before requiring them.

Besides all this, there was the drink—a curse which followed them from the ship.

Moody had contrived to secrete a cask of rum in the boat before quitting the wreck, and this was opened soon after landing, he and most of the mutineers drinking themselves drunk and indulging in the wildest orgies whilst it lasted.

One evening, about a week after they had got ashore, in the middle of a drunken debauch Moody set fire to a tent, which they had constructed out of some of the spare sails placed in the boat. It was completely burnt, many of the men being almost roasted alive before they could extricate themselves and three dying subsequently from the injuries they had then received.

This was not the worst, however; for, in addition to the tent, their entire stock of provisions, which were stored inside, was consumed; and, beyond a few of the half-eaten tins that had been previously thrown away, they had nothing afterwards left to eat.

Starvation stared them in the face.

“Did you not search about and find the cabbage that we got here?” asked Mr Meldrum.

“No,” replied the steward; “the whole land thereabouts, before the snow fell, was as bare as a brick-field, and just as black and burnt up like.”

“And did no seals or birds come?”

“Some animals swam in one day,” said Llewellyn, “but the men were drunk at the time and frightened them away; so they never came back again when we needed them. Only a stray gull or two occasionally flew by, so far out of reach that none of us could catch them.”

“Well, go on to tell the story in your own way,” said Mr Meldrum.

Their hunger got so great, the man proceeded to say, that they hunted about for stray ham-bones, and even gnawed the soles of their boots; and at last Bill Moody said they would have to cast lots and sacrifice one of their number for the good of the rest.

“Oh, the dhirty cannibal!” interposed Mr McCarthy. “He’d be quite capable of that; bad cess to the baste!”

There were now only ten of them left, with himself, continued Llewellyn, and he could see that Moody wanted him to be killed, it being all a pretence about casting lots. Some of the men saw through the plot, too, as well as he did and took his part. It was then that a fight came about, and in it he got that slash across his face which they had noticed.

Moody’s own particular adherents amongst the party were only four in number; but they had all got pistols, which the others did not possess; and Llewellyn’s party would probably have got the worst of it had not an awful thing happened.

Just at the moment the fight began, the smoking mountain blew up!

“An eruption of the volcano,” said Mr Meldrum.

The steward did not know anything about that. He explained that, while they were in the midst of the struggle, a lot of fire and stones came down upon them, and Moody and some of the other mutineers were crushed to death outright. The survivors, with himself, then managed to push down the longboat into the sea again, and made off from the terrible place—coasting back along the coast in the hope of coming across one of the settlements of the whaling vessels, which some of them had heard frequented the island.

When they were suffering the last extremities of hunger and thirst—the latter being a fresh privation, for they had had plenty of water to drink on the volcano beach, however much they had wanted food—they saw the flag of the “Penguin Castle” settlers, and made towards it as well as they were able.

“And, thank God, I’m here with you all!” concluded the steward when he had brought his narrative to this point. “I have been saved from a horrible death.”

“Arrah, sure, all’s well that inds will!” said Mr McCarthy; “but I’m glad you weren’t a deserter, as I thought you were; and I’m roight glad, too, that that thafe of a Moody has mit with his desarts at last!”

Chapter Thirty Two.

Preparations for Departure.

It was a fortunate circumstance, not only for the surviving mutineers who had turned up so strangely, but for the little community at Penguin Castle as well, that they did not make their appearance on the scene earlier; for, had they come at the trying period, when famine, so to speak, reigned in the land, they certainly would not have been "welcome guests!" Of course, even then, Mr Meldrum and the others would have felt bound to do as much for them as they could; but as at that time the castaways were almost near upon starvation, they could ill have afforded to help others in the same predicament, however much charity might have constrained them.

But, now, things were very different in regard to their larder, wild ducks being plentiful enough and another heavy "bag" of rabbits having been secured as soon as the road to the warren had become passable through the partial subsidence of the flood in the valley; while, in addition to those stores of substantial food, there was Kerguelen cabbage *ad libitum* at their disposal—all the fresher and more juicy through being covered up by the snow and watered by the spring rains—besides an abundance of the haddock-like, spike-headed fish to be had for the catching in the bay, not to speak of the dried penguins as a last resource, should the other articles of diet fail to suit or pall on the palate after a time. Indeed, as Mr Lathrope observed frequently when seated at the central table of their general room and disposing of the savoury residue of some gipsy stew of Snowball's concoction, during this period of plenty, which came in such pleasing contrast to their recent scarcity of provender, they were "living like fighting cocks, and no mistake!"

Such being the state of things at "Penguin Castle," it was not long before the emaciated men, who arrived in the longboat almost at death's door through want, were restored to health. Mr Meldrum, however, took the precaution of binding them down by the most stringent conditions as to their obedience and orderly conduct before admitting them on the same terms as the rest to the common membership of the community—it being clearly put before them that the least *lâche* or inattention to orders would subject them to expulsion, when they would have to shift for themselves and give a wide berth to those of the settlement.

Captain Dinks had recovered so far now that he was able to sit up for a short time each day; but the length of his illness and the amount of blood he had lost had so aged and pulled him down that he was transformed, from the smart energetic sailor he had been, into a feeble old man, utterly incapable of ever resuming his former position should events ever place it in his power to take command of a ship again—at least so it seemed from his general state of prostration.

Under these circumstances, therefore, Mr Meldrum was unquestionably still looked upon as the head of the party, quite apart from any appointment as such, from the simple reason that everybody recognised that it would be only through his advice and forethought that they could ever hope to escape from the island and see home once more.

Although he had as yet never spoken directly to the point on the subject, all could gather, from stray hints and observations which occasionally dropped from his lips, that this thought was ever before him; and that, when he considered that the proper time for action had arrived, he would lay his plans before them.

They were not mistaken.

One evening, about the third week in October and the third month of their residence on Desolation Island, when all were assembled in the general room after the principal meal of the day—gathered together for a social chat over the little petty details of their life since the morning and cogitating as to what was best to be done on the morrow, as was their invariable custom each night before separating at bedtime—Mr Meldrum unbosomed himself, just when they least expected it.

Mr Lathrope was having a spirited contest with the first-mate over the chequer-board that he had assisted in making; Kate was reading out of a little pocket Bible to the poor captain as he lay back in his cot; while the others, grouped around, were talking and otherwise amusing themselves—some of the men knitting a net, which it was intended to use as a seine for catching fish some day when finished, and the steward assisting Snowball in cutting up some cabbage which they were going to pickle and lay by for emergencies—when Mr Meldrum, after a preliminary "hem," to attract their attention, addressed the little gathering.

"Friends," said he, "it was my intention to speak to you some little time back about our future prospects here, but I waited for the weather to become more settled. Now that the spring has fairly set in, however, it is better not to delay our preparations any longer, for time is precious and we shall have to accomplish a great deal in the short period which will be at our disposal."

"I 'spose," put in Mr Lathrope, "you mean about shifting our diggings, mister, hey?"

"Precisely," replied the other. "The season was not sufficiently advanced before; but now that it is, the rain having stopped falling persistently and the weather showing signs of clearing up, why, the sooner we are up and stirring, the greater chance we shall have of getting rescued!"

"Waal," drawled the other in his usual nasal way, "you've only got to say the word, boss, and I guess we're on the move!"

"All right! I'm coming to that, but I want you to understand the situation. Here is a map of Kerguelen Land," and Mr Meldrum unrolled the old admiralty chart which has been alluded to before, as he spoke. "You will see, from the rough outline given of the island, that it is formed of two peninsulas, running nearly north and south respectively and both of nearly equal size, but divided by a comparatively narrow neck of land. The whole island is, taking its outside

limits, about ninety miles long by sixty broad in its widest part, although at the narrow point or neck which I have mentioned—see, just here where I place my finger—the distance from sea to sea between the eastern and western sides does not exceed fifteen miles.”

“I say it clearly, sorr,” said Mr McCarthy, all attention when his especial element was mentioned.

“Well, it so happens,” continued Mr Meldrum, “that our position here, the correctness of which I have carefully ascertained from observations that I have taken and worked out, is, very fortunately for us, on the western side of this isthmus, and not at the extremity of the broader portion of the island. Consequently, we shall only have to traverse the short width of this neck of land in our endeavours to get across to the eastern side, whither we must go if we hope for any vessel to pick us up and take us to a civilised port—none ever touching here on account of the dangerous character of the coast, which we already know to our cost!”

“Bedad, I can’t say how ye are going to get the boats over fifteen miles ov solid ground, more or less,” said the first-mate, scratching his head vigorously, as he always did when puzzled by anything.

“I’ll tell you,” answered Mr Meldrum. “You may have noticed since the snow melted and the rains came, how the waters of that originally small lake at the bottom of the creek have become extended so that they now reach up the base of the furthest hills in the valley?”

“Yis, sorr,” said Mr McCarthy, stopping from disturbing his auburn locks any further with his fingers and now all eagerness again, as if only just then beginning to comprehend what the other was driving at.

“All right, then,” continued Mr Meldrum, “so far, so good! Now, to-day, I went prospecting up to the top of the cliff here, and I see that the waters of the swollen tarn are united in the extreme distance—to the left there on the map—with a river, or some other lake, which comes round that further hill. Hence, this very width of fifteen miles which we have to cross may be but half of it land and half water, so that, really, in that case, we should have only to haul the boat, or boats, over the intervening bits of *terra firma* in passing from sea to sea.”

“I guess, mister,” said Mr Lathrope, “you mean what the lumber men on the Susquehanna and Red River call ‘making a portage,’ hey?”

“I don’t quite follow you,” observed Mr Meldrum.

“Why, when they come across a rapid in the river, they jest tote up their canoes and carry ’em along the bank, or through the forest sometimes, till they gits to whar the stream runs free agin, when they floats ’em and sails along as slick as you please!”

“Exactly,” said Mr Meldrum, “you have just hit what I wished to describe. Well, friends, whether we have to carry the boat a short distance or a long one, we shall have to cross this isthmus; and, the sooner we commence making our preparations, the better.”

“You sid only a boat, sorr; aren’t ye going to take the pair ov ’em?” asked Mr McCarthy.

“No,” replied the other, “one will be about as much as we shall be able to manage, and the smaller of the two at that.”

“Be jabbers!” exclaimed the first-mate in surprise; “and how, thin, will you carry the lot ov us?”

“When we have to cross land,” said Mr Meldrum, “of course we’ll have to walk, and can go in a body or not, just as we please; but when we have to take to the water again, why the boat will have to do it in so many trips—taking over a certain number first and returning for a fresh load, until all shall be taken over; and repeating the process from stage to stage.”

“It kinder strikes me, mister,” said Mr Lathrope, reflectively, “that you’ll find that thar jolly-boat a heap bigger and a pile heavier than them birch-bark canoes of the lumber men and Injuns I was a talkin’ about; and yet, they’re heavy enough to cart along fur any raal sort o’ distance, you bet, fur I’ve tried ’em!”

“I’ve already thought of that,” said Mr Meldrum, “and to-morrow the carpenter and I will have a talk about a little job which will, perhaps, relieve your mind in the matter; but, take the boat we must, by hook or by crook! Do you know that, after crossing the isthmus and getting into the open sea on the other side, we shall have to coast along for another fifty or sixty miles before we can expect to reach Betsy Cove, the little harbour out of Hillsborough Bay or sound, which—you can see it here on the chart—is the rendezvous of the whalers. Thither, I tell you, we must go if we hope to meet any of these in order to be taken off the island. Now, if we can’t get there by water we should have to go by land; and the distance, by the circuitous route we should have to adopt, would exceed two hundred miles, the way, too, taking us across mountains which the ladies at least would find impassable!”

“And when are you thinking of starting?” asked Captain Dinks, speaking for the first time.

“As soon as possible. The whalers are said generally to arrive at Betsy Cove about the beginning of the summer, that is in November; and, what with the difficulties we may meet in traversing the isthmus here, and the subsequent long distance we should have to go by water—for we may have to make repeated trips in order to transport all the members of our party to the point I am aiming at—it will take us all our time to reach there in a month.”

“All right!” responded the captain, who looked for the moment more cheerful at the idea of moving away, “make all the arrangements you like, Mr Meldrum; I’m only a useless old hulk now, and can do nothing to help you.”

“Bedad you’ll be all right agin, cap’en,” said Mr McCarthy. “That is, faix, when you say the say on t’other side, sure.”

Cheer up, my hearty, and niver say die!"

"Thank you, Tim," said Captain Dinks, actually smiling, which was the best sign he had shown for weeks; "your face is as good as a tonic any day, old friend, and you make me feel better already!"

The very next day all began to prepare for the contemplated shifting of their quarters, Mr Meldrum so contriving that each had his quota of work to perform in making ready for the start.

Ben Boltrope was commissioned to manufacture as speedily as he could, out of what spare timber he could get hold of—and, if necessary, he was empowered to break up the longboat in default of finding any elsewhere, for they would not want to use it again—a small light carriage with large broad wheels similar to those commonly used in transporting life-boats from place to place along the coast, when their services are suddenly required at some spot remote from their station and it would take too long to send them round by sea.

This carriage, of course, was for the accommodation of the jolly-boat, whenever it should be found necessary for it to abandon its more congenial element the water, for the land; and as the wheels required some delicacy of manipulation, it was a lucky thing that the mutineers had forgotten to take Ben's tool-chest out of the longboat, and that it had been restored to his possession. Otherwise, the old man-o'-war's man would have been unable to have completed satisfactorily the difficult task set him with only an old axe and a hammer for his available tools, as had been the case when the house was being built.

Such of the party as were not assisting the carpenter were set to work collecting and curing everything in the shape of food, or provisions of any sort that came to hand—the rabbit warren being depopulated and wild ducks slaughtered to such an extent that the latter abandoned the valley; while, the last remaining birds in the penguin colony, old and young alike, were sacrificed to appease the craving gods of the common larder.

Neither were the ladies idle; for, Kate Meldrum and Mrs Major Negus were employed making canvas bags for the stowage of all these good things in proper ship-shape fashion. Even Master Maurice—the whilom "Imp," who had almost been reformed by his experience amongst the penguins—and Miss Florry, had their services requisitioned in one way or other.

One and all, without exception, had each something to do!

"I guess, mister," said Mr Lathrope a week later on, when he and Mr Meldrum were returning from an unsuccessful foray on the adjacent marshes that had been the haunt of the wild fowl—without once getting a shot, much less bagging a duck to reward their trouble,—“this'll be a tall moving; and the sooner we make tracks the better now, since all the game's skeart. I don't see nary a grasshopper to aim at!"

"The arrangements are all completed," replied the other, "and I have determined to start to-morrow. As you say, there's nothing to be gained by our waiting any longer; so, as we've now as much provision collected as we shall either want or can carry, and as Ben has finished the boat-carriage, I don't see any reason for delaying our departure a single day!"

Mr Meldrum was as good as his word. He gave out an intimation of the projected start on the morrow to the household the same evening, as soon as the two reached the little dwelling by the creek which they were about to abandon so remorselessly after the long shelter it had given them in their adversity!

Chapter Thirty Three.

Across Country.

It was a lovely morning, the loveliest that the shipwrecked people had seen since their landing on Kerguelen Land, when the little party started away from Penguin Castle, bidding adieu to the spot which for so many long months had given them a shelter and a home.

The sun was shining out brightly, the sky without a cloud, and the air felt quite warm, although with a freshness in it that just gave zest to movement; while the atmosphere had that peculiar opalescent translucency about it and an almost imperceptible colouring—in the faintest tints of light mauve and amber, with a shade of tender apple-green—which is rarely seen in more northern latitudes, excepting in those regions that are well within the borders of the Arctic circle.

Out in the bay opposite the creek, the water was as smooth as glass, undisturbed by the slightest breath of wind so as to cause a ripple; and numbers of baby puffins and young penguins, their spruce little downy bodies clad in bright new coats of silky feathers, were scattered in groups over the mirror-like expanse, diving and coming up again in a moment in the centre of a series of expanding circles that gradually grew wider and wider in diameter, as when a stone is flung into a still pond, only to disappear the next minute. Others were flitting along over the surface with the pinions of their little wings just dipped in the water, so that they flicked it up, in the short flights they took now and then in play and mimic pursuit of each other, like as rowing men do when they "feather" their oars too soon in lumpy water. Sometimes, the generally restless birdlets would rest tranquilly for a brief while on the bosom of the sea, chattering away like so many aquatic magpies in miniature mottled flocks; but this was only for a very short spell.

To the right of the creek, rising abruptly out of the sea, the black basaltic cliffs which formed such a bold headland to the bay stretched far out to where the extreme point of Cape Saint Louis could be seen, embracing within the compass of its arm the reef on which the *Nancy Bell* had been lost; and to the left, beyond the ridge at the back of the castaways' dwelling, the higher ranges of the inland mountains, which seemed to run down to the southwards

and eastwards as far as the eye could reach, stood up—towering in the distance above the hills immediately near in the foreground and lifting their snow-clad summits into the blue vault of the heavens.

The “travelling caravan,” as Mr Lathrope had styled the jolly-boat when he saw it first mounted on its broad-flanged, awkward-looking carriage, had been packed the night before with all the impedimenta of the pilgrims. Their few “goods and chattels and household effects” were stowed in and about below the thwarts, with the canvas bags containing the dried birds and Kerguelen cabbage which formed their stock of provisions ranged round the gunwales and crammed in anywhere; while a special place was kept clear and reserved in the stern-sheets for the accommodation of poor Captain Dinks, who was deposited here in his cot.

Pussy, who had been so happily saved from the wreck at the last moment and had since done such good service in demolishing the mice which infested the house, was placed alongside of the captain to keep him company, and he had also in charge a tame, or rather an educated penguin, that Master Maurice Negus had displayed considerable ability in training and which Mr Meldrum had allowed to be taken along with the other things as a reward for the “imp’s” services of late in assisting at the preparations of the expedition.

For some days prior to this, Mr Meldrum had been very busy taking short excursions in various directions, but all tending to the same point of the compass. He was endeavouring to find out which route would be the most practicable for reaching the eastern seaboard; and, after collecting all his observations into one harmonised whole and deliberating over the matter with Mr Lathrope and the first-mate, who had severally accompanied him in his various prospecting tours, the final course of the party was at length agreed on.

The bright morning appeared to all as an augury of success; so it was with light hearts that they set out.

They abandoned Penguin Castle in all its entirety, Mr Meldrum saying that possibly they might have to seek its shelter again; but, if happily there should arise no occasion for that eventuality, the building might still be of service to other shipwrecked men in a like extremity to themselves. Thus it came to pass that the place was left “all standing,” with rooms, furniture—such as it was—Snowball’s copper and the cooking range all intact. Even the flagstaff with Kate’s ensign at the peak was left hoisted, as if to show, that if deserted now, the spot had once been inhabited!

They were thirty-two souls in all now, reckoning the steward and the other four men of the mutineers who had come back in the longboat—which had to be broken up, by the way, after all, to form the jolly-boat’s carriage; and it was just “six bells in the forenoon watch” when they started, a team of the sailors, tethered in traces like a pack of Esquimaux dogs, hauling away at the boat-carriage and running it along merrily with a chorus of “cheerily men, cheerily ho!” The others tramped behind the queer vehicular conveyance, without respect of persons; only poor Captain Dinks being allowed a seat in the boat, while it travelled on land, and that only by reason of his helplessness and inability to move without assistance. When they had to take to the water, of course, the jolly-boat would have to carry more passengers.

On the way, sometimes, they had serious difficulties to encounter, for the ground in many places was moist and spongy, causing the feet of the men hauling to sink deeply into the soil as they tugged at the towing-rope of the jolly-boat’s carriage; but, as frequently Mr Meldrum remarked, to rouse the seamen’s energies, “difficulties were only made for brave men to conquer,” so at it they went with a will which soon overcame the dead weight of the load they had to drag behind them—a fresh towing team relieving the first at the expiration of every half hour, so as not to weary the men out by a too prolonged strain at such unusual exertion.

Bye and bye, they arrived at the end of their first “portage,” the shores of the little lake which Mr Meldrum had noticed trending in an eastward direction. This water would now considerably aid their passage across the isthmus by allowing the jolly-boat to take to its native element, on whose bosom it would be borne some miles on the onward way.

Here a halt was called and a short luncheon taken, after which the jolly-boat was safely launched on the water by backing it down on its carriage. This plan was easy as well as expeditious; for, as soon as the boat had reached its proper point of immersion, it floated off the wheels.

The ladies then got into the stern-sheets, alongside of the captain, accompanied by Mr Meldrum, while four of the seamen took their places on the thwarts in order to row them across—the remainder of the party stopping where they were, along with a portion of the packages that had been removed from the boat so as to make room for Mrs Major Negus and the others who went with her. The carriage belonging to the boat was also left behind until the latter should have deposited its first cargo on the other side of the lake and return to fetch a fresh load.

Three trips were taken before the whole party were thus transported over the lake, the boat’s carriage being then towed over at the last crossing.

It would be needless repetition to recount in detail all the different portages of the jolly-boat over the strips of land which lay between the chain of lakes that were spread over the line of their route; or, to tell the number of the trips by water that had to be made.

There were many unloadings of the little craft, and many packings-up again.

Many weary miles the poor unaccustomed pedestrians had to tramp, sometimes up-hill, sometimes down dale, through marshy lands and over stony boulders that blistered their feet; and all the while they had to drag after them that terrible Frankenstein-like monster, the jolly-boat mounted on its carriage, which seemed to the worn-out men sometimes a species of Juggernaut car, crushing out their spirits and sapping their every energy.

Suffice it to say, that, at the end of a fortnight’s time, they at length reached a magnificent stretch of blue water,

which Mr Meldrum said was Hillsborough Bay, on the eastern side of Kerguelen Land.

Hurrah—they had crossed the isthmus, and arrived so far towards the end of their destination!

As they toiled over this neck of land which united the two principal peninsulas into which the island was divided, they could mark how, as had been noticed along the coast, the country was composed of a series of terraced hills, rising above a chain of lakes and lagoons that indented it deeply on either side and forming an endless succession of deep fords and harbours, the hills being almost invariably covered, from their crests down to a certain altitude, with perpetual snow. Below this line, their sides were clothed with green verdure, composed chiefly of a species of azorella and a rough spinated grass; while, the strangest feature of all was, that not a single tree, or plant approaching to the dimensions of a shrub, could be seen on any portion of the island!

The most charming characteristic of the scenery noticed, was the profusion of cataracts, cascades, and waterfalls, which leaped and sparkled from terrace to terrace of the basaltic net-work of peaks and ridges that ran here, there, and everywhere across the isthmus, enclosing the valleys and scarping the sea—the splashing of these natural fountains making soft music everywhere as the water gurgled down into tiny rivulets and brooks below, which stole their way along banks bordered by chickweed and liverwort into the lakes, and from the lakes into the ocean, only to be sucked up again by the clouds and deposited on the hills in the form of rain, forming the cascades and cataracts anew; and so on, *da capo*.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Rescued.

“Snakes and alligators, mister!” exclaimed Mr Lathrope when the whole party were gathered together on the shore of Hillsborough Bay, united once more after the boat-carriage had been lugged over its final portage, and the boat itself had accomplished its last separate short trip before adventuring again on the open waters of the sea—“I guess your fifteen miles has come to a considerable sight more’n fifty, you bet.”

“Oh! please be a little more moderate in your estimate,” laughed Mr Meldrum. “I confess I somewhat understated the probable distance; but really, now, fifty miles is a little too much.”

“Wa-al, then, let us call it five-and-twenty,” said the American with a genial grin over his sharp-cut features, which were almost as elongated as his legs. “You can’t grumble at that anyway, I reckon, boss!”

“That’s pretty much like the story of the five hundred cats which came down, I believe, to two, if I’m not mistaken,” slyly put in Miss Kate, smiling.

“Now, don’t you be too rough on a feller, missy,” said Mr Lathrope, pretending to be very serious over the matter, in his humorous way. “I cave in to the fifty, that’s a fact, as I kinder wanted to pile on the agony; but when I took my stand to be euchred on twenty-five miles, I meant the distance we’ve tramped over, and nary a bit of the water passage, for my old boots hev got busted up, I guess, and the sooner I git a noo pair the better for this child.”

“Bedad, that’s the same case wid mysilf,” interposed Mr McCarthy, exhibiting the articles he wore as he spoke, which, from their repeated patchings and general state of dilapidation, would certainly have carried off the prize at a curiosity show. “Sure, and it’s walkin’ on my fut I’ve bin the last four days entirely.”

“You’d have ben a smart coon to have done the contrary, I guess, mister, anyhow,” said the American drily.

“Sure, an’ it’s the sole of me fut I mane, sorr,” explained the first-mate in Hibernian fashion.

“Jest so,” said Mr Lathrope, laughing at the blunder; “and it would puzzle you to walk different, I kalkerlate, that is unless you tried the sole of your head!”

“Well, here we are, no matter what distance we have travelled,” said Mr Meldrum, going back to business; while Frank and Kate, who had not been able to get much conversation together of late, were having a very interesting little *tête-à-tête* confabulation in a corner, out of ear-shot of the rest. “We shall, however, soon have to separate our forces again, for we must make the next start on our journey by water, which will now be our travelling medium all the way.”

“Be jabbers, and it’s glad I am to hear that same!” exclaimed Mr McCarthy, interrupting the speaker in his jubilation at not being forced to walk any more, a means of locomotion to which, from his long life at sea, the first-mate was strangely averse.

“As I was saying,” continued Mr Meldrum, “we must now make up our minds for a short separation, the rest of our journey having to be performed by water. I’ll tell you what I think will be the best plan, if you will listen:— From here to Betsy Cove, the harbour I have mentioned where the whalers call every year, is in a bee-line just about thirty-five miles right ahead across the stretch of sea there; but as we may have to make a *détour* in order to avoid reefs and any rocks or islands which may come within this straight line, we’d better call it fifty miles.”

“Better say a hundred, mister, while you’re at it,” said Mr Lathrope, with a wink to the others; “you kinder forget the fifteen miles you made it across the isthmus ‘fore we started, hey?”

“There’s no fear of my making that mistake here,” replied Mr Meldrum. “This is all plain sailing, with correct latitude and longitude to go by! It won’t be more than fifty, indeed, even if we have to creep round the coast of the bay all the way, instead of shaping a course right across it, as I intend doing. Well, all things considered, it will be best for the

boat first to take half of us this distance to Betsy Cove, going all the way in the one trip; and then to return for the other portion of the party. We have lightened her considerably of the provisions during the last ten days, and being able to carry twelve or fourteen hands ordinarily, she will now easily take us across the bay in two trips—that is, if some of you don't mind a little squeezing."

"Will—will—it be quite safe?" said Mrs Major Negus in a hesitating way, looking at the bright, frisking little wavelets which covered the blue sea of the bay with some slight alarm. She had imbibed a perfect horror of the water and all pertaining to it ever since the wreck.

"Quite," answered Mr Meldrum. "We've had peril enough without my seeking to endanger your safety now! I suppose," continued he, going on to explain the arrangements, "the boat will take a day, say, in getting to Betsy Cove, and another day coming back on the return voyage for the rest.—We'll call it three days, to allow for contingencies; so that, we shall not be apart more than four days at the outside, allowing due time for the boat reaching the Cove again after her second trip hither."

"Fancy!" whispered Frank to Kate. "Four whole days that I may not be able to see you! I know it will be just my luck that I shall have to stay behind at the camp; for, your father will most probably take all the ladies with him in the first trip, as he did at setting out."

"Oh, dear!" said Kate smiling, "that will be a terribly long separation, won't it?"

"You darling tease!" exclaimed he; "I don't believe you care for me half as much as I do for you!"

"Don't I!" she said softly; and her melting blue eyes would have disclosed a secret if Frank had been looking into them at the moment—which very probably he was!

However, the sad eventuality he had conjectured did not occur. Mr Meldrum, knowing the condition of matters between the lovers, did not have the heart to separate the two, even temporarily; and so Frank had the supreme and unexpected felicity of accompanying Kate in the first trip the jolly-boat took across the bay to Betsy Cove—Mrs Major Negus and Maurice, Mr Meldrum and Florry, Mr Adams and Captain Dinks, of course, besides six of the seamen, being their fellow-passengers.

Mr Lathrope remained at the head of the inlet, with Mr McCarthy, in charge of the camp and the remaining hands until the jolly-boat came back to fetch them; and it really seemed, from the many earnest "good-byes" exchanged between those starting off and the ones left behind as if the castaways were parting for ever, the separation seemed to cause such a wrench after they had been so long together!

Thanks to the fine fresh breeze, and the fact of their being almost in the open sea now—for the sides of the bay diverged so greatly after a time that the opposite coasts could not be seen—the boat was under sail instead of being pulled along; and the motion was ever so much more pleasant than when it was oscillated to and fro by the sharp jerky strokes of the rowers.

The weather still continued fine and clear, with the sun shining on the water and a bright blue sky overhead; and as the boat glided along, heeling over to the wind every now and then and tossing the spray from her bows as she came down with a flop on the crest of some little wave which got in her way, Frank wished that he and Kate could glide on so for ever. Everything seemed so delightful around them after the dreary winter they had so recently passed through.

Nature herself was smiling again upon them in the bright summer dawn!

Even the penguins seemed to enjoy the change of season, for they raced after the boat as she pursued her way, moving through the water like a shoal of albacore, and rarely showing more than their heads above the surface for a little while. Then, all of a sudden, as if playing a game of leapfrog amongst themselves, they would spring out of the sea in long lines, one after another, showing their steel-grey backs and silvery sides, so that Kate could hardly believe they were not fishes jumping up in sport, like as she had frequently seen the bonito do when off the African coast in the Atlantic.

The jolly-boat had such a spanking breeze from the north-west all the way with her, right abaft the beam, that she accomplished the distance between the head of the inlet and Betsy Cove before nightfall, Mr Meldrum shaping her course so well by the old chart he had that she fetched the harbour in a bee-line almost from their point of departure, steering east by south.

There was no mistaking the place.

Betsy Cove was a second bay within a larger one, called "Accessible Bay" on the chart and marked by a curious isolated mountain-peak which raised itself on the very extremity of a low spit of land that ran out into the sea, a long way out from the main shore.

On the beach were several old wooden huts and a large iron boiler that had evidently been used for "trying out" seal and whale oil from the blubber; while further up the shore was a small graveyard, a rather melancholy-looking spot with a few wooden crosses and piles scattered about it bearing dreary legends relating to the untimely end of different seamen who had either died there on shore, or had lost their lives at sea in the immediate vicinity. However, the most important point to our little party, was the fact that there were no signs of any vessels having recently visited the place; and, consequently, Mr Meldrum had carried out his original plan to the letter, having evidently arrived there in time before the annual coming of the whalers.

Early the next morning the jolly-boat was sent back to fetch the others, and towards the evening of the day following

the whole of the party were once more together.

A week passed by without any event of note happening, during which period the little community did not suffer from any want of food or other necessaries, for they found a store of provisions in one of the huts that had evidently been placed there in case of need similar to their own; so, things jogged on evenly enough. Still, all were in a state of high-strung suspense, looking out eagerly from morning till night for the promised vessel that every one expected was coming to deliver them.

"I guess they'd better look alive, mister, if they're coming," said Mr Lathrope, "or else the summer'll be gone afore we git away, and then we shall have to go back to Penguin Castle for another winter. I'd sooner a durned sight be thar than haar if it comed on to blow!"

"Patience, my friend!" replied Mr Meldrum. "Don't you recollect that old French proverb, 'Everything comes to him who waits!'"

"Don't reckon I dew, mister," answered the other. "I guess, though, it warn't a waiter at one of them hotels that said that, hey?"

"Perhaps not," said Mr Meldrum, smiling at the American's hit; "but I've no doubt we shall be rescued this year, even if we have to wait."

He was not disappointed.

On the Monday morning of the following week the look out man—for they had set up another signal station here at the head of the harbour the same as at Penguin Castle—sang out the welcome call—"Sail ho!"

And, soon after, a large fore-and-aft rigged schooner was seen entering the bay.

She proved to be the *Matilda Ann* of New London. She was engaged in the whale and seal fishery between Kerguelen Land and the neighbouring Heard Islands; and as she was empty, having transferred her oil to a homeward-bound whaler belonging to the same owners, her captain readily accepted the offer made him by Mr Meldrum on behalf of Captain Dinks, to charter the schooner to convey the survivors of the passengers and crew of the *Nancy Bell* to the Cape of Good Hope, whence they would easily be able to get a passage back to England or to their original destination in New Zealand.

"I guess that air prime," said Mr Lathrope; "but I've hed enuff v'ying fur a spell, and I kinder kalkerlate I'll make tracks to hum. I don't mind either, darkey, if I take you along o' me! I've got a fust-rate brown-stone front in Philadelphy, and I'll chuck you in as cook, if you like, hey?"

"Golly, massa, you don't mean dat, suah!"

"Guess I dew," said the American deliberately.

"Tank you, massa; den you ken take down de bill, I ain't no longer to let—I'm on, yah, yah!" shouted Snowball, giving way to the most obstreperous merriment, in order to testify his satisfaction at Mr Lathrope's engaging him in his service, the darkey having always had a hankering after the American from his thorough appreciation of his cookery.

Mrs Major Negus was true to the last.

"What an extremely fishy smell!" she exclaimed as she went on board the whaler which had so opportunely come to rescue them from the solitude of Desolation Island. "I'm sure I wish Captain Dinks had secured a passage for us in a more respectable ship after choosing to cast away his own!"

But little more remains to be added.

The whaling schooner reached Table Bay in safety, without encountering any storms similar to that which had led to the loss of the *Nancy Bell*, and all the rescued castaways were shortly afterwards landed at Cape Town. Here, Captain Dinks, who had recovered much from his wound since he was taken off the island, secured a passage home to England for himself and officers and such of the passengers of the lost ship as desired to go back thither, sending on to New Zealand, at the owners' expense, those who preferred proceeding to their original destination.

Amongst these latter was Mrs Major Negus and her son, "the Major" being extremely anxious to join her husband at Waikato as soon as possible. Mr Meldrum and his family also went on; the ex-commander in the Royal Navy having sold out the little property he had at home and capitalised his pension with the object of settling in New Zealand, had now no desire to return to England, or the means to live there if he had such a wish.

Frank did not forget his engagement with Kate, however.

Although he was obliged to accompany Captain Dinks back to England, it was not long after his arrival in London before he passed the Trinity House Board, obtaining a certificate licensing him to act as chief mate, in which capacity he went out to New Zealand on his very next voyage.

This will not be his last trip to the Antipodes either, for rumour has it that, not improbably, Frank Harness, promoted to the rank of a master in the mercantile marine, will proceed shortly again to Otago in command of a ship of his own, when, possibly, he will have one especial item of human freight to bring home with him on his own account!

The Last of the Old Ship!

There is one thing more to tell.

It all arises from the unpardonable stupidity of that donkey of a steward, Llewellyn, who forgot the memorandum concerning the circumstance and left it down below in the cabin—and that, too, in spite of Ben Boltrope's telling him to be certain to bear it mind, besides his wife, Mary, having continually jogged his memory on the subject! Had it not been for this, the omission would never have occurred, as the matter would have been mentioned in its proper place some time ago.

Shortly after the *Matilda Ann* set sail from the little whaling station at Betsy Cove with the rescued castaways of Kerguelen Land on board, and just as she was weathering the Cloudy Islands, as they are called—a group of rocks that lie to the north-east of the mainland—the look-out man in the fore cross-trees, who was keeping a keen watch for breakers, the navigation at this point being rather ticklish on account of the treacherous reefs and stray currents that wander about there, suddenly shouted down to the man at the wheel to put the helm down, which of course he immediately did.

“What is it?” called out the steersman, who happened to be the master of the schooner himself. He noticed no sign of breakers anywhere near and wondered at this sudden alteration of the vessel's course—“Where's the reef?”

“Tain't no reef, sir,” sang out the man aloft in answer, “but I see something like a man in the water.”

“Man be hanged!” exclaimed the schooner's skipper in a rage. “And was it for such an absurd idea that you've nearly made me shiver the masts out of her? If it be a body, it can only be a corpse; for no man could swim out here from Kerguelen, and I'm blessed if he could live on those rocks of islands beyond!”

“There!” shouted the look-out man again, taking no notice of the other's upbraiding, and seeming to be very anxious about whatever he had seen in the water. “It is quite close now on the lee bow.”

“Well, just to oblige you,” said the skipper, speaking loud enough for all on board to hear, “and to let you see for yourself what a confounded fool you are, I'll fetch her up to it!”

“Bully for you, cap'en!” exclaimed Mr Lathrope, who with the others of the rescued party was on deck, not liking the rather fusty odour of the schooner's cabin—which, to do justice to Mrs Major Negus, did smell most abominably of seal-oil, and even worse scents!

The floating object was soon approached on the schooner's bearing away towards it; and a man in the bows, who had a boat-hook ready in his hand, quickly grappled it and pulled it alongside.

It was no man, however, as the look-out had thought; but only a piece of square timber which had evidently once formed some portion of a vessel's belongings, and it was carved out roughly on the uppermost side to represent a female head and bust.

“I wasn't far out in thinking it were a man in the water,” said the look-out man, gazing down on the object from his perch above, as the schooner's skipper, giving the helm in charge of some one else, came forward to have a look over the side at the innocent cause of all this unnecessary fuss, as he thought.

“You'd better say no more,” replied the skipper, scornfully shouting back up to the man. “I always thought you were a fool, and now I know you are one! A drowning man, indeed! why, it's only the broken figurehead of some old vessel or other!”

“Look, Mr McCarthy!” cried Mr Meldrum to the Irishman, who just then came up to see what all the commotion was about. “Don't you see what it is?”

“Be jabbers, I do!” responded the ex-mate, quite as much excited as the other. “Sure, an' it's the last of the ould ship! I wondther howsomever it iver floated all the way here?”

It was the figurehead of the ill-fated *Nancy Bell*.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WRECK OF THE NANCY BELL; OR, CAST AWAY ON KERGUELEN LAND

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