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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRITZ AND ERIC ***

John Conroy Hutcheson

"Fritz and Eric"

Chapter One.

"Good-Bye!"

"Time is getting on, little mother, and we'll soon have to say farewell!"

"Aye, my child. The parting is a sad one to me; but I hope and trust the good God will hold you in His safe keeping, and guide your footsteps back home to me again!"

"Never you fear, little mother. He will do that, and in a year's time we shall all meet again under the old roof-tree, I'm certain. Keep your heart up, mother mine, the same as I do; remember, it is not a 'Farewell' I am saying for ever, it is merely 'Auf wiedersehen!'"

"I hope so, Eric, surely; still, we cannot tell what the future may bring forth!" said the other sadly.

Mother and son were wending their way through the quaint, old-fashioned, sleepy main street of Lubeck that led to the railway station—a bran-new modern structure that seemed strangely incongruous amidst the antique surroundings of the ancient town. Although it was past the midday hour, hardly a soul was to be seen moving about; and the western sun lighted up the green spires of the churches and red-tiled pointed roofs of the houses, glinting from the peculiar eye-shaped dormer windows of some of the cottages with the most grotesque effect and making them appear as if winking at the onlooker. It seemed like a scene of a bygone age reproduced on the canvas of some Flemish artist; and, but that Eric and his mother were accustomed to it, they must have rubbed their eyes, like Rip Van Winkle when he came down from the goblin-haunted mountain into the old village of his youth, in doubt whether all was real, thinking it might be a dream. Presently, however, they were at the railway station, and they would have been convinced, if they had felt inclined to believe otherwise, that they were living in the present. But, even here, amid all the hissing of steam, and creaking of carriages, and whirr of moving machinery, the queer old-world costumes of the peasantry, with their quaint hats and mantles, which more resembled the stage properties of a Christmas pantomime than the known dress of any people of the period, all spoke of the past—a past when the great Barbarossa reigned in Central Europe, and when there were "Robbers of the Rhine," and "Forty thousand virgins," in company with Saint Ursula, canonising the sainted and scented city of Cologne. Ah, those days of long ago!

"Here we are at last, mother," said Eric, slinging the bag containing his sea kit on to the railway platform. "The old engine is getting its steam up, and we'll soon be off. Cheer up, little mother! As I've told you, it is not a good-bye for ever!"

"So you say, my son. The young ever look forward; but old people like myself look back, and it makes us reflect how few of the noble aspirations and longing anticipations of our youth are ever realised!"

"Old people like yourself indeed, little mother!" said Eric indignantly, tossing up his lion-like head, and looking as if he would like to see any one else who would dare to make such an assertion, the next moment throwing his arms round her neck, and hugging her fondly. "I won't have you calling yourself old, you dear little mother, with your nice glossy brown hair, and beautiful bright blue eyes and handsome face—a face which I fail not to see Burgher Jans gaze on with eloquent expression every Sunday when we go to the Dom Kirche. Ah, I know—"

"Fie, my son!" exclaimed Madame Dort, interrupting him by placing her hand across his mouth, a process which soon stopped his indiscreet impetuosity, a warm blush the while mantling her comely countenance; for she was yet in the bloom of middle-aged womanhood. "Suppose, now, any one were to overhear you, audacious child!"

"Ah, but I know, though," repeated the boy triumphantly, when he had again regained his freedom of speech. "I won't tell, little mother; still, I must make a bargain with you, as I don't intend that fusty old Burgher Jans to have my

handsome young mutterchen, that's poz! But, to change the subject, why are you so despondent about my leaving you now, dear mother? I've been already away from you two voyages, and yet have returned safe and sound to Lubeck."

"You forget, my child, that the pitcher sometimes goes once too often to the well. The ocean is treacherous, and the perils of the sea are great, although you, in boy-like fashion, may laugh at them. Strong men have but too often to acknowledge the supremacy of the waves when they bear them down to their watery grave, leaving widows and orphans, alas! to mourn their untimely fate with sad and bitter tears! Don't you remember your poor father's end, my son?"

"I do, mother," answered the boy gravely; "still, all sailors are not drowned, nor is a seafaring life always dangerous."

"Granted, my child," responded his mother to this truism; "but, those who go down to the sea in ships, as the Psalmist says, see the perils of the deep, and lead a venturesome calling! Besides, Eric, I must tell you that I—I do not feel myself so strong as I was when you first left home and became a sailor boy; and, although I have no doubt a good Providence will watch over you, and preserve you in answer to my heartfelt prayers, yet you are now starting on a longer voyage than you have yet undertaken, and perchance I may not live to greet you on your return!"

"Oh, mother, don't say that, don't say that!" exclaimed Eric in a heart-broken voice; "you are not ill, you are not ailing, mother dear?" and he peered anxiously with a loving gaze into her eyes, to try and read some meaning there for the sorrowful presage that had escaped thus inadvertently from her lips, drawn forth by the agony of parting.

"No, my darling, nothing very alarming," she said soothingly, wishing to avoid distressing him needlessly by communicating what might really be only, as she hoped, a groundless fear on her part. "I do not feel exactly ill, dear. I was only speaking about the natural frail tenure of this mortal life of ours. This saying 'Good-bye' to you too, my darling, makes me infected with morbid fear and nervous anxiety. Fancy me nervous, Eric—I whom you call your strong-minded mother, eh?" and the poor lady smiled bravely, so as to encourage the lad, and banish his easily excited fears on her account. It was but a sickly smile, however, for it did not come genuinely from the heart, prompted though the latter was with the fullest affection. Still, Eric did not perceive this, and the smile quickly dismissed his fears.

"Ha, ha," he laughed in his light-hearted, ringing way. "The idea of your being nervous, like I remember old grandmother Grimpe was when I used to jump suddenly in at the door or fire my popgun! I would never believe it, not even if you yourself said it. Ah, now you look better already, and like my own dear little mother who will keep safe and well, and welcome me back next year, surely; and then, dear one, we'll have no end of a happy time!"

"I hope so, Eric; I hope so with all my heart," said she, pressing the eager lad to her bosom in a fond embrace; "and you may be sure that none will be so glad to welcome you back as I!"

"Think, mother," said Eric presently, after a moment's silence, in which the feelings of the two seemed too great to find expression in words of common import. "Why, by that time I will have nearly sailed round the world; for in my voyage to Java and back I will have to 'double the Cape,' as sailors say!"

"Yes, that you will, my boy," chimed in his mother, anxious to sustain this buoyant change in his humour, and drive away the somewhat melancholy tone she had unwittingly introduced into their last parting conversation. "You'll be a regular little travelled monkey, like the one belonging to the Dutchman that we were reading about the other day which could do everything almost but speak, although I don't think anybody would accuse you of any want of ability on the latter score, you chatterbox!"

"No, no, little mother; I think not likewise," chuckled Eric complacently. "I'm not one of your silent ones, not so! But, hurrah!—There comes Fritz turning in under the old gateway. He said he would try and get away for half an hour in the afternoon from the counting-house to wish me another good-bye and see me off, if Herr Grosschnapper could spare him. Ah ha, Master Fritz," shouted out the sailor lad, as his brother drew nigh, "you're just in time to see the last of me. I thought the worthy Herr would not let you come, you are so very late."

"Better late than never," said the other, smiling, coming up beside the pair, who were standing in front of one of the railway carriages, into which Eric had already bundled his bag. "The old man did growl a bit about my 'idling away the afternoon,' as he called it; but when I impressed him with the fact that you were going away to sea, he relented and let me come, saying that it was a good job such a circumstance did not occur every day!"

"Much obliged to him, I'm sure!" said Eric, with that usual toss of his head which threw back his mane-like locks of yellow hair. "He would have been a fine old curmudgeon to have refused you leave to wish good-bye to your only brother!" And he put one of his arms round Fritz's neck as he spoke.

"Hush, my son," interposed Madame Dort. "You must not speak ill of the good merchant who has been such a kind friend to Fritz and given him regular employment in his warehouse!"

"All right, mutterchen, I won't mention again the name of the old cur—, I mean dear old gentleman, little mother, there!" And then catching the twinkling eye of Fritz, the two burst into a simultaneous laugh at the narrow escape there had been of his repeating the obnoxious epithet; while Madame Dort could not help smiling too, as she gazed fondly into the merry face of the roguish boy, standing by his brother's side and clinging to him with that deep fraternal affection which is so rarely seen, alas! in members of the same family.

Truly, they were sons of whom any mother might have been proud.

Fritz was tall and manly, by virtue of his two-and-twenty years and a small fringe of dark down that covered his upper lip; Eric was shorter by some inches, but more thick-set and with broader shoulders, predicting that he would be the

bigger of the two as time rolled on.

The firstborn, Fritz, with his closely cropped hair and swarthy complexion, took after his dead father, who had been a Holsteiner—a mariner by profession, who had sailed his ship from the Elbe some years before for the last time, and left his wife to bring up her fatherless boys by the sweat of her brow and her own exertions; for Captain Dort had left but little worldly goods behind him, his all being embarked with himself in his ship, which was lost, with all hands on board, in the North Sea. Fritz and Eric had both been too young at the time to appreciate the struggles of their mother to support herself and them, until she had achieved a comfortable competency by teaching music and languages in several rich Hanoverian families; and now she had no longer to battle for her bread.

Eric took after her in face and expression, having the same light-coloured hair and bright blue eyes; but there the resemblance ceased, as hardly had he grown to boyhood than he evinced that desire for a sea life which he must have inherited with his father's blood—he would, he must be a sailor!

Being the youngest, he naturally was her pet; and thus, although the recollection of her husband's fate was ever before her, and Madame Dort had a dread of the sea which only those who have suffered a similar bereavement can fully understand, she could not resist the boy's continual pleadings, backed up as they were by his evident and unaffected bias of mind towards everything connected with ships and shipping; for, Eric never seemed so happy as when frequenting the quays and talking with the sailors and sea-captains who came to the old port of Lubeck, where of late years the mother had taken up her residence, in order to be near Fritz, who had obtained a clerkship in a merchant's house there, through the friendly offices of the parents of one of the music-teacher's pupils.

Eric had already received his 'sea-baptism,' so to speak, having been on a trip to England in a Hamburg cattle-boat, and on a cruise up the Baltic in a timber-ship; but he was now going away in a Dutch vessel to the East Indies, the voyage promising to occupy more than a year, so there is no wonder that his mother was anxious on his account, thinking she would never live to see him again. It seemed so terrible to her as she stood on the railway platform, surrounded by all the bustle and preparation of the train about to depart, to fancy, as she gazed with longing eyes at her brave and gallant Eric, with his lion-like head and curling locks of golden hair, that she might never look on her sailor laddie's merry, loving face any more; and, tears dropped from the widow's eyes as she drew him towards her, clasping him to her, as if she could not bear to let him go.

"Come, mother," said Fritz, after a moment's interval. "Time is up! The guard is calling out for the passengers to take their seats. Eric, old fellow, good-bye, and God bless you! You will write to the mother and me from every port you touch at?"

"Aye, surely," said the boy, a sob breaking his voice and banishing the mannish composure which he had tried to maintain to the last. "Good-bye, Fritz; you'll take care of mother?"

"Don't you fear, that will I, brother!" was the answer in those earnest tones which Fritz always used when he was making a promise and giving his word to anything he undertook—a word which he never broke.

"And now, good-bye, mutterchen, my own darling little mother," said Eric, clasping his mother in a last clinging hug; "you'll never forget me, but will keep strong and well till I come back."

"I will try, my child, with God's help," sobbed out the poor lady. "But, may He preserve you and bring you back safe to my arms! Good-bye, my darling. You must never forget Him or me; my consolation in your absence will be that your prayers will ascend to heaven along with mine."

"You may trust me, mother, indeed you may. Good-bye, little mother! God bless you, mutterchen! Good-bye!" cried out the sailor lad from the carriage window; and then, the train moved off, puffing and panting out of the station, leaving Fritz and his mother standing on the platform, and waving their handkerchiefs in farewell to Eric, who was as busily engaged gesticulating, with his hat in one hand and in the other a newspaper that his brother had brought him, shouting out, 'Lebewohl!'—a sobbing farewell it was—for the last time, and still waving adieux when his voice failed him!

"Never mind, my mother," said Fritz softly, giving his arm to the heart-stricken lady, and leading her away with tender care from the railway station to their now sadly bereaved home. "Cheer up, and hope, mutterchen! You have a son still left you, who will never desert you or quit his post of looking after you, till Eric, the dear boy, comes back."

"I know, my son, I know your love and affection," replied Madame Dort, pressing his arm to her side affectionately; "but, who can tell what the future may have in store for us? Ah, it's a wise proverb that, dear son, which reminds us that 'man proposes, but God disposes!'"

"It is so," murmured Fritz, more to himself than to her; "still, I trust we'll all meet again beneath the old roof-tree."

"And I the same, from the bottom of my heart!" said his mother, in cordial sympathy with his wish, as she began to ascend the steps leading up to her dwelling; while Fritz returned to the counting-house of his employer, Herr Grosschnapper, to finish those duties which had been interrupted by his having to see Eric off.

Chapter Two.

A Thunderclap!

It was late in the autumn when Eric left Lubeck on his way to Rotterdam, where he was to go on board the good ship *Gustav Barentz*, bound on a trading voyage to the eastern isles of the Indian Ocean; and, as the year rolled on,

bringing winter in its train—a season which the Dort family had hitherto always hailed with pleasure on account of its festive associations—the hours lagged with the now sadly diminished little household in the Gulden Strasse; for, the merry Christmas-tide reminded them more than ever of the absent sailor boy, who had always been the very life and soul of the home circle, and the eagerly sought-for guest at every neighbourly gathering.

“It does not seem at all the same now the dear lad is away on the seas,” said old Lorischen, the whilom nurse, and now part servant, part companion of Madame Dort. “Indeed, I cannot fancy him far-distant at all. I feel as if he were only just gone out skating on the canal, and that we might expect him in again at any moment!”

“Ah, I miss him every minute of the day,” replied Madame Dort, who was sitting on one side of the white porcelain stove that occupied a cosy corner of the sitting-room, facing the old nurse, who was busily engaged knitting a pair of lambs-wool stockings on the other.

“It is now—aye, just two months since the dear lad left us,” continued Lorischen, “and we’ve never had a line from him yet. I hope no evil has befallen the ship!”

“Oh, don’t say such a thing as that,” said Madame Dort nervously. “The vessel has a long voyage to make, and would only touch at the Cape of Good Hope on her way; so we cannot expect to hear yet. I wonder at you, Lorischen, alarming me with your misgivings! I am sure I am anxious enough already about poor Eric.”

“Ach himmel! I meant no harm, dear lady,” rejoined the other; “but, when one has thoughts, you know, they must find vent, and I’ve been dreaming of him the last three nights. I do wish he were safe back again. The house is not itself without him.”

“You are not the only one that thinks that,” said Madame Dort. “Why, even the very birds that come to be fed at the gallery window miss him! They won’t take their bread crumbs from my hand as they used to do last winter from his; you remember how tame they were, and how they would hop on his shoulder when he opened the window and called them?”

“Aye, that do I, well! He was a kind lad to bird and beast alike. There is my old cat, which another boy would have tormented according to the nature of all boys where poor cats are concerned; but Eric loved it, and petted it like myself! Many a time I see Mouser looking up at that model of his ship there, blinking his eyes as if he knew well where the young master is, for cats have deeper penetration than human folk give them credit for. I heard him miaow-wowing this morning; and, when I went to look for him, there he was on the top of the stove, if you please, gazing up at the little ship, with his tail up in the air as stiff as a hair-brush! I couldn’t make it out at all, and that’s what made me so thoughtful to-day about the dear lad, especially as I’d dreamt of him, too.”

“My dear Lorischen, you absurd creature,” laughed out Madame Dort. “I’m glad you said that. Don’t you know what was old Mouser’s grievance? Was I not close behind you at the time the cat was making the noise, and did not Burgher Jans’ dog rush out of the room as the door was opened? Of course, Mouser got on the stove to be out of his way, and that was why you thought he was speaking in cat language to poor Eric’s little model ship. What a superstitious old lady you are, to be sure!”

“Ah well, you may think so, and explain it away, madame,” said Lorischen, in no way convinced; “but I have my beliefs all the same; and I think that cat knows more than you and I do. Dear, dear! There, I declare it is snowing again. What a Christmas we will have, and how the dear lad would have enjoyed it, eh?”

“Yes, that he would,” rejoined the other. “He did love to watch the snowflakes come down, and talk of longing to see an Arctic winter; but I hope it will not fall so heavily as to block the railway, and prevent us from getting any letters.”

“I hope not,” replied Lorischen sympathisingly. “That would be a bad look-out, especially at Christmas time! Look, the roof of the Marien Kirche is covered already: what must it not be in the open country!”

The old town presented a very different aspect now to what it had done when Madame Dort had walked by Eric’s side to the railway station, for the red tiles of the houses were hidden from view by the white covering which now covered the face of nature everywhere—the frozen canal ways and river, with the ice-bound ships along the quays and the tall poplar trees and willows on the banks, as well as the streets and market-place, being thickly powdered, like a gigantic wedding-cake, with snow-dust; while icicles hung pendent, as jewels, from the masts of the vessels and the boughs of the trees alike, and from the open-work galleries of the market hall and groined carvings of the archways and outside staircases that led to the upper storeys of the ancient buildings around. These latter glittered in every occasional ray of sunshine that escaped every now and then from the overhanging clouds, flashing out strange radiant shades of colouring to light up the monotonous tone of the landscape.

Madame Dort rose from her chair and went to the window where she remained for some little time watching the fast descending flakes that came down in never-ceasing succession.

“I’m afraid it is going to be a very heavy fall,” said she presently, after gazing at the scene around in the street below. Then, lifting her eyes, she noticed that the heavy mass of snow-clouds on the horizon had now crept up to the zenith, totally obscuring the sun, and that the wind had shifted to the north-east—a bad quarter from whence to expect a change at that time of year.

“But, dear me, there is Fritz! I wonder what brings him home so early to-day?” she exclaimed again after another pause. “See,” she added, “the dear child! He has got something white in his hand, and is waving it as he comes up the stairway. It’s a letter, I’m sure; and it must be from Eric!”

Old Lorischen bounced out of her chair at this announcement and was at the door of the room almost as soon as her mistress; but, before either could touch the handle, it was opened from without, and Fritz came into the apartment.

"Hurrah, mother!" he shouted out in joyful tones. "Here's news from Eric at last! A letter in his own dear handwriting. I have not opened it yet; but it must have been put on board some passing vessel homewards bound, as it is marked 'ship's letter,' and I've had to pay two silbergroschen for it. Open it and read, mother dear; I'm so anxious to hear what our boy says."

With trembling hands Madame Dort tore the envelope apart, and soon made herself mistress of the contents of the letter. It was only a short scrawl which the sailor lad had written off hurriedly to take advantage of the opportunity of sending a message home by a passing ship, as his brother had surmised—Eric not expecting to have been able to forward any communication until the vessel reached the Cape; and, the stranger only lying-to for a brief space of time to receive the despatches of the *Gustav Barentz*, he could merely send a few hasty lines, telling them that he was well and happy, although he missed them all very much, and sending his "dearest love" to his "own little mother" and "dear brother Fritz," not forgetting "darling, cross old Lorischen," and the "cream-stealing Mouser."

"Just hear that, the little fond rascal!" exclaimed the worthy old nurse, when Madame Dort read out this postscript. "To think of his calling me cross, and accusing Mouser of stealing; it is just like his impudence, the rogue! I only wish he were here now, and I would soon tell him a piece of my mind."

Eric added that they had had a rough passage down the North Sea, his vessel having to put into Plymouth, in the English Channel, for repairs; and that, as she was a bad sailer, they expected to be much longer on the voyage than had been anticipated. He said, too, that if the wind was fair, the captain did not intend to stop at the Cape, unless compelled to call in for provisions and water, but to push on to Batavia so as not to be late for the season's produce. He had overheard him telling the mate this, and now informed those at home of the fact that they might not be disappointed at not receiving another letter from him before he reached the East Indies, which would be a most unlikely case, unless they had the lucky chance of communicating a second time with a homeward-bound ship—a very improbable contingency, vessels not liking to stop on their journey and lay-to, except in answer to a signal of distress or through seeing brother mariners in peril.

"So, you see," said Madame Dort, as soon as she had reached the end of the sheet, "we must not hope to hear from the dear boy again for some time, and can only trust that all will go well with him on the voyage!" She heaved a heavy sigh from the bottom of her mother's heart as she spoke, and her face looked sad again, like it had been before Eric's letter came.

"Yes, that's right enough, mutterchen," answered Fritz hopefully; "but, you can likewise see that Providence has watched over our Eric so far, in preserving him safely, and there is now no reason for our feeling any alarm on his account. We shall hear from him in the spring, without doubt, telling us of his safe arrival at Java, and saying what time we may look forward to expecting him home. At any rate, this dear letter comes welcome enough now, and it will enable us to have a happier Christmas-tide than we should otherwise have passed."

"Ach, that it does," put in old Lorischen, beginning again to bustle about the room with all her former zest in making preparations for the coming festival, which her melancholy forebodings about Eric and superstitious, fears anent the cat's colloquy in the morning had somewhat interrupted: "we shall have a right merry Christmas in spite of the dear lad's absence. We must remember that he will be with us in spirit, at least, and it would grieve him if we were down-hearted!"

This wise reflection of the old nurse, coupled with Fritz's hopeful words, appeared to have a cheering influence on Madame Dort, whom many trials had made rather more despondent than could have been expected from her bright, handsome face, which did not seem sometimes to have ever known what sorrow was; although, like Eric's, it exhibited for the moment every passing mood, so that those familiar with her disposition could almost read her very thoughts, her nature being so open. Banishing her gloom away, apparently by the mere effort of will, she now proceeded to assist Lorischen in getting the room decorated for the Christmas Eve feast, of which all partook with more merriment and content than the little household in the Gulden Strasse had known since the sailor boy left. Nay, it seemed to them, happy with the tidings of his safety and well-being, that Eric was there too in their midst; for they drank his health before separating for the night, and his mother, when placing the surprise presents, which were to tell the members of the family in the morning that they had not been overlooked in the customary distribution of those little gifts that form the most pleasing remembrances of the festive season in Germany, did not omit also to fill the stocking which Eric had suspended from the head of his bedstead before leaving—he having laughingly said that he expected to find it chock-full when he returned home in time for the next Christmas feast, as he was certain that Santa Claus would never be so unkind as to forget him because he chanced to be away and so missed his turn in the usual visit of the benevolent patron of the little ones!

Time passed on at Lubeck, the same as it does everywhere else. The year turned and the months flew by. Winter gave place to spring, when the adamant chains with which the ice-king had bound the rivers and waters of the north were loosed asunder by the mighty power of the exultant sun; the snow melted away from the earth, which decked itself in green to rejoice at its freedom, smiling in satisfaction with flowers; while the trees began to clothe their ragged limbs and branches in dainty apparel, and the birds to sing at the approach of summer.

June came, when Madame Dort had fully expected to hear of Eric's arrival at Batavia; but the month waned to its close without any letter coming to gladden the mother's heart again, nor was there any news to be heard of the good ship *Gustav Barentz* in the commercial world—not a single telegram having been received to report her having reached her destination, nor was there any mention of her having been seen and signalled by some passing vessel, save that time when she was met off the Cape de Verde Islands in the previous November. It began to look ominous!

But, while Madame Dort was filled with apprehension as to the fate of her younger son, a sudden conjuncture of circumstances almost made her forget Eric. This was, the unexpected summons of Fritz from her side, to battle with the legions of Germany against the threatened invasion of "the Fatherland" by France.

At the time, it looked sudden enough. A little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, had arisen on the horizon of European politics, which, each moment, grew blacker and more portentous; and, in a brief while, it burst into a war that deluged the vine-clad slopes of Rhineland and the fair plains of Lorraine with blood and fire, making havoc everywhere. Now, however, looking back on all the events of that terrible struggle and duly weighing the surroundings and impelling forces leading up to it, allowing also for all temporary excuses and pretexts, and admitting all that can be said for partisanship on either side, there can be no use in blinking at the pregnant fact that the real cause of the war arose from a desire to settle whether the French or the Germans were the strongest in sheer brute force—just in the same way as two men, or boys, fight with nature's weapons in a pugilistic encounter to strive for the mastery, thus indulging in passions which they share with the beasts of the field!

The long, steady, complete preparation for war on each side shows that this very simple and intelligible motive was at the bottom of it all; and it is pitiable to think, for the sake of human nature, when recapitulating the history of this fearful conflict of fifteen years ago which caused such misery and murderous loss of life, that two of the most polished, advanced, educated, and representative nations of Europe at that time should not have apparently attained a higher code of civilised morality than that adopted by the natives of Dahomey - one, ruled over by the blood-stained fetish of human sacrifice! As the world advances, looking at the matter in this light, we seem to have exchanged one sort of barbarism for another, and the present one appears almost the worse of the two, by the very reason of its being mixed up with so much scientific advancement, cultural refinement, and the higher development of man. It is like the old devil returning and bringing with him seven other devils more powerful for evil than their original prototype, this prostitution of learning, intellect, and philosophy to the most debasing influences of human nature!

These thoughts, however, did not affect either Fritz or his mother at the time.

Not being the only son of a widow, in which case he might have been exempted from service, Fritz, when he had reached his eighteenth year, had been compelled to join the ranks of the national army; and, after completing the ordinary course of drill, had been relegated to the Landwehr and allowed to return home to his civic occupation. But, when the order was promulgated throughout the German empire to mobilise the vast human man-slaying machine which General Moltke and Prince Bismark had constructed with such painstaking care that units could be multiplied into tens, and tens into hundreds, and hundred into thousands—swelling into a gigantic host of armed men almost at a moment's notice, ready either to guard the frontier from invasion, or to hurl its resistless battalions on the hated foe whose defeat had been such a long-cherished dream—the young clerk received peremptory orders to join the headquarters of the regiment to which he was attached. The very place and hour at which he was to report himself to his commanding officer were named in the general order forwarded along with his railway pass, so comprehensive were the details of the Prussian military organisation. This latter so thoroughly embraced the entire country after the absorption of the lesser states on the collapse of Koniggratz, that each separate individual could be moved at any given moment to a certain defined point; while the instructions for his guidance were so complete and perfect, that they could not fail to be understood.

Fritz had to proceed, in the first instance, to the capital city of his state, Hanover, now no longer a kingdom, but only a small division of the great empire into which it was incorporated. For him there was no chance of evasion or getting out of the obligation to serve, for the whilom "kingdom" having withstood to the last during the six weeks' war the onward progress to victory of the all-devouring Prussians, her citizens would be at once suspected of disloyalty on the least sign of any defection. Besides, a keen official eye was kept on the movements of all Hanoverians, their patriotism to the newly formed empire being diligently nourished by a military rule as stern and strict as that of Draco.

"Oh, my boy, my firstborn! and must I lose thee too?" exclaimed Madame Dort, when Fritz made her acquainted with the news of his summons to headquarters. "Truly Providence sees fit to afflict me for my sins, to try me with this fresh calamity!"

"Pray do not take such a sombre view of my departure, dear mother," said Fritz. "Why, probably, in a month's time I will be back again in old Lubeck; for, I'm sure, we'll double up the French in a twinkling."

"Ah, my child, you do not know what a campaign is, yet! The matter will not be settled so easily as you think. War is a terrible thing, and the Prussians may not be able to crush the whole power of the French nation in the same way in which they conquered Austria and Saxony, and subdued our own little state four years ago."

"But, mother recollect, that now we shall be fighting all together for the Fatherland," said Fritz, who like most young Germans was well read in his country's history, and to him the remembrance of the old war time, when Buonaparte trampled over central Europe, was as fresh as if it were only yesterday. "We've long been waiting for this day, and it has come at last! Besides, dear mutterchen, you forget that the Landwehr, to which I belong, will only act as a reserve, and will not probably take any part in the fighting—worse luck!" He added the latter words under his breath, for it was not so long since he had abandoned his barrack-room life for him to have lost the soldierly instincts there implanted into him; and, truth to say, he longed for the strife, the summons to arms making him "sniff the battle from afar like a young war-horse!" The French declaration of war and the proclamation of the German emperor had roused the people throughout the country into a state of patriotic frenzy; so that, from the North Sea to the Danube, from the Rhine to the Niemen, the summons to meet the ancient foe was responded to with an alacrity and devotion which none who witnessed the stirring scenes of that period can ever forget.

Fritz was no less eager than his comrades; and, considerably within the interval allowed him for preparation, he and the others of his corps living in the same vicinity were on their way to Hanover.

This second parting with another of her children almost wrung poor Madame Dort's heart in twain; but, like the majority of German mothers at the time, she sent off her son, with a blessing, "to fight for his country, his Fatherland"; for, noble and peasant alike, every wife and mother throughout the length and breadth of the land

seemed to be infected with the patriotism of a Roman matron. Madame Dort would be second to none.

“Good-bye, my son,” she said, “be brave, although I need hardly tell your father’s son that, and do your duty to God and your country!”

“I will, mother; I will,” said Fritz, giving her a last kiss, as the train rolled away with him out of the station to the martial strains of “Der Deutsche Vaterland,” which a band was playing on the platform in honour of the young recruits going to the war.

The widow had to-day no son left to support her steps homeward to the desolate house in the Gulden Strasse, now bereaved of her twin hopes, Fritz and Eric both; only old Lorischen was by her side, and she felt sadly alone.

“Both gone, both gone!” she murmured to herself as she ascended the outside stairway that led to her apartments in the upper part of the house. “It will be soon time for me to go, too!”

“Ach nein, dear mistress,” said the faithful servant and friend who was now the sole companion left to share the deserted home. “What would become of me in that case, eh? We will wait and watch for the truants in patience and hope. They’ll come back to us again in God’s good time; and they will be all the more precious to us by their being taken from us now. Himmel! mistress, why we’ve lots of things to do to get ready for their return!”

Chapter Three.

Gravelotte.

The actual declaration of war by France against Germany was not made until the 15th of July, 1870, reaching Berlin some four days later; but, for some weeks prior to that date, there is not the slightest doubt that both sides were busily engaged in mobilising their respective armies and making extensive preparations for a struggle that promised at the outset to be “a war to the knife”—the cut-and-dried official announcement of hostilities only precipitating the crisis and bringing matters to a head, so to speak.

On the general order being given throughout the states of the Empire to place the national army on a war footing, in a very few days the marvellous system by which the German people can be marshalled for battle, “each tribe and family according to its place, and not in an aggregate of mere armed men,” was in full operation throughout the land; and, under the influence of fervid zeal, of well-tested discipline, and of skilful arrangement, the Teuton hosts became truly formidable. From the recruiting ground allotted to it, each separate battalion speedily called in its reserves, expanding into full strength, the regiments so formed being at once arrayed into divisions and corps under proved commanders, furnished with every appliance which modern military science deemed necessary. These battalions composed the first line of defence for the Fatherland; while behind them, to augment the regular troops, again following out local distinctions and keeping up “the family arrangement,” the Landwehr stood in the second line; the additional reserve of the Landsturm—yet to be called out in the event of fresh levies being required for garrisoning the fortresses with this militia force, so as to enable the trained soldiery to move onward and fill up the casualties of the campaign—forming a third line of defence.

These gigantic masses were organised with the celerity and precision of clockwork, and then sent forward westward, perfectly equipped—in the highest sense a national army, being over four hundred thousand strong!

Day after day, up to the end of July, the different railway lines of Germany bore the mighty host onward to the banks of the Rhine in endless succession of train-loads. Mass after mass of armed men, duly supplied with all the material of war, advanced rapidly, yet in due pre-arranged order, to the points selected for their gathering; while, in the meantime, the fortresses along the line of the river, where the first French attack was expected to be made, were put in a proper state of defence, and now, with strong garrisons, repaired works, ditches filled, and ramparts crowned with Krupp cannon, were prepared to defy the invader. By the first week of August three great armies had taken possession of the strip of territory, lying between the lower stream of the Moselle and the Rhine, which had for centuries been a battlefield between the German and French races, and which was now to witness fighting on a scale which put every previous campaign into the shade. The first army, under the veteran General Steinmetz, who had won his spurs at Waterloo, had been moved from the north down the valley of the Moselle and along the railway from Bingen, with its headquarters at the strongly fortified town of Coblenz. The second, or “central army,” under Prince Frederick Charles, “the Red Prince,” as his enthusiastic soldiers styled him, occupied Mannheim and Mayence, guarding the Vosges, through which was the principal avenue to the heart of the coveted Rhineland provinces; while the third army, under the Crown Prince of Prussia, who, as is well-known, is married to our own “Princess Royal,” had its headquarters at Landau, where also the Baden and Wurtemberg contingents had to rendezvous.

“The ball was opened”—to use the light-hearted expression of a French journalist in describing the commencement of the murderous struggle for supremacy between the two nations—at Saarbruck on the 2nd of August, 1870, when the late ill-fated Prince Imperial of France received his “baptism of fire”; but the first real engagement of the war did not occur till two days later, at Weissebourg, this being succeeded by the terrible battle of Woerth on the 6th of the month, when the German army under the Crown Prince of Prussia crumpled up the forces of McMahon, and thus effectually disposed of the previously much-vaunted superiority of the French military system, with its chassepot rifle and mitrailleuse.

With these initial victories of Germany we have not much to do, however; for Fritz belonged to the Hanoverian division, which formed one of the units of the Tenth Army Corps, under the command of Steinmetz, which did not come into action until later on.

On joining his regiment at headquarters, our young recruit from Lubeck, hastily summoned to exchange the pen and

desk of a Dutch merchant's counting-house for the needle-gun and camp of the soldier, discovered to his great joy, that, instead of having to go through the tedious routine of garrison duty—which he had expected would have mainly composed his experiences of the war—the French invasion of Rhineland had so suddenly collapsed, that the Teuton forces, which had been assembled for the original purpose of defending the native soil, were now able to take the offensive and in their turn invade the territory of the foe; and, thus, he would be able to see active service on the field. This was a consummation dearly desired on his part, for he was young and ardent; although, perhaps, the order to go forwards was not quite so much relished by some of his comrades, who were married men and preferred the quiet of their home fireside to the many risks and discomforts of a campaign, which, at the beginning, they did not look upon so hopefully as their leaders.

“Hurrah!” he exclaimed one morning at Coblenz, when the division in which he served was paraded on the Platz in heavy marching order, the men hurriedly falling into the ranks. “No more sentry rounds now and guard-mounting; we’re off to Paris!”

“Don’t you crow too loudly, my young bantam,” said a veteran near him; “we’ll have a long march first, and then perhaps one of those confounded chassepot bullets we’ve heard so much of will put you feet foremost, in a way you won’t like!”

“Bah!” replied Fritz; “I’ll run the chance of that. Anything is better than stopping here kicking our heels in this old town, while our brothers are gaining laurels in the battlefield!”

“Ach, mein lieber,” said the other; “wait till you’ve seen a little of the reality of war, the same as I did four years ago at Sadowa; you’ll then think differently. It all looks very well now, with your smart new uniform and bright helmet; but, when the one is ragged with bayonet cuts and bloody and dirty, and the other doesn’t preserve you from a leaden headache, you will prefer, like me, barrack life—aye, even in Coblenz!”

“Hush there! order in the ranks!” sang out an officer at this moment, stopping Fritz’s answer; and, the word of command being presently given to march, the conversation was not renewed.

After the fearful loss they had suffered at Woerth, which battle was followed up by the sanguinary defeat of Frossard at Forbach, to the left of their line, on the same day, the French fell back on Metz as their rallying point, hoping by means of the vast entrenched camp there and its facilities of communication with Chalons and Verdun, to be able to make a stand against the enemy, now pressing them so sore. Military critics say that this was the greatest mistake made by the Emperor Napoleon’s advisers; and that, had the forces under Bazaine retreated farther to the west—after throwing a sufficient garrison into Metz—they might have been able to effect a junction with the defeated army of McMahon, which that general was withdrawing into the interior and from which they were now completely cut off.

Be that as it may, however, during this interval of inactivity, when the shattered fragments of the magnificent French army—which had so proudly assumed the offensive but a bare fortnight before along the frontiers of the Rhine—were idling away precious moments that were fraught with peril and disaster to the Gallic race, the huge German masses, animated by a sense of victory and the consciousness of a superiority in arms as well as in numbers, were sweeping forward like a whirlwind of destruction. The Crown Prince, who had routed McMahon at Woerth and driven the wedge in that separated him from Bazaine, continued his onward march on the left of the German line through the passes of the Vosges into the fertile plains of Champagne. At the same time, Prince Frederick Charles, with the main portion of the second army, had crossed the Moselle at Pont-à-Mousson; and, moving northwards, was already in a position to threaten the line of the French retreat on Verdun, while the remainder of the Red Prince’s forces were advancing to the eastward of Metz. The columns, too, of Steinmetz, moving with mathematical regularity at an equal rate of progression, were also being echeloned along the northern face of the fortress, just within striking distance.

To put it concisely, some two hundred and fifty thousand unbeaten German soldiers, with an artillery numbering over eight hundred guns, almost surrounded the stronghold of Lorraine and the far weaker and partly demoralised force which the French had gathered together beneath its walls, only, as it turned out subsequently, to court defeat and annihilation.

It was not until the 14th of August that the series of battles that were to rage round Metz, began.

Early in the morning of that day—apparently for the first time struck with an apprehension of having his retreat on Chalons by way of Verdun interfered with and his communications with his base of supply cut off, thus appreciating his critical position only when it was too late to remedy it—the French Marshal commenced crossing the Moselle with his vanguard. The entire body of troops, however, did not reach the river; for, three corps, which had been encamped to the eastward of the fortress, delayed their departure until the afternoon—a tardiness that enabled Steinmetz to attack their rear and detain them on the spot, until the flanking movement of Prince Frederick Charles’ army beyond the Moselle towards Pont-à-Mousson had been completed. A bloody and indecisive action was the result, in which, if the Germans did not gain a victory, they succeeded in accomplishing their object—that of detaining the French troops before Metz, until their retreat on Verdun should be impossible of achievement.

On the 16th occurred the battle of Vionville; and, two days later, that of Gravelotte, the bloodiest contest that took place between the opposing forces throughout the entire war—the first general engagement, too, in which our friend Fritz really “smelt powder” and became an active participant.

The rough skirmishing work which some of the divisions of the army corps under Steinmetz had already had, during the intervening days since the 14th, somewhat prepared the soldiers of the Waterloo veteran for butchery. They could plainly perceive from his tactics that their general was one who would spare no sacrifice of human life in order to gain his end and defeat the enemy. The corpses piled high on the field of Vionville of the Cuirassiers and Ziethen Hussars, who had been ordered to charge batteries of artillery in Balaclava fashion, afforded proof enough of that; and the men said, with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders, “Ah, yes; we’re going to have a warm time of it now

with 'Old Blood and Iron,' we are!"

And they had!

Fritz had barely dropped to sleep on the evening of the 17th, when, towards midnight, he was aroused by the wild music of military trumpets, blown apparently from every bivouac in his neighbourhood for miles round.

"Who goes there?" he exclaimed, raising himself up on his elbow, but half awake and dreaming he was on sentry duty.

"Rouse up! rouse up!" shouted a comrade in his ear, and then he recollected all at once where he was. As he sprang to his feet, the noise throughout the camp told without further explanation that an important crisis was at hand, for the measured tramp of marching battalions pulsated the ground like the beat of a muffled drum, while above this sound could be heard the roll of wheels and dragging of gun limbers, and the ringing of horses' hoofs, all swelling into a perfect roar of sound.

Bazaine, having been driven back from the forward positions his army had attained on the Verdun and Etain roads, in its progress of retreat towards Chalons, by the intervention of the German forces, now sought a fresh vantage-ground during the brief respite allowed by his enemy—one, that is, where he would be able not only to offer a determined resistance, but also retain his lines of retreat; and whence, if victorious, he might be able to break forth and make good his intended movement on Chalons. Such a position he found in the range of uplands, which, intersected at points by ravines, with brooks and difficult ground in front and with belts of wood in the near distance, extends from the village of Gravelotte on the north-east to Privat-la-Montaigne, beyond the road that runs from Metz to the whilom German frontier; and, throughout the whole of the previous day the Marshal had been busily engaged in stationing his troops along this line collecting every means of defence which could add to its natural strength.

The arrangements of Bazaine certainly gave proof on this occasion of that tactical skill for which he had previously been renowned.

The French left, occupying Gravelotte at the junction of the roads from Verdun and Etain and thence extended along the high-road to Metz, held a range of heights, with a wood beneath, which commanded all the neighbouring approaches. This position, besides, was protected in front by lines of entrenchments, with rifle-pits and a formidable display of artillery; and, shielded in its rear by the heavily armed fort of Saint Quentin, might well-nigh be considered impregnable. Bazaine's centre, although not so strongly placed, had also the advantage of rising ground; and, the right of the line was equally protected by natural and artificial means. Along this admirably selected fighting ground the French Marshal posted some hundred thousand men altogether, clinging to Gravelotte with his best troops, and leaving about twenty thousand as a reserve near Metz—thus acting entirely on the defensive.

While Bazaine had been making these preparations, the German leaders had not by any means been idle. On the same day that the French Marshal was entrenching himself on his chosen field of battle, the entire force of the second army, under the Red Prince, approaching from Pont-à-Mousson, had come into line; and, in communication with the first army, under old "Blood and Iron" Steinmetz, had completely crossed the French, line of retreat, occupying the Verdun and Etain roads northward from Rezonville to Doncourt, with the remaining corps that had remained to the east of Metz supporting the rear and right flank. Altogether, the German commanders had at least nine army corps in hand; and when the reinforcements were brought up, they could calculate on possessing a force of no less than two hundred and forty thousand men to hurl against their antagonists, thus overmatched at the very outset by at least two to one.

The Teuton plan of battle, as subsequently detailed, premised, that, as the French left at Gravelotte was prodigiously strong, making it extremely difficult to carry that position without enormous sacrifices, it would be preferable to move a large part of the army across Bazaine's front, in order to assail and crush his right wing, which was protected in the rear by Metz, and so could not be turned in that direction. It was also decided that, at the same time, a forward attack should be made as a feint on Gravelotte, the German commanders hoping that under the double pressure of a simultaneous onslaught on both its wings, the French army would lose its hold of the Verdun and Etain roads—which of course it was Bazaine's object to secure—when, being driven in under the guns of Metz, his forces would there be isolated and completely cut off from any further action in the campaign.

This result, it may be here stated, was ultimately attained, although the turning movement against the right of the French line was found to be impracticable shortly after it was undertaken and had to be given up, the operations of the German host being subsequently confined to an attack in front on the formidable position of Gravelotte—which, with its ridge of hills lined with fortifications and strengthened with rows of rifle-pits that covered the slopes in every direction, overtopping each other like seats in a circus, seemed proof against attack.

Marching in the darkness, he knew not whither, by the side of comrades in solid phalanx, Fritz found himself, when morning broke, at the rear of some other battalions that were concealed from the enemy behind a mass of brushwood and scattered forest trees. These grew on an elevated plateau from which a very good view could be obtained of the field of battle, the rising sun lighting up the whole landscape and displaying the beautiful details of the country around, so soon, alas! to be marred by the terrible havoc of battle, bringing fire and ruin and bloodshed in its train.

On the left, stretched out like a silver thread amidst the green sheen of the foliage the road leading to Verdun and Paris beyond, lined along its extent with rows of tall poplars planted with mathematical regularity; while a series of pretty villages, each with its own church steeple and surrounded by charming villa residences, only a few hundred yards apart apparently, broke the monotonous regularity of the highway—Mars la Tour, Florigny, Vionville, Rezonville, Malmaison, and last, though by no means least, Gravelotte, which was in the immediate foreground. On the right were thickly wooded hills; and, far away in the distance, glittered the peaks and pinnacles of Metz, the whole forming

a lovely panorama, spread out below in the smiling valley of Lorraine.

As Fritz was looking on this scene with mingled feelings, a splendid regiment of uhlans dashed up behind the infantry; and, when they reached the brow of the hill, they broke into a wild hurrah, which almost seemed to thrill their horses, which neighed in chorus. This provoked a responsive echo from the marching battalions on foot; and then, the cavalry galloped forwards. At the same time, distant cannonading could be heard in the neighbourhood of Vionville, and shells were seen bursting in the air around the French positions at Point du Jour, with the smaller puffs of smoke from rifles in action between the trees below.

The battle had begun.

Bang, bang, went the guns; and soon the cannonade, drawing in closer and closer upon the doomed villages, became a deafening roar, with streams of hurtling missiles shrieking overhead and bursting with a crash at intervals. Masses of men could be perceived winding in and out along the main road and the side lanes like ants, a gap every now and then showing in their ranks when some shot had accomplished its purpose. By twelve o'clock the engagement had become general; although, as yet, it had been only a battle of the guns, which bellowed and hurled destruction on assailant and defender alike—the curious harsh grating sound of the French mitrailleuse being plainly perceptible above the thunder of the cannon and rattle of musketry, “just like the angry growl of a cross dog under a wagon when some one pretends to take away his bone!” as one of the men said.

The Ninth Army Corps, composed of Schleswig-Holsteiners, Fritz's compatriots and close neighbours, were the first to come into collision with the enemy's van but soon the Hanoverian artillery had to follow suit; and bye-and-bye, in the main attack on Gravelotte, the infantry became engaged at last, much to the relief of the men, who were bursting with impatience at being allowed to rest idly on their arms when such stirring scenes were being enacted before their eyes.

This was not, however, until the French positions in front of Vionville had been carried, a success only achieved late in the afternoon, after the most desperate fighting and when the slaughter-dealing Steinmetz ordered an advance in front of the enemy's defences.

A tremendous fire of artillery was first concentrated on the French works, one hundred and twenty guns taking part in the bombardment; and then, after about half an hour's shelling, the leading Prussian regiment dashed up the slopes above Gravelotte. The men were rushing into the very jaws of death; for, when they had got about half-way up, the mitrailleuses opened on them, doing terrible execution at close quarters. The brave fellows, however, pressed on, though they fell literally by hundreds. Indeed, they actually got into the works, and a half battery of four-pounder guns which had followed them up was close in their rear on their way to the crest of the hill, when the French, who had run their mitrailleuses farther back some four hundred yards to avoid capture, opened so deadly a fire that the “forlorn hope” had to retire again down the slope—leaving the guns behind them, for every horse in the battery had been killed or disabled. After this, a mad attempt was made to charge the hill with cavalry, the cuirassiers and uhlans dashing up the road at the French works; but men and horses were mowed down so rapidly that the scattered remnants of these fine squadrons had to retire like the infantry. A third effort was made by another line regiment, the men advancing in skirmishing order, instead of in column like the first pioneers of the attack; but although this attempt was covered by a tremendous artillery fire, it was equally unsuccessful. Some of the men certainly managed to reach the French batteries, but they were then shot down in such numbers by the terrible mitrailleuses that they could not hold their ground.

These different episodes of the battle consumed the greater portion of the afternoon, although of course fighting was going on elsewhere along the line. Fritz's battalion was engaged in another part of the field, and in the Bois du Vaux, as well as on the opposite bank of the Moselle, it did good service in crushing in the wing of the French. Here Fritz had an opportunity of distinguishing himself. In charging an entrenched outwork held by the enemy, the captain of his company got struck down by a bullet; when, as no officer remained to take his place, Fritz gallantly seized the sword of the fallen man, leading on his comrades to the capture of the battery, which had been annoying the German reserves greatly by its fire. Fortunately, too, for Fritz, his commanding officer, General Von Voigts-Rhetz, not only noticed his bravery on the occasion, but let him know that it should not be forgotten at headquarters.

Meanwhile, the continual bombardment of the French position was maintained, and about half-past six o'clock in the evening a last desperate attack was made on Gravelotte—the outlying farmhouse of La Villette, which was the key to the defence, being especially assailed. The reserve artillery being brought up commenced playing upon the still staunchly guarded slopes with storms of shot and shell; and, presently, the farmhouse was in flames, although the garden was still held by the French, who had crenellated the walls, making it into a perfect redan. A gallant foot regiment then took the lead of the German forces, charging up the deadly slope, followed by a regiment of hussars; when, after more than an hour spent in the most desperate fighting of the day, the French at last began to retire from the entrenchments which they had defended so gallantly up to now, the infantry being protected in their retreat by the murderous mitrailleuses that had so disunited the ranks of their stubborn foes, the hoarse growl of their discharge being yet heard in the distance long after the louder and sharper reports of the guns and howitzers had generally ceased.

The evening was now closing in, and soon darkness reigned around, the prevailing gloom being only broken by the fiery path of some bombshell winging its parabolic flight through the air, or the long tongue of fire darting forth from the mouth of a stray cannon; while, in the sky above, the lurid smoke-clouds of burning houses joined with the shades of night in casting a pall over the scene of hideous carnage which the bright day had witnessed, hiding it for ever save from the memories of those who were there and had shared its horrors.

The battle of Gravelotte was lost and won; but, to the Germans, the victory was almost akin to a defeat, no less than five-and-twenty thousand of the best troops of the “Fatherland” being either killed or wounded!

Fritz escaped scathless through all the perils of the day, in spite, too, of his risking his life most unnecessarily on many occasions in order to see the progress of the fight when his battalion was not in action; but his favourite comrade, the veteran soldier who had fought at Sadowa, received a bullet in his chest, and his life-blood was gradually ebbing away when Fritz, kneeling at his side, asked him if he could do anything for him.

"Ah, no," answered the poor fellow; "nobody can do anything for me now! I told you, comrade, to wait till you saw what real war was like. Himmel! Sadowa and '66 were child's play to this here, with the fire of the chassepot and that infernal mitrailleuse! Hurrah, though we've won!" shouted out the veteran in a paroxysm of patriotism; and then, joining in with the chorus of "Die Wacht am Rhein," which a Prussian corps was singing as they marched by, he thus sobbed out his last breath and so died!

"His was a patriot soldier's end," said Fritz, as he closed his eyes and covered over his face reverently with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes, so it was," chimed in the others sententiously. "It is good so to die!"

Chapter Four.

After the Battle.

During the height of the struggle, Fritz had been carried away by a perfect delirium of excitement, as if in a dream; and what he had done had been done almost unconsciously, in spite of himself, and on the spur of the moment. He had been marched here; marched there; halted; ordered to fire; charged with his comrades; retreated; charged again—all, as it seemed, in one brief second of time!

What, with the continuous roar of artillery reverberating through the surrounding hills; the constant ping; pinging and singing of rifle bullets; the rattling discharge of platoon firing; the whirring of heavy shot and shell through the air above the ranks and the bursting every now and then of some huge bomb in their midst, knocking down the men like ninepins and sending up a pyramid of dust and stones, mingled with particles of their arms and clothing, as well as fragments of the torn flesh of some victims, on the missile exploding in a sheet of crackling flame, with a rasping, tearing noise—all combined with the thick sulphureous cloud of gunpowder which hung over the battlefield, half asphyxiating the combatants, whose hoarse cries of rage and hatred could be heard above the noise of the cannon and discharges of musketry, mixed up with the words of command of their different officers, the "*En avant, mes amis!*" of the French, the stern "*Vorwärts!*" of the Germans, and the occasional wild, weird, frenzied scream of some stricken charger echoing shrilly in the distance, like the wail of a lost soul in purgatory—the whole realised a mad riot of destruction and carnival of blood, the essence of whose moving spirit appeared to take possession of each one engaged, rendering him unaccountable for his actions for the time being. Like the rest, Fritz felt the "war fever" upon him. A red mist hovered before his eyes. He smelt blood and longed to spill more. The fumes of brimstone acted on his senses like hasheesh to narcotic smokers. An irresistible impulse urged him forwards. A voice kept crying in his ears, "Kill and slay, and spare not!"

This was while the fury of the combat lasted, when the Prussian battalions were hurling their human waves in columns against the rocky defences of Gravelotte, only for them to fall back impotently, like the broken foam and spent wash of billows which have assailed in vain the precipitous peaks of some cliff-defended coast that repels their every attack; when the sharp clash of steel met opposing steel and galloping thud of flying squadrons, urged on with savage oath and triumphant cheer, filled the air; when the gurgling groan of the death-agony and moan of painless pain, made the treble of the devil-music, to the thundering sustained bass of the cannon roar, and the growling arpeggio accompaniment of the mitrailleuse!

But, when, after one last fearful combined volley, in which every single piece of ordnance on the field seemed to take part, the hideous turmoil of sound ceased as if by mutual consent. A sort of solemn hush, in company with the night, caused comparative stillness to brood over the scene, in contrast to the pandemoniacal noise that had previously reigned so fiendishly. Then, all of a sudden, Fritz appeared to awake suddenly from a disturbed dream or phantom-haunted night-mare, in which all the powers of evil were tearing at his heart and brain. The war fever, for him, had exhausted its final paroxysm. The red mist had been withdrawn from his eyes. The thirst for blood from his soul. He was himself again; but a strangely altered self, for he felt weak and ill, and as languid and worn-out as if he had just recovered from a fainting fit.

It was at this moment that Hermann his comrade had been struck down by a chassepot ball, winging its murderous mission from some unknown point; and when Fritz had sat down by the side of the body, covering over the face of the dead man, he did not seem to feel any desire to live or even to rise up again, he was so utterly powerless and lacking in energy. The majority of his fellow-soldiers appeared, too, to be in the same mood, stretching their weary limbs on the ground in listless apathy, as if caring for nothing; they did not either seem to be affected by hunger or thirst, although it was more than twelve hours since they had broken their fast; the fury of the fight had satiated them, taking away all stamina and appetite.

Presently, however, an ambulance detachment, passing by on their merciful errand to seek for the wounded, besought aid; and Fritz, with others, at once sprang up and volunteered assistance to bear away those to whom the surgeon's care could do any good to the field hospitals, where their hurts could be attended to in a general way. The number of wounded men was so great that it was simply impossible for the doctors to hunt after individual cases and treat them properly.

The battlefield was now covered by a dense cloud, illuminated at either end of the valley in which it lay by two enormous fires of burning houses. But, above, the stars shone down peacefully from the blue vault of heaven on the terrible picture of carnage below; and, as the smoke of the gunpowder cleared away, the different points of the

struggle could be clearly picked out by reason of the heaps of corpses and dead horses, piled beneath overturned cannon and broken limbers, shattered needle-guns and chassepôts, all of which were scattered around pell-mell in endless profusion.

"Water, water, for the love of God!" was the heartrending cry that proceeded everywhere from yet living men hidden among hecatombs of the slain, as they heard the footsteps of the ambulance corps and their helpers. Really, the task was an endless one, to try to relieve the misery around; for, hardly had one wounded wretch been saved from being buried alive in the mountain of dead under which he writhed, than an appeal for aid was heard in another direction—and yet again another, until the bearers and relief corps themselves became exhausted. Each required forty pairs of hands instead of one!

It was terrible work to go over the scene of slaughter in cold blood, with no fever of excitement to blot out the hideous details, now displaying themselves in all their naked reality! Conspicuously, in front of La Villette, were to be seen the white trimmings of the uniforms of the Prussian Imperial Guards; the red trousers of the French line; the shining helmets of the cuirassiers, whose breastplates were all torn and dented with shot, as if they had been ploughed over; while the wind, now rising as the night progressed towards morning, rustled the myriad leaves of white paper that had escaped from out of the French staff carriages, blowing them across the valley, like a flock of sea-gulls fluttering on the bosom of the breeze.

As the day broke, the bright beams of the rising sun lit up the field of battle, only to disclose its horrors the more unmistakably. The rays of light, flashing on the exposed sword blades and bayonet points, reflected little radiant gleams of brightness; but, the hands of those who wielded them so valiantly not many hours ago were now cold and cramped in the agony of death, alas! Sad bruised eyes glared out from disfigured faces under torn-open breasts, appearing to look up to where the stars only so recently twinkled down, vainly asking Providence why it had put the lightning into the hands of man for so fell a purpose! Rows of infantry lay dead in perfect order, as if on parade, where the mitrailleuse had mowed them down; whole squadrons of hussars and lancers were heaped up in mass; and, in some of the French rifle-pits, there were more than a thousand corpses piled, the one on top of another with trim regularity, as if carefully arranged so. Blue, red, and yellow uniforms, with the occasional green of the Tyrolean Jager, were mixed together in picturesque confusion along the Verdun road; in fact, the dead and dying were everywhere in such prodigious numbers that the hearts of those seeking out the wounded were appalled.

Worse than in the fields were the scenes displayed in the villages and little towns along the white high-road to Metz, the tall poplars that lined it being torn down by the round shot, thus blocking the way. The broken vehicles and baggage wagons that were mingled together in an inextricable mass also added to the obstruction; Malmaison, Vionville, and Rezonville were filled with war victims; and all the surgeons, French as well as German, that could be summoned to help, were as busy as they could possibly be. Carriages and stretchers covered the open places in front of every house, the Red Cross of Geneva being rudely depicted on the doors, with the neutral flag of the society floating above; while pools of blood marked the dressing places of the wounded, the pale white faces of whom looked down in mute misery from the carts in which they were being borne away to the rear to make room for others to be attended to. To complete the picture, those who had died under operation were laid by the roadside until they could be collected bye-and-bye for burial, the living having to be seen to first!

Released at length, after toiling through the night and early morning at his voluntary labour, Fritz was able at last to return to the bivouac of the Hanoverians; but, while on his way to camp, he passed one of the most affecting pictures he had yet seen. Hearing the howl of a dog, he turned aside towards a little clump of trees from which the sound seemed to come, and here he came up to a splendid large black retriever, which, with one paw on a dead officer's breast and with his noble head raised to the sky, was baying in that melancholy fashion in which dogs tell their woe on being overcome by grief. Near this little group was an unfortunate horse sitting on its haunches, its hind-quarters having been torn off by the discharge of a shell, or the passage of some conical projectile. The animal was moaning heavily with pain, and looked so appealingly at Fritz out of its large deep eyes, that he raised a revolver which he had picked up on the field and put the poor brute out of its agony. It was a different matter with the dog, however; although he could not persuade the faithful retriever to leave his master's side; and, as it was getting late, and Fritz thought he might be missed and reported as a straggler from his corps, he hurried on to the camping ground of his regiment, promising himself to return later on in the day, if spared from duty, when he would bury the dead body of the officer and take possession of the dog—that is, should no one else have appropriated him in the meantime, as might possibly be the case.

He was so worn-out with fatigue, on arrival at the bivouac of the regiment in the Bois du Vaux, that, on finding that his absence was not taken any notice of, he laid himself down by the side of a fire which the men had kindled for cooking their camp kettles; and, although it was a warm summer day, he immediately fell asleep, not waking until late in the afternoon. Then, partaking of some Erbwurst, or "peasoup sausage," which one of his comrades had kindly kept for him, albeit the rations were rather scanty, he felt a new man, and fit for anything; for, the worn-out feeling of exhaustion and nervous horror which had possessed his mind throughout the many hours that elapsed since the close of the fighting on the evening before, being only the effects of over-excitement, had now completely disappeared on his getting rest and refreshment. Indeed, he no longer felt sickened with war. On the contrary, he was quite ready to start into a fresh battle, and that, too, with as eager an impetus as he had plunged into his first engagement.

This was not all, either.

On the regiment being paraded shortly afterwards in front of its bivouac, the field officer of the day called out "Fritz Dort" a second time, after the names of the men had been run over on the muster roll—many failing to answer, and having the brief military comment "Dead," or "Missing," placed after their numbers.

"Here!" answered Fritz, stepping forwards and saluting the officer in the ordinary routine fashion, wondering what was to come next.

"Fritz Dort and men of the 16th Hanoverians," proceeded the major, reading from an official document in his hand, "I am directed by the general commanding the Tenth Army Corps, in the order of the day, to signalise the distinguished gallantry which the said Fritz Dort displayed yesterday in the face of the enemy at the engagement in front of Gravelotte, when, on the falling of the officer leading the company to which he was attached, the said Fritz Dort bravely stepped to the front, and taking his commander's vacant post, led on his men to capture the French battery, which they were detailed to take by storm. For such conspicuously good service in action, the general commanding hereby promotes the said Fritz Dort to be a sub-lieutenant in the same regiment, trusting that, as an officer, he will perform his duty as he has done as a private soldier and meet with the obedience and honour of those with whom he has previously served as a brother comrade, none the less on account of his promotion from the ranks which as one of themselves he has adorned!"

A loud "Hurrah!" broke from all the men when the major had finished reading this document; and that officer then shook hands kindly with Fritz, welcoming him cordially to the higher station he had attained. The other subalterns also advanced, doing the same; while, on retiring from the parade, the men of the rank and file, without receiving any order to that effect, gave the young hero a general salute, in token of their respect and recognition of his new dignity as an officer over them.

Fritz's heart was bursting with joy at his unexpected promotion. He thought how proud his mother would be to hear of it; but, before writing home by the afternoon field post, as he intended doing, he determined to carry out the promise he had made to himself, and which he held as equally binding as if it had been made in the presence of witnesses—the promise to bury the body of the dead officer which he had come across in the wood, guarded by his faithful dog.

"Heinrich!" he called out to the man who, as his whilom comrade, had preserved his rations for him. He forgot for the moment the altered condition of their respective ranks.

"Ja, Herr Lieutenant," said Heinrich, much to his surprise, stepping out towards him and saluting, with forefinger to pickelhaube, as straight as a ramrod.

"Bother!" exclaimed Fritz, a bit puzzled at first by the inconvenience in some ways of his exaltation in rank. There was some difficulty at first in accommodating himself to his new position.

"Never mind my being an officer for awhile, friend Heinrich," he explained to his whilom comrade—"the dignity can keep without harming it until we are again on duty together, when I promise to remember it to all your advantage; for you've been good fellows to me, one and all! I want you now to help me, friend Heinrich, in a sad commission; so, I rely upon your assistance from our old brotherly feelings when together—not because I ask you as your superior. Get a pickaxe and spade from one of the pioneers and come with me. I'm going to bury a poor fellow who has fallen over there, whose fate has attracted my sympathy." Fritz pointed, as he spoke, to the wood where the dead man lay.

"With right good pleasure, Herr Lieutenant," said the other in a cheerful tone of voice, with great alacrity of manner, saluting again as before. As a soldier, he knew his place too well to take a liberty with an officer, even if a newly-made one, and with his own permission! The German, or rather Prussian, system was and is very strict on such points.

"Oh, bother!" ejaculated Fritz again, between his teeth. "The idea of helping to bury a man 'with right good pleasure!'"

He could not help smiling at the ludicrous association with so grave a subject, as he unconsciously mimicked the soldier's simple speech.

"Poor dear old fellow, though," thought he a moment afterwards, "he doesn't know what a funny phrase he used."

In a minute or two the man returned with the required articles; when he and Fritz set off towards the wood, the latter leading the way, and Heinrich following close behind in single file.

On reaching the spot which he had marked, Fritz found that no one had apparently been there in his absence, for the dog was still on guard over his master's corpse, although he was now lying across the body, and had ceased his melancholy howl. When he approached the animal wagged his bushy tail, as if in recognition of having seen Fritz before.

"Poor fellow!" said Fritz; "come here, old man! We're here to put your master in his last home, and you must not prevent us. We will treat him very tenderly."

The dog looked up in his face, as if he understood what his new friend said; and, crawling off from the officer's body, he came to Fritz and licked his hand, holding up the while one paw, which was bleeding as if from a cut.

"He is wounded," said Heinrich, stooping down.

"Yes," answered Fritz, examining the poor paw, much apparently to the dog's satisfaction. "It's from a piece of shell, probably the same that settled the horse there; but it's not a bad wound, and will soon get well, doggie!" So saying, lifting up the injured member gently, he began to bind it round with a piece of lint which he had in his pocket, the retriever keeping perfectly quiet, as if knowing that no injury was intended him.

Fritz then proceeded to open the dead officer's jacket, in order to search for any papers or articles of value, which he might keep and forward to his relatives. Previously, the dog would not allow him to touch the body at all, but now he did not offer any objection, so Fritz turned out all the pockets. He could discover no paper, however, nor any trace of identity. The only token he could find was a little silver ring wrapped in a small piece of paper, inscribed, "From my

beloved, 18th July, 1870." This was carefully enclosed in a little bag of silk, and suspended by a ribbon round the poor young fellow's neck, resting on the cold and lifeless spot where his heart once used to beat.

"A love gage," said Heinrich sympathisingly.

"Ah, yes," replied Fritz; "and the poor girl will, I suppose, continue to look out for him, hoping to see him again, while he lies here in a nameless tomb! Never mind, I will keep the token and the dog; perhaps I may discover her and his friends some day through them. Now, let us make the grave quickly, comrade, and commit him to his rest!"

In silence the two then dug a low trench in the soil beneath the tree where the officer had found his death, and then reverently laid him in it. He had died calmly from the effects of a bullet which must have penetrated his brain, as only a small blue orifice was to be seen in the centre of his forehead; and a smile was on his handsome young face, as if no painful thought had vexed his last moment.

During the sad obsequies, the dog kept close to the side of Fritz, watching attentively everything that was done, without stirring or uttering a sound, save when they shovelled the earth on his poor master's breast. He then gave vent to a short, angry bark; but, on Fritz speaking to him soothingly, he again became quiet, remaining so to the end, when he laid down on the newly-made grave, with a deep, low whine that was almost a sigh, that seemed to come from the bottom of his faithful canine heart!

From a piece of broken wood close by, Fritz then carved a rude cross, which he fixed in the ground at the head of the poor young fellow's last resting-place, inscribing on it the words: "To a French officer. Peace to his remains. The grave knows no enmities! 18th August, 1870."

The date on this unknown victim's grave was exactly one month later than that on which he must have parted from his sweetheart. What a strange fatality, pondered Fritz and his companion, that one who had probably been so much loved and cared for, should be indebted for the last friendly offices which man or woman could render him—to strangers! "May he rest in peace!" said Fritz, uncovering his head as he turned away, and then putting on his helmet again.

"So, too, I wish," echoed Heinrich. "We can do no more for him, poor youth!"

"No," said Fritz; "we'd better go now. Come on, old fellow!" he added, with a whistle to the retriever, who, wise dog that he was, seeing he could do no further good to the one to whom he had been faithful in life and watched in death as long as he was able, now answered the call of the new friend whom Providence had sent him. Without any demur he returned with Fritz and Heinrich to the Hanoverian camp, following close behind the heels of the former, as if recognising him as his master in the place of him whom he had lost.

Fritz christened this treasure trove of the battlefield "Gelert"; and like that trusty hound of old, the animal became known to all the men in a very short while. He was formally adopted, indeed, as the pet of the regiment, besides coming in for Fritz's own special care, being known even to the general in command of the division as "the dog of the sub-lieutenant of Gravelotte."

Chapter Five.

Bad News.

If it had seemed dull and lonely in the little household of the Gulden Strasse at Lubeck after Eric had gone to sea, how much more so was it not to the two sad women left alone to console each other when Fritz, also, had departed from home!

For days, Madame Dort appeared borne down by a weight of woe, and even Lorischen lost that customary cheeriness with which she usually performed her daily duties in her endeavours to console her mistress. Mouser, too, went miaow-wowing about the house at nights, as if he likewise shared in the family despondency—not once being caught in the act of stealing the breakfast cream, a predilection for which had hitherto been an abnormal failing on his part. So changed, indeed, became the old cat that he did not possess spirit enough to put up his tail and "phit" and "fiz" at Burgher Jans' terrier, when that predatory animal made an occasional excursion into the parlour at meal times, to see what he could pick up, either on the sly or in that sneaking, fawning fashion which a well-trained dog would have despised. This continued almost to the end of the month; but then came a bright little bit of intelligence to gladden their hearts. It was like a gleam of sunshine breaking through the dark cloud of gloom that hung over them.

Fritz wrote home from Coblenz, close to the frontier, telling how comfortable he was, and how every one in the army of the Fatherland was confident as to the result of the campaign. In a few weeks at the outside, they thought—everything was so carefully planned and every contingency provided against—the French army of invasion would have been dispersed to the four winds of heaven and the war be over; and, then, the Landwehr, at all events, would be enabled to return home to their several states and resume those peaceful employments which their mobilisation had interrupted. Fritz said that he feared he would have no chance of distinguishing himself in the campaign, as one alone of the three great army corps they had already massed along the Rhine would be sufficient to crush the hated foe. The only men who would probably see any fighting would be those serving under the Crown Prince, who had already routed the enemy and were in active pursuit of them across the borderland. His veteran old general, Steinmetz, every one considered to be "out of the hunt completely!" All he would see of the whole affair, they thought, would be the warriors returning home crowned with laurels after the victory.

Thus ran the tenor of Fritz's letter, the writer evidently not dreaming of the events in store for him; and that, instead of returning to Lubeck in a few weeks, it would be many weary months before he saw the blinking eyes of the ancient

astronomical clock in the Dom Kirche again!

Through the intricacies of the field post, too, this communication was a long time in reaching the little seaport town on the North Sea, being at least ten days old when it arrived; but what mattered that? It contained good news when it did come, and was as welcome as if it had been dated only yesterday.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Lorischen, when her mistress communicated the contents of Fritz's letter. "The young Herr will soon be back, and then we'll see him give Meinherr Burgher Jans the right-about. I call it scandalous, I do, his persecuting an unprotected, lone widow—just because her sons are away, and there's only me to look after her! But, I keep him at arm's distance, I promise you, madame. It is only his thief of a dog who manages to creep in here when I am about!"

Madame Dort blushed. She was a comely, middle-aged woman, and when she coloured up she looked quite pretty.

"I'm sure, Lorischen," she said, "I wonder you can talk such nonsense; you are as bad as poor Eric used to be, teasing me about that little fat man! Poor Burgher Jans means no harm in coming to inquire after my health while Fritz is away."

"That's just what I object to, dear lady," interrupted the other; "why does he do it?"

"Can't you see, you stupid thing," said Madame Dort, laughing heartily, the hopeful letter of her son having quite restored her spirits, "that is the very reason? If dear Fritz were here, he would naturally ask him how we all are; but, as he is away now, and I never go outside the house, while you, my faithful Lorischen, are not very communicative, I suppose, when you go to the Market Platz, it is plain enough to common sense that the worthy Burgher, if he takes an interest in us, must come here to inquire after the family himself!"

"Oh yes, I understand," answered the old nurse, in a grumbling tone. She had lived so long with the widow, whom she looked upon really as a child committed to her charge, that she considered she had a perfect right to pass an opinion on anything which did not please her. Besides, she was jealous, on behalf of the boys, of any interloper being put over their heads in the shape of a stepfather, she as an old spinster having a wholesome horror of the designing nature of all men, especially of the little Burgher Jans, to whom she had taken an inveterate dislike. "Oh yes, I understand," she said in an ironical tone she always assumed on being a bit vexed; "when the cat's away the mice play!"

"I presume then," said Madame Dort dryly, "that Mouser is a good deal absent now from his duties; for, I noticed this morning that half that cheese in the cupboard was nibbled up. It was a good Limburger cheese, too!"

"Ach, Himmel!" exclaimed the old nurse, not perceiving the design of her mistress to change the conversation, and taking up the cudgels readily to defend her dearly loved cat. "The poor creature has not been himself since the young masters have been away. He feels too lonesome to hunt the mice as he used to do so gaily in the old days, tossing them up in the air when he caught them, and bringing them mewing to my feet,—the dear one! Why, he hardly ever touches a drop of milk now."

"Yes, I see he spares our cream—"

"Oh, madame, that was a libel on the poor animal. It was only the dear lad Eric's joke! Mouser would never touch one drop of the breakfast cream, save perhaps when we might be late for the meal, or when the dear fellow felt a little thirsty, or—"

"Ah, indeed! Yes, no doubt," interrupted Madame Dort, laughing again. "He would have been at it again to-day, only Burgher Jans' dog came in at the nick of time and scared him away!"

"Did he!" said Lorischen indignantly. "It strikes me that pest of a terrier is here a good deal too much, like his master! And, talk of him, there he is!" she added hastily, leaving the room as a knock came to the door.

Burgher Jans came in as the old nurse went out, brushing by him with ill-concealed contempt and aversion. He was a fat little man, with long straight hair coming down over his coat collar, and a round, full-moon sort of face, whose effect of beaming complacency was enhanced by a pair of large-rimmed tortoise-shell spectacles out of which his owl-like eyes shone with an air of balmy wisdom.

"Most worthy lady," he commenced, addressing Madame Dort with an elaborate bow, sweeping the floor with his hat. "Unto me the greatest and ever-much rapture doth it with added satisfaction bring, to tell you of the glorious success of the German arms over our greatly-overbearing and hopeful-of-victory foe."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the widow, "you are rather late with your news; I heard from Fritz just now."

"And is the dear, well-brought-up, and worthy youth in good health?"

"He is," said Madame Dort; "and tells us to expect him home soon."

Burgher Jans looked startled at this announcement, losing a trifle of his beaming smile. "He is not wounded, I trust?" asked he tremblingly.

"Oh dear no, thank the good God who has watched over him," answered the other cheerfully. "Why, he has not been in battle yet! He tells us that the French are retreating, and that the war will be over almost before another blow has been struck, the enemy having to surrender before our irresistible battalions."

"Have you not heard of the battles of Woerth and Forbach, then?"

"No; what—when were they?"

"Where did your son Fritz write to you from, then?"

"From Coblenz. His letter is dated the day he arrived there, but I only got it this morning."

"Ah then, most worthy lady, two terrible battles have occurred since that time. We have beaten the French and forced them back into their own country; but, alas! thousands of German lives have been lost. The slaughter has been terrific!"

"Good heavens, Burgher Jans, you alarm me!" said Madame Dort, rising from her chair in excitement. "Fritz told me there would be no fighting except between the Crown. Prince's army and the enemy!"

"The worthy young Herr was right so far," put in the little man soothingly, "that is as regards the south of the line; but our second army corps has been likewise engaged on the banks of the Saar, hurling disaster on the foe, although the French fought well, too, it is said. Where, however, is Herr Fritz?"

"Serving under General Steinmetz."

"Ah, then he's safe enough, dear madame. That army is but acting as the reserve. It is only my poor countrymen, the Bavarians, and the Saxons who will have the hard work of the campaign to do. Von Bismark wants to let out a little of their blood in return for the feverish excitement they displayed against the Prussians in '66!"

"You relieve my mind," said Madame Dort, resuming her seat. "I thought for the moment Fritz was in danger. You speak bitterly against the Chancellor, however. He is a great man, and has done much for Germany."

"Oh, yes, I grant that," replied the other warmly; "still, he is one who never forgets. He always pays out a grudge! You will see, now, if those poor Bavarians do not come in for all the thick of the fighting."

"You talk as if there is going to be a lot more?"

"So there is, without doubt, without doubt," said Burgher Jans, rubbing his hands together, as if he rather enjoyed the prospect.

"In that case, then, Fritz cannot return to Lubeck as soon as he thinks possible?" and Madame Dort looked grave again, as she said this half questioningly.

"I fear not, most worthy lady," replied the little man in a tone of great concern; but, from the look on his face and the brisk way in which he still continued to rub his hands together, it might have been surmised that the prolonged absence of poor Fritz from his home would not affect him much,—in fact, that he would be rather pleased by such a contingency than not.

Madame Dort noticed this, and became quite sharp to him in consequence.

"I must beg you to say good-bye now," she said; "I've a busy day before me, and have no more time to waste in chatting. Good-morning, Burgher Jans."

"Good-morning, most worthy lady," said the little fat man, accepting his dismissal and bowing himself out.

"The ill-natured little manoeuvrer!" exclaimed Madame Dort, half to herself, as he left the room. Lorischn entered again at the same time, the two always playing the game apparently of one of those old-fashioned weather tellers, in which a male or female figure respectively comes out from the little rustic cottage whenever it is going to be wet or fine; for, as surely as the Burgher ever entered the sitting-room, the old nurse withdrew, never returning until he had left. "The ill-natured little manoeuvrer!" exclaimed Madame Dort, not thinking she was overheard. "I believe he would be glad to keep poor Fritz away if he could."

"Just what I've thought all along!" said Lorischn, immensely pleased at this acknowledgment of her superior power of discernment.

"I mean, not on account of wishing any harm to Fritz," explained the widow, "but that he himself might be able to come here oftener."

"Just what I've said!" chirped out the old nurse triumphantly; but Madame Dort made no reply to this second thrust, and before Lorischn could say anything further, a second visitor came to the little house in the Gulden Strasse. It seemed fated as if that was to be a day for callers, and "people who had no business to do preventing those who had," as the old nurse grumbled while on her way to open the street door for the new-comer—a courtesy Burgher Jans never required, walking in, as she said, without asking leave or license, just when he pleased!

The visitor was Herr Grosschnapper, the merchant who employed Fritz in his counting-house and who was also a part proprietor in the ship in which Eric had sailed for Java. Madame Dort's heart leapt in her bosom when she saw the old gentleman enter the parlour.

But, the shipowner's face did not look as if he brought any pleasing news; and, after one brief glance at his countenance, the widow's fell in sympathy. She almost anticipated the evil tidings which she was certain he had in store for her.

"Madame Dort," he began, "pray compose yourself."

"I am quite calm, Herr Grossschnapper," she answered. "Go on with what you come to tell me. You have heard something of my poor boy Eric; is it not so?"

"It is, madame," replied the merchant, deceived by her composure. "I grieve to say that I have received intelligence through the English house of Lloyd's that the *Gustav Barentz* foundered at sea in the Southern Ocean early this year. Two boats escaped from her with the crew and passengers, one of which, containing the first officer and several hands, was picked up when those on board were in the last stage of exhaustion, by a vessel bound to Australia. The men were taken to Melbourne before any communication could be received from them, so that is why the news of the wreck has been so long in reaching us."

"And Eric?" asked the widow, with her head bent down.

"He was with the captain in the other boat, dear madame," said Herr Grosschnapper; "but, I'm afraid there is little or no chance of their having been saved, or else we would have heard of them by this time. Pray bear up under the loss, madame. He was a good son, I believe, and would have made a good sailor and officer; but it was not to be! Remember, you have another son left."

"Ah, but not Eric, my little one, my darling!" burst forth the poor bereaved mother in a passion of tears; and then, the merchant, seeing that any words of comfort on his part would be worse than useless, withdrew.

The violence of Madame Dort's grief, however, was soon assuaged, for she had long been preparing herself for this blow. She had given up all hope of ever hearing from Eric again, even before Fritz left home.

Thenceforth, all her motherly love was bound up in her firstborn, now the only son left her; and daily she scanned the papers to learn news of the war.

Time passed on, the widow occasionally receiving a hurried scrawl from Fritz, who, as she knew, was now no longer resting with the reserve battalions in the fortresses of the Rhine, but marching onwards with the invading army through France.

She heard of the terrible battle of Gravelotte, in which she dreaded that he had taken part; but, almost before she could read the full official details published in the German newspapers under military censorship, her anxieties were relieved by a long letter coming from Fritz, telling of his participation in the colossal contest and of his miraculous escape without a wound, although he had been in the thick of the fire and numbers of his comrades from the same part of the country had been killed.

But, he had better news to tell—that, at least, is what he wrote, only the mother doubted whether any intelligence could be more important to her than the fact of his safety!

What would she think of hearing that he had been promoted to be an officer "for gallantry in the field of battle," as the general order read out to the whole army worded it? Would she not be proud of her Fritz after that?

Aye, would she not, would not Lorischen?

And did not the entire gossiping community of Lubeck know all about it by and through the means of the old nurse before the close of the self-same day, eh?

Certainly; still, would it be believed that the very first person whom Lorischen told the news to was her special antipathy, Burgher Jans? She actually went up to and accosted him of her own free-will on the Market Platz for the very purpose of telling him of Fritz's promotion! Yes, such was the case; and she not only was friendly to the little fat man on this occasion, but she actually patted his dog at the same time!

Still, Eric, the lost sailor laddie, was not forgotten in his brother's success. The mother's grief was only chastened; and almost the very first thought she had on receiving the news from Fritz, and afterwards when she read it in official print, was "how pleased poor Eric would have been at this!"

Bye-and-bye, Fritz wrote again, telling that their task had become very monotonous. The Tenth Army Corps was detained along with several others to besiege Metz, so hemming in Bazaine and the remainder of the army that had endeavoured so gallantly at Gravelotte to pierce the German lines, that they were powerless to assist the rest of their countrymen in driving the Teuton invader from their soil. The besieging army, which was formed of the united forces of the different corps under Prince Frederick Charles and Steinmetz, had nothing to do, said Fritz, save to stand to their guns and perform sentry duty; for the French, since the fearful battle of the 18th of August, had not once attempted to push their way out beyond range of the guns of the fortress, under whose shelter they were cantoned in an extended entrenched camp, and were apparently being daily drilled and disciplined for some great effort.

On the 31st of the month, however, Fritz told his mother later on, Bazaine made a desperate effort to break the German cordon around Metz; and this being repulsed with heavy loss, the Marshal again remained quiet for the space of another six weeks.

During this period Madame Dort heard regularly from her son through the field post. She sent him letters in return, telling him all the home news she could glean, and saying that she expected him back before the winter. She hoped, at least, that he would come by that time, for Herr Grosschnapper had informed her that he would have to fill up Fritz's place in his counting-house if the exigencies of the war caused his whilom clerk to remain away any longer.

Things went on like this up to the month of October, the anniversary of poor Eric's going away; when, all at once, there came a cessation of the weekly letters of Fritz from headquarters.

His mother wrote to inquire the reason.

She received no answer.

Then she read in the papers of another heavy battle before Metz, in which the Tenth Army Corps had taken part. The engagement had happened more than a week before, and Fritz was silent. He might be wounded, possibly killed!

Madame Dort's anxiety became terrible.

"No news," says the proverb, "is good news;" but, to some it is the very worst that could possibly be; for, their breasts are filled with a storm of mingled doubts and fears, while hope is deadened and there is, as yet, no balm of resignation to soothe the troubled heart! The proverb is wrong; even the most heartbreaking confirmation of one's most painful surmise is infinitely preferable to being kept in a state of perpetual suspense, where one dreads the worst and yet is not absolutely certain of it.

It was so now with Madame Dort. She thought she could bear the strain no longer, but must go to the frontier herself and seek for information of her missing son, as she had read in the newspapers of other mothers doing. However, one afternoon, as she was sitting in the parlour in a state of utter dejection by the side of the lighted stove, for winter was coming on and the days were getting cold, Lorischen brought in a letter to her which had just come by the post.

It was in a strange handwriting!

The widow tore it open hurriedly, glancing first at the signature at the end. "Madaleine Vogelstein!" she said aloud. "I wonder who she is; I never heard of her before!" She then went on to read the letter.

It did not take her long to understand the sense of it.

For, after scanning the contents with startled eyes, she exclaimed, "My son! oh, my son!" and then fell flat upon the floor in a dead faint.

Chapter Six.

Wounded.

The stupendous events of the war rushed on with startling rapidity.

The invasion of France, in retaliation for the projected invasion of Germany, was now an accomplished fact; and, day after day, the Teuton host added victory to victory on the long list of their triumphant battle-roll, almost every engagement swelling the number of Gallic defeats and lessening the power of the French to resist their relentless foe, who now, with iron-clad hand on the throat of the prostrate country, marched onward towards Paris, scattering havoc with fire and sword wherever the accumulating legions of armed men trod.

The battle of Woerth succeeded that of Wissembourg; Forbach that of Woerth; and then came Vionville and Gravelotte to add their thousands of victims to the valhalla of victory. The surrender of Sedan followed, when the Germans passed on their way to the capital; but the brave general Urich still held out in besieged Strasbourg, and Bazaine had not yet made his last brilliant sortie from the invested Metz. The latter general especially kept the encircling armies of Prince Frederick Charles and Steinmetz on the constant alert by his continuous endeavours to search out the weakest spot in the German armour. The real attempt of the French Marshal to break through the investing lines was yet to come; that of the 31st of August, to which Fritz alluded in his letter to his mother, having been only made apparently to support McMahon as a diversion to the latter's attack on Montmedy, before the surrender of Sedan.

From this period, up to the beginning of October, the French remained pretty quiet, the guns of the different forts lying without the fortifications of Metz only keeping up a harassing fire on the besieging batteries that the Germans had erected around on the heights commanding the various roads by which Bazaine's army could alone hope to force a passage through their lines. Summer had now entirely disappeared and cold weather set in, so the Teuton forces found it very unpleasant work in the trenches when the biting winds of autumn blew through their encampments of a night, making their bivouac anything but comfortable; while the sharp morning frosts also made their rising most unpleasantly disagreeable; add to this, whenever they succeeded in making their quarters a trifle more cosy than usual, as certainly would the cannon of Fort Quélin or the monster guns of Saint Julien send a storm of shot and shell to awaken them, causing an instant turn-out of the men in a body to resist a possible sortie. Bazaine made perpetual feints of this sort, with the evident intention of wearying out his antagonists, even if he could do them no further harm.

The position was like that of a cat watching a mouse-hole, the timid little occupant of which would every now and then put out its head to see whether the coast were clear; and then, perceiving its enemy on the watch, provokingly draw it in again, leaving pussy angry at her repeated disappointments and almost inclined to bite her paws with vexation at her inability to follow up her prey into its stronghold; for, the heavy artillery of the fortress so protected the surrounding country adjacent to Metz, that the Germans had to place the batteries of their works out of its range, that is, almost at a distance of some four miles from the French camp—of which any bombardment was found after a time to be worse than useless, causing the most infinitesimal amount of damage in return for an enormous expenditure of ammunition and projectiles that had to be conveyed over very precarious roads all the way from the frontiers of the Rhine into the heart of Lorraine.

"Oh, that the French would only do something!" cried Fritz and his companions, sick of inactivity and the wearisome nature of their duties, which, after the excitement of battle and the stirring campaigning they had already gone through, seemed now far worse than guard-mounting in Coblenz. "Oh, that the French would only do something to

end this tedious siege!"

Soon this wish was gratified.

On the morning of the 6th of October, when the investiture of Metz had lasted some six weeks or more—just at daybreak—a heavy, dull report was heard at Mercy-le-Haut. It was like the bursting of a mine.

"Something is up at last!" exclaimed one of the staff-officers, entering the tent where Fritz and others were stretched on the bare ground, trying to keep themselves as warm as they could with all the spare blankets and other covering that could be collected heaped over them—"Something is up at last! Rouse up; the general assembly has sounded!"

The ringing bugle notes without in the frosty air emphasised these words, causing the young fellows to turn out hastily, without requiring any further summons.

Aye, something was up. The pioneers of the Seventh German army corps, on the extreme right, had mined and blown up the farm buildings of Legrange aux Bois, close to Peltre. These farm buildings had hitherto served as a cover to the French troops when they made their foraging sorties, but they could not be held by the Germans, for they were situated within the line of fire of Fort Quélin; so, as may be imagined, their destruction was hailed with a ringing cheer by the besiegers. The artillerymen in the fort, however, apparently anticipating an attack in force of which this explosion was but the prelude, were on the alert at once; and, soon after sunrise, they began to pour in a heavy rain of fire on the German works, which the conflagration of the buildings and removal of intervening obstacles now clearly disclosed. Whole broadsides of projectiles from the great guns flew into the valley of the Moselle as far as Ars, sweeping away the entrenchments as if they were mere packs of cards; and, presently, an onward movement of French battalions of infantry, supported by field artillery and cavalry, showed that, this time at least, something more was intended by Marshal Bazaine than a mere feint.

Trumpet called to trumpet in the German ranks, and speedily the whole of the second army under Prince Frederick Charles mustered its forces in line of battle, the men gathering in imposing masses towards the threatened point at Ars. Here the 61st and 21st infantry regiments, which were on outpost duty, were the first: to commence hostilities, rushing to meet the French who were advancing from Metz. Aided by the batteries erected by the side of the Bois de Vaux, the Germans, after a sharp conflict, succeeded in repulsing the enemy, who had ultimately to retire again under the guns of Fort Quélin, although they made a vigorous resistance while the engagement lasted—only falling back on suffering severe loss from the shower of shrapnel to which they were subjected, besides losing many prisoners. During all the time of this attack and repulse, Fort Saint Julien, on the other side of the fortress, was shelling the Landwehr reserve, causing many casualties amongst the Hanoverian legion; and, but that the men here were quite prepared for their foe, the combat might have extended to their lines.

As it was, the expected fight, for which the Tenth Corps was ready and waiting, was only delayed for a few hours; when, if Fritz and his comrades had complained of the cold of the weather, they found the work cut out for them "hot" enough in all conscience!

In the afternoon of the following day, Bazaine made a desperate effort to break through the environment of the Germans in the direction of Thionville. On the previous evening, in resisting the attack from Saint Julien, which had been undertaken at the same time as that from Saint Quélin on Ars, the French had been driven from the village of Ladonchamps, and their adversaries had established foreposts at Saint Rémy, Pétites et Grandes Tapes, and Maxe; and now, under cover of a thick fog, the French Marshal advanced his troops again and commenced a vigorous attempt, supported by a heavy artillery fire, for the recovery of the lost Ladonchamps. Failing in this, although possibly the attack might have been a blind, the general being such a thorough master of strategy, Bazaine made a dash for Pétites et Grandes Tapes, annihilating the foreposts and hurling great masses of men at their supports. Having occupied these villages, the French Marshal then sent forward a large body of troops to the right, close to the Moselle. These advanced up the valley against the German entrenchments on the heights until checked by cannon fire from batteries on both sides of the river, and were only finally stopped by an advance in force of two brigades of the Landwehr, the men of whom occupied a position just in front of Pétites et Grandes Tapes.

Amongst these latter troops was the regiment of our friend Fritz.

The fighting was terrific here.

Clouds of bullets came like hail upon the advancing men, reaping the ranks down as if with a scythe, while bursting shells cleared open spaces in their midst in a manner that was appalling; still, those in the rear pressed on to fill the places of the fallen, with a fierce roar of revenge, and the needle-gun answered the chasseur as quickly as the combatants could put the cartridges into the breech-pieces and bring their rifles again to the "present."

Fritz felt the frenzy of Gravelotte return to him as he gripped the sword which he now wielded in place of the musket; and, urging on his company, the men, scattering right and left in tirailleur formation were soon creeping up to the enemy, taking advantage of every little cover which the irregularities of the ground afforded.

Then, suddenly, right in front, could be seen a splendid line regiment of the French, advancing in column. A sheet of flame came from their levelled rifles, and the Fusilier battalion of the Landwehr regiment to the left of Fritz's company were exterminated to a man, the enemy marching over their dead bodies with a shout of victory.

Their progress, however, was not to last.

"Close up there, men!" came the order from Fritz's commanding officer; when the troops hurriedly formed up in a hollow which protected them for a moment from the galling fire. "Fix bayonets!"—and they awaited the still steady advance of the French until they appeared above the rising ground. "Fire, and aim low!" was the next order from the major; and then, "Charge!"

With a ringing cheer of "Vorwärts!" Fritz dashed onward at the head of the regiment, a couple of paces in front of his men, who with their sharp weapons extended in front like a fringe of steel, came on behind at the double.

Whiz, sang a bullet by his ear, but he did not mind that; crash, plunged a shell into the ground in front, tearing up a hole that he nearly fell into; when, jumping over this at the run, in another second he had crossed swords with one of the officers of the French battalion, who rushed out as eagerly to meet him.

They had not time, though, to exchange a couple of passes before a fragment of a bursting bomb carried away the French officer's head, bespattering Fritz with the brains and almost making him reel with sickness; while, at the same moment, the men of the German regiment bore down the French line, scattering it like chaff, for the sturdy Hanoverians seemed like giants in their wrath, bayoneting every soul within reach!

This was only the beginning of it.

"On," still "on," was the cry; and, not until the lost villages were recaptured and the unfortunate German foreposts avenged did the advance cease.

But the struggle was fierce and terribly contested. Three several times did the Germans get possession of Pétites et Grandes Tapes, and three several times did the French drive them out again with their fearful mitrailleuse hail of fire; the bayonet settled it at last, in the hands of the northern legions, who had not forgotten the use of it since the days of Waterloo, nor, as it would appear, the French yet learnt to withstand it!

Beyond a slight touch from a passing bullet which had grazed his lower jaw, having the effect of rattling his teeth together, as if somebody had "chucked him under the chin," Fritz had escaped without any serious wound up to the time that the French were beaten back after the third attempt to carry their positions; but then, as they turned to run and the Hanoverians pressed on in pursuit, he felt suddenly hit somewhere in the breast. A spasm of pain shivered through him as the missile seemed to rend its way through his vitals; and then, throwing up his arms, he fell across the corpse of a soldier who must have been shot almost immediately before him, for the body was quite warm to the touch.

How he was hurt he could not tell; he only knew that he was unable to stir, and that each breath of air he drew came fainter and fainter, as if it were his last.

He heard, from the retreating tramp of footsteps and distant shouts, that his regiment had moved on after the enemy; but, as he lay on his back, he could not see anything save the sky, while each moment some stray shot whistled by in the air or threw up earth over him, threatening to give him his finishing blow should the wound he had received not be sufficient to settle him.

Then, he felt thirsty, and longed to cry out for help; but, no sound came from his lips, while the exertion to speak caused such intolerable agony that he wished he could die at once and be put out of his misery. When charging the French battalion, he recollected putting his foot on the dead face of some victim of the fight, and he could recall the thrill of horror that passed through him as he had done this inadvertently; now, each instant he expected, too, to be trampled on in the same manner.

Ha! He could distinguish footsteps pressing the ground near. "Oh, mother!" he thought, "the end is coming now, for the fight must be drawing near again. I wish a shell or bullet would settle the matter!"

But the footsteps he imagined to be the tramp of marching men—on account of his ear being so close to the ground and thus, of course, magnifying the sound—were only those of the faithful Gelert, who with the instinct of a well-trained retriever was searching for his new-found friend. He had tracked his path over the valley from the advanced post which the regiment had occupied in the morning, and where the dog had been kept by Fritz to watch his camp equipments until he should return. Gelert evidently considered that he had waited long enough for duty's sake; and, that, as his adopted master did not come to fetch him, he ought to start to seek for him instead, one good turn deserving another!

At the moment, therefore, when Fritz expected to have the remaining breath trampled out of him by a rush of opposing battalions across his poor prone body, he felt the dog licking his face, whining and whimpering in recognition and mad with joy at discovering him.

"Dear old Gelert, you brave, good doggie," he ejaculated feebly, in panting whispers. "You'll have to try and find a third master now!" and then, overcome by the effort, which taxed what little strength was left in him, he swooned away like a dead man—the last distinct impression he had being that of seeing a bright star twinkle out from the opal sky above him as he lay on the battlefield, which seemed to be winking and blinking at him as if beckoning him up to heaven!

His awakening was very different.

On coming to his consciousness again, he felt nice and warm and comfortable, just as if he were in bed; and, opening his eyes, he saw the sweet face of a young girl bending over him.

"I must be dreaming," he murmured to himself lazily. He felt so utterly free from pain and at ease that he did not experience the slightest anxiety or perplexity to know where he was. He was perfectly satisfied to take what came. "I must be dreaming, or else I am dead, and this is one of the angels come to take me away!"

Chapter Seven.

Madaleine.

"I am glad you are better," said a soft voice in liquid accents, so close to his ear that he felt the perfumed breath of the speaker wafted across his face.

Fritz stared with wide-opened eyes. "I'm glad you're better," repeated the voice; "you are better, are you not; you feel conscious, don't you, and in your right senses?"

"Where am I?" at last said Fritz faintly.

"Here," answered the girl, "with friends, who are attending to you. Do not fear, you shall be watched over with every care until you are quite well again."

"Where is 'here'?" whispered Fritz feebly again, smiling at his own quaint question.

The girl laughed gently in response to his smile. "You are at Mézières, not far from the battlefield where you fell. I discovered you there early yesterday morning."

"You?" inquired Fritz, his eyes expressing his astonishment.

"Yes, I," said the girl kindly; "and I was only too happy to be the means of finding you, and getting you removed to a place of safety; for, I'm afraid that if you had lain there much longer on the damp ground you would have died."

"Oh!" interrupted Fritz as eagerly as his exhausted condition would allow; "I remember all now! I was wounded and lay there close to the battery; and then I saw the stars come out and thought—"

"Hush!" said the girl, "you must not speak any more now. You are too weak; I only spoke to you to find out whether you had regained consciousness or not."

"But you must let me thank you. If it had not been—"

"No, I won't allow another word," she interposed authoritatively. "You will do yourself harm, and then I shall be accused of being a bad nurse! Besides, you haven't got to thank me at all; it was the dog who made me see you."

"What, Gelert," whispered Fritz again, in spite of her admonition,— "dear old fellow!"

He had hardly uttered these words, when the faithful dog, who must have been close beside the bed, raised himself up, putting a paw on one of Fritz's arms which lay outside the coverings and licking his hand, whining rapturously the while, as if rejoiced to hear the voice of his master again.

"'Gelert!'" exclaimed the girl with some surprise. "Why, I know the dog perfectly, and he recognises me quite well; but he is called 'Fritz,' not 'Gelert,' as you said."

"'Fritz!'" ejaculated he, in his turn. "Why, that is my name!"

"Gracious me," thought the girl to herself, "he is rambling again, and confusing his own name with that of the dog! I must put a stop to his speaking, or else he will get worse. Here, take this," she said aloud, lifting to his lips a wineglass containing a composing draught which the doctor had left for her patient to take as soon as he showed any signs of recovery from his swoon, and which she really ought to have given him before; "it will do you good, and make you stronger."

Fritz swallowed the potion unhesitatingly, immediately sinking back on his pillow in a quiet sleep; when the girl, sitting down by the side of the bed, watched the long-drawn, quivering respirations that came from the white, parted lips of the wounded man.

"Poor young fellow!" she said with a sigh; "I fear he will never get over it. I wonder where Armand is now, and how came this stranger to have possession of his dog! The funniest thing, too, is that 'Fritz' seems as much attached to this new master as he was to Armand, although he has not forgotten me. Have you, 'Fritz,' my beauty, eh?"

The retriever, in response, gave three impressive thumps with his bushy tail on the floor, as he lay at the girl's feet by the side of the bed. He evidently answered to this other familiar appellation quite as readily as he had done to that of "Gelert," being apparently on perfect terms of friendship, not to say intimacy, with the young lady who had just asked him so pertinent a question.

He certainly had not forgotten her. He would not have been a gallant dog if he had; nor would he have displayed that taste and wise discrimination which one would naturally have expected to find, in a well-bred dog of his particular class, for his interlocutor was a remarkably pretty girl—possessing the most lovely golden-hued hair and a pair of blue eyes that were almost turquoise in tint, albeit with a somewhat wistful, faraway look in them, especially now when she gazed down into the brown, honest orbs of the retriever, who was watching her every moment with faithful attention. She had, too, an unmistakable air of refinement and culture, in spite of her being attired in a plainly made black stuff dress such as a servant might have worn, and having a sort of cap like those affected by nuns and sisters of charity drawn over her dainty little head, partly concealing its wealth of fair silky hair. No one would have dreamt of taking her to be anything else but a lady, no matter what costume she adopted, or how she was disguised.

"Who ever thought, dear doggie," she continued, speaking the thoughts that surged up in her mind while addressing the dumb animal, who looked as if he would like to understand her if he only could,— "who ever would have thought that things would turn out as they have when I last patted your dear old head at Bingen, 'Fair Bingen on the Rhine,' eh?" and she murmured to herself the refrain of that beautiful ballad.

The retriever gave a long sniff here to express his thorough sympathy with her, and the girl proceeded, musingly, thinking aloud.

“Yes, I mean, doggie, when Armand and I parted for the last time. Poor mamma was alive then, and we never dreamt that this terrible war would come to pass, severing us so completely! Poor Armand, he said he would be true and return to me again when he was old enough to be able to decide for himself without the consent of that stern father of his, who thought that the daughter of a poor German pastor was not good enough mate for his handsome son—although he was only a merchant, while my mother was a French countess in her own right. Still, parents have the right to settle these things, and I quite agreed with dear mamma that I would never consent to enter a family against their will, especially, too, when they despised our humble position!”

The girl drew herself up proudly as she said this.

“Never mind,” she went on again presently, “it is all over and done for. But, still, I believe Armand loved me. How handsome he looked that last time I saw him when he came to our little cottage to say good-bye, before he went to join his regiment in Algeria, where his father had got him ordered off on purpose to separate us. However, perhaps it was only a boy and girl affection at the best, and would never have lasted; my heart has not broken, I know, although I thought it would break then; for, alas! I have since seen sorrow enough to crush me down, even much more than parting with Armand de la Tour. Fancy, poor darling mamma gone to her grave, and I, her cherished child, forced to earn my bread as companion to this haughty old baroness, who thinks me like the dust under her feet! Ah, it is sad, is it not, doggie?”

The retriever sniffed again, while the blue eyes continued to look down upon him through a haze of tears; and then, the girl was silent for a time.

“Heigho, doggie,” she exclaimed, after a short pause of reflection, brushing away the tear drops from her cheeks and shaking her dainty little head as if she would fain banish all her painful imaginings with the action, “I must not repine at my lot, for the good Father above has taken care of me through all my adversity, giving me a comfortable home when I, an orphan, had none to look after me. And, the good baroness, too—she may be haughty, but then she is of a very noble family, and has been brought up like most German ladies of rank to look down upon her inferiors in position; besides, she is kind to me in her way. I am pleased that she took it into her head to come off here to seek for her son, and bring him presents from home in person. Nothing else would suit her, if you please, on his birthday, although the young baron, I think, was not over-delighted at his mother coming to hunt for him in war time, as if he were a little boy—he on the staff of the general! I fancy he got no little chaff from his brother officers in consequence. However, ‘it is an ill wind that blows nobody good,’ for the good baroness being here has been seized with a freak for looking after the wounded, because the Princess of Alten-Schlossen goes in for that sort of thing; and thus it is, doggie, that I’m now attending to this poor fellow here. Though, how on earth Armand parted with you, and you became attached to this new master, whom you seem to love with such affection, I’m sure I cannot tell!”

Fritz at this moment turned in the little pallet bed on which he was lying, and in an instant the girl was up from her seat and bending over him.

“Restless?” she said, smoothing the pillows and laying her cool hand on the hot brow of her patient, who gave vent to a sigh of satisfaction in his sleep. “Ah! you’ll be better bye-and-bye. Then, you will wake up refreshed and have some nourishment; and then, too, you’ll be able to tell me all about yourself and master doggie here, eh?”

But, it was many days before poor Fritz was in a condition to offer any explanation about the dog—many days, when the possibility was trembling in the balance of fate as to whether he would ever speak again, or be silent for aye in this world!

When he woke up, he was delirious; and the doctor, a grave German surgeon of middle age, on coming into the room to examine him, when making the rounds of the house—a villa in the suburbs of Mézières, which had been transformed into a sort of field hospital for the most dangerous cases in the vicinity—declared Fritz to be in a very critical state. His life, he said, was in serious peril, a change having taken place for the worse.

He had been struck by a chassepot conical rifle bullet in the chest; and the ball, after breaking two of his ribs and slightly grazing the lungs, had lodged near the spine, where it yet remained, the wounded man being too prostrate for an operation to be performed for its extraction, although all the while it was intensifying the pain and adding to the feverish symptoms of the patient.

“You’ve not been allowing him to talk, have you?” asked the surgeon, scanning the girl’s face with a stern professional glance.

“No,” she replied, blushing slightly under his gaze; “that is, he wanted to, an hour ago, when he became conscious, but I gave him the sleeping draught you ordered at once.”

“Donnerwetter!” exclaimed the other. “The potion then has done him harm instead of good. I thought it would have composed him and made him comfortable for the operation, as, until that bullet is taken out he can’t possibly get well. However, he must now be kept as quiet as possible. Put a bandage on his head and make it constantly cool with cold water. I will return bye-and-bye, and then we’ll see about cutting out the ball.”

The surgeon then went out softly from the room, leaving the girl to attend to his directions, which she proceeded to do at once; shuddering the while at what she knew her poor patient would have to undergo, when the disciple of Aesculapius came back anon, with his myrmidons and their murderous-looking surgical knives and forceps, to hack and hew away at Fritz in their search for the bullet buried in his chest—he utterly oblivious either of his surroundings or what was in store for him, tossing in the bed under her eyes and rambling in his mind. He fancied himself still on the battlefield in the thick of the fight:— “Vorwärts, my children!” he muttered. “One more charge and the battery is

won. Puff! that shell had a narrow squeak of spoiling my new helmet. The gunner will have to take better aim next time!" Then he would shudder all over, and cry out in piteous tones, "Take it away, take it away—the blood is all over my face; and his body, oh, it is pressing me down into that yawning open grave! Will no one save me? It is terrible, terrible to be buried alive, and the pale stars twinkling down on my agony!" Presently, however, the cold applications to his head had their effect, and he sank down into a torpid sleep, only to start up again in the ravings of delirium a few moments afterwards.

Fritz continued in this state for hours, with intervals of quiet, during which his nurse, by the doctor's orders, administered beef tea and other nourishment which sustained the struggle going on in his sinking frame; until, at last, the ball was extracted, after an operation which was so prolonged that the girl, who felt almost as if she were undergoing it herself, thought it would never end.

Then came the worst stage for the sufferer. Fever supervened; and, although the wound began to heal up, his physical condition grew weaker every day under the tearing strain his constitution was subjected to.

Even the doctor gave him up; but the girl, who had attended to him with the most unwearying assiduity had hopes to the last.

Fritz had been unconscious from the time that he first recognised the dog, on the evening after he was wounded and found himself in the villa, until the fever left him, when he was so weak that he was unable to lift a finger and seemed at the very gates of death.

Now, however, his senses returned to him, and a glad look came into his eyes on seeing, like as he did before and now remembered, the face of the beautiful girl bending over him again; but he noticed that she did not look so bright as when he first beheld her.

"Ah!" he exclaimed feebly, "it was not a dream! How long have I been ill?"

"More than a fortnight," said the girl promptly.

"Oh, my poor mother!" ejaculated Fritz with a sob, "she will have thought me dead, and broken her heart!"

"Don't fear that," said she kindly. "I wrote to her, telling her you were badly hurt, but that you were in good hands."

"You! Why, how did you know her name, or where she lived?"

"I found the address in your pocket," answered the girl with a laugh. "Don't you recollect putting a slip of paper there, telling any one, in case you were wounded or killed, to write and break the news gently to your mother, 'madame Dort, Gulden Strasse, Lubeck'? I never heard before of such a thoughtful son!"

"Ah, I remember now," said Fritz; "and you wrote, then, to her?"

"Yes, last week, when we despaired of your recovery; but, I have written again since, telling her that the bullet has been removed from your wound, and that if you get over the fever you will recover all right."

"Thank you, and thank God!" exclaimed Fritz fervently, and he shut his eyes and remained quiet for a minute or two, although his lips moved as if in prayer.

"And where is Gelert, my dog?" he asked presently.

"'Fritz,' you mean," said the girl, smiling.

"No, that is my name, the dog's is Gelert."

"That is what I want explained," said the other.

"But, please pardon my rudeness, Fraulein," interrupted Fritz, "may I ask to whom I am indebted for watching over me, and adding to it the thoughtful kindness of relieving my mother's misery?"

"My name is Madaleine Vogelstein," said the girl softly. "Do you like it?"

"I do; it is a very pretty one," he replied. "The surname is German, but the given name is French—Madaleine? It sounds sweeter than would be thought possible in our guttural Teuton tongue!"

"My mother was a Frenchwoman, and I take the name from her," explained the girl. "But now, before I stop you from talking any more, for the good doctor would blame me much if he came in, you must tell me how you came to possess that dog; or, rather, why he so faithfully attached himself to you, as it was entirely through him that I found you, and got you picked up by the ambulance corps and brought here. You must first take this soup, however, to strengthen you. It has been kept nice and warm on that little lamp there, and it will do you good. I won't hear a word more until you have swallowed it!"

"A soldier should always obey the orders of his commanding officer," said Fritz with a smile, as he slowly gulped down the broth, spoonful by spoonful, as Madaleine placed it in his mouth, for he could not feed himself.

"That will do," she remarked, when he had taken what she thought sufficient. "And now you can tell me about the dog. Here he is," she continued, as the retriever came into the room; and, going up to the side of the bed where Fritz was lying, put up his paws on the counterpane and licked his master's face, in the wildest joy, apparently, at his recovery and notice of him. "He must have heard his name spoken, as I only just sent him out for a run with one of

the men, for all the time you were so ill we could not get him to leave the room. Now, doggie, lie down like a good fellow, and let us hear all about you."

The retriever at once obeyed the girl, stretching himself on the floor at her feet, although close beside his master all the while.

Fritz then narrated the sad little episode of the battle of Gravelotte, and how he had found the dead body of the French officer with the dog keeping guard over it.

The girl wept silently as he went on.

"It must have been poor Armand," she said presently through her tears. "Did you find nothing about him to tell who he was?"

"There was a little bag I saw round his neck," said Fritz; "I took it off the poor fellow before we buried him, and suspended it on my own breast afterwards for security, thinking that I might restore it some day to his friends, if I ever came across them."

"Ah, that must be the little packet which got driven into your wound, and, stopping the flow of blood, saved your life, the doctor says. I have kept it carefully for you, and here it is," cried the girl, hastily jumping up from her seat and bringing the article in question to Fritz.

"Open it," he said; "I haven't got the strength to do it, you know."

Madaleine unfastened the silken string that confined the mouth of the bag, now stained with Fritz's blood; and then she pulled out the little silver ring it contained.

One glance was enough for her.

"Yes," she faltered through her sobs. "It is the ring I gave him; but that was months before the date engraved upon it, 'July 18th, 1870,' which was the day he said he would come back to Bingen, as then he would be of age."

"And he never came, then?" inquired Fritz.

"No, never again," said she mournfully.

"Ah, I would come if I had been in his place," exclaimed Fritz eagerly, with a flashing eye. "I never fail in an appointment I promise to keep; and to fail to meet a betrothed—why it is unpardonable!"

He had raised his voice from the whisper in which he had previously spoken, and its indignant tone seemed quite loud.

"Perhaps he couldn't come," said Madaleine more composedly. "Besides, we were not engaged; all was over between us."

"I'm very glad to hear that," replied Fritz. "It would have been dastardly on his part otherwise! But, would you like to keep the dog for his sake, Fraulein Vogelstein? I have got no claim to him, you know."

"Oh dear no, I would not like to deprive you of him for the world, much as I love the poor faithful fellow. Why, he would think nobody was his proper master if he were constantly changing hands like this!"

"Poor old Gelert!" said Fritz; and the dog, hearing himself talked about, here raised himself up again from his recumbent attitude by the side of the bed and thrust his black nose into the hand of his master, who tried feebly to caress him.

"Fritz, you mean," corrected Miss Madaleine, determined to have her point about his right name.

"Well, if you call him so, I shall think you mean me," said Fritz jokingly, as well as his feeble utterance would permit his voice to be expressive. He wanted, however, to imply much more than the mere words.

"That would not be any great harm, would it?" she replied with a little smile, her tears of sorrow at Armand de la Tour's untimely fate having dried up as quickly as raindrops disappear after a shower as soon as the sun shines out again; however, she apparently now thought the conversation was becoming a little too personal, for she proceeded to ply the invalid with more soup in order to stop his mouth and prevent him from replying to this last speech of hers!

Chapter Eight.

The "Little Fat Man."

"Hullo! What fails with the well-born and most worthy lady, her to make in such pitiable plight?" inquired Burgher Jans, poking his little round face into the parlour of the house in the Gulden Strasse, just as Lorischen, bending over her mistress, was endeavouring to raise her on to the sofa, where she would be better enabled to apply restoratives in order to bring her to.

The old nurse was glad of any assistance in the emergency; and, even the fat little Burgher, disliked as he was by her, as a rule, with an inveterate hatred, was better than nobody!

"Madame has fainted," she said. "Help me to lift her up, and I'll be obliged to you, worshipful Herr."

"Yes, so, right gladly will I do it, dearest maiden," replied Burgher Jans politely, with his usual sweeping bow, taking off his hat and depositing it on an adjacent chair, while he lent a hand to raise the poor lady and place her on the couch.

This done, he espied the letter that had caused the commotion, which Madame Dort still held tightly clutched in her hand when she fell; and he tried to pull it away from her rigid fingers. "Ha, what have we here?" he said.

"You just leave that alone!" snapped out Lorischen. "Pray take yourself off, with your wanting to spy into other people's business! If I were a man I'd be ashamed of being so curious, I would. Burgher Jans, I'll thank you to withdraw; I wish to attend to my mistress."

"I will obey your behests, dearest maiden," blandly replied the little man, taking his hat from the chair and backing towards the door, although casting the while most covetous eyes on the mysterious letter, which he would have cheerfully given a thaler to have been allowed to peruse. "I will return anon to inquire how the gracious lady is after her indisposition, and—"

"If you are not out of the room before I count five," exclaimed the old nurse, angrily interrupting him, "I declare I'll pitch this footstool at your little round turnip-top of a head, that I will. One—two—three—"

"Why, whatever is the matter, Lorischen?" interposed Madame Dort, opening her eyes at this juncture, while the old nurse yet stood with the footstool raised in her uplifted hands facing the door, half in and half out of which peered the tortoise-shell spectacles of the little fat burgher. "Who is there?"

The poor lady spoke very faintly, and did not seem to know where she was at first, her gaze wandering round the room.

Lorischen quickly put down the heavy missile with which she was threatening Burgher Jans; and he, taking advantage of this suspension of hostilities, at once advanced again within the apartment, although still keeping his hand on the door so as to be ready to beat a retreat in a fresh emergency, should the old nurse attempt to renew the interrupted fray.

"High, well-born, and most gracious madame," said he obsequiously. "It is me, only me!"

"Hein!" grunted Lorischen. "A nice 'me' it is—a little, inquisitive, meddlesome morsel of a man!"

"Oh, Meinherr Burgher Jans," said Madame Dort, rising up from the sofa. "I'm glad to see you; I wanted to ask you something. I—"

Just at that moment she caught sight of the letter she held between her fingers, when she recollected all at once the news she had received, of which she had been for the time oblivious.

"Ah, poor Fritz!" she exclaimed, bursting into a fit of weeping. "My son, my firstborn, I shall never see him more!"

"Why, what have you heard, gracious lady?" said Burgher Jans, abandoning his refuge by the door, and coming forwards into the centre of the room. "No bad news, I trust, from the young and well-born Herr?"

"Read," said the widow, extending the letter in her hand towards him; "read for yourself and see."

His owlish eyes all expanded with delight through the tortoise-shell spectacles, the fat little man eagerly took hold of the rustling piece of paper and unfolded it, his hands trembling with nervous anxiety to know what the missive contained—and which he had been all along burning with curiosity to find out.

Lorischen actually snorted with indignation.

"There, just see that!" she grumbled through her set teeth, opening and clenching her fingers together convulsively, as if she would like to snatch the letter away from him—when, perhaps, she would have expressed her feelings pretty forcibly in the way of scratches on the Burgher's beaming face: "there, I wouldn't have let him see it if he had gone down on his bended knees for it—no, not if I had died first!"

The widow continued to sob in her handkerchief; while the Burgher appeared to gloat over the delicate angular handwriting of the letter, as if he were learning it by heart and spelling out every word—he took so long over it.

"Ah, it is bad, gracious lady," he said at length; "but, still, not so bad as it might otherwise be."

Madame Dort raised her tear-stained face, looking at the little roan questioningly; while Lorischen, who in her longing to hear about Fritz had not quitted the apartment, according to her usual custom when Burgher Jans was in it, drew nearer, resting her impulsive fingers on the table, so as not to alarm that worthy unnecessarily and make him stop speaking.

The Burgher felt himself a person of importance, on account of his opinion being consulted; so he drew himself up to his full height—just five feet one inch!

"The letter only says, most worthy and gracious lady,—and you, dearest maiden," he proceeded—with a special bow to Lorischen, which the latter, sad to relate, only received with a grimace from her tightly drawn spinster lips—"that the young and well-born Herr is merely grievously wounded, and not, thanks be to Providence, that he is—he is—he is—"

"Why don't you say 'dead' at once, and not beat about the bush in that stupid way?" interposed the old nurse, who detested the little man's hemming and hawing over matters which she was in the habit of blurting out roughly without demur.

"No, I like not the ugly word," suavely expostulated the Burgher. "The great-to-come-for-all-of-us can be better expressed than that! But, to resume my argument, dearest maiden and most gracious lady, this document does not state that the dear son of the house has shaken off this mortal coil entirely as yet."

"I'd like to shake off yours, and you with it!" said Lorischen angrily, under her breath—"for a word-weaving, pedantic little fool!"

"You mean that there is hope?" asked Madame Dort, looking a bit less tearful, her grief having nearly exhausted itself.

"Most decidedly, dear lady," said the Burgher. "Does not the letter say so in plain and very-much-nicely-written characters?"

"But, all such painful communications are generally worded, if the writers have a tender heart, so as to break bad news as gently as possible," answered the widow, wishing to have the faint sanguine suspicion of hope that was stealing over her confirmed by the other's opinion.

"Just so," said Burgher Jans authoritatively. "You have reason in your statement; still, dear lady, by what I can gather from this letter, I should think that the Frau or Fraulein Vogelstein who signs it wishes to prepare you for the worst, but yet intimates at the same time that there is room to hope for the best."

"Ah, I'm glad you say so," exclaimed the widow joyfully. "Now I read it over, I believe the same; but at first, I thought, in my hurried glance over it, that Fritz was slain, the writer only pretending he was still alive, in order to prepare me for his loss. He is not dead, thank God! That is everything; for, whilst there is life, there's hope, eh?"

"Most decidedly, gracious lady," responded the little man with effusion. "If ever I under the down-pressing weight of despondency lie, so I unto myself much comfort make by that happy consolation!"

Madame Dort experienced such relief from the cheering aspect in which the Burgher's explanation had enabled her now to look upon the news of Fritz's wound, that her natural feelings of hospitality, which had been dormant for the while, asserted themselves in favour of her timely visitor, who in spite of his curiosity had certainly done her much good in banishing all the ill effects of her fainting fit.

"Will you not have a glass of lager, Herr Jans?" said she.

"Mein Gott, yes," promptly returned the little man. "Much talking makes one dry, and beer is good for the stomach."

"Lorischen, get the Burgher some lager bier," ordered Madame Dort, on her invitation being accepted, the old nurse proceeding to execute the command with very ill grace.

"The Lord only knows when he'll leave now, once he starts guzzling beer in the parlour! That Burgher Jans is getting to be a positive nuisance to us; and I shall be glad when our poor wounded Fritz comes home, if only to stop his coming here so frequently—the gossiping little time-server, with his bowing and scraping and calling me his 'dearest maiden,' indeed—I'd 'maiden' him if I had the chance!"

Lorischen was much exasperated, and so she grumbled to herself as she sallied out of the room.

However, much to her relief, the "fat little man" did not make a long stay on this occasion, for he took his leave soon after swallowing the beer. He was anxious to make a round of visits amongst his acquaintances, to retail the news that Fritz was wounded and lying in a hospital at Mézières, near Metz, for he had read it himself in the letter, you know! He likewise informed his hearers, although he had not so impressed the widow, that they would probably never see the young clerk of Herr Grosschnapper again in Lubeck, as his case was so desperate that he was not expected to live! His story otherwise, probably, would have been far less interesting to scandal-mongers, as they would have thus lost the opportunity of settling all the affairs of the widow and considering whom she would marry again. Of course, they now decided, that, as she had as good as lost both her sons and had a nice little property of her own, besides being comparatively not old, so to speak, and not very plain, she would naturally seek another partner to console herself in her solitude—Burgher Jans getting much quizzed on this point, with sly allusions as to his being the widow's best friend!

Some days after Madaleine Vogelstein's first letter, Madame Dort received a second, telling her that the ball had been extracted from her son's wound, but fever had come on, making him very weak and prostrate; although, as his good constitution had enabled him to survive the painful operation, he would probably pull through this second ordeal.

The widow again grew down-hearted at this intelligence, and it was as much as Burgher Jans could do, with all his plausibility, to make her hopeful; while Lorischen, her old superstitious fears and belief in Mouser's prophetic miaow-wowing again revived, did all her best to negative the fat little man's praiseworthy efforts at cheering. Ever since the Burgher had been elected a confidant of Madaleine's original communication, he had made a point of calling every day in the Gulden Strasse, with his, to the old nurse, sickening and stereotyped inquiry—"Any news yet?" until the field post brought the next despatch, when, as he now naturally expected and wished, the letter was given him to read.

"He seems bent on hanging up his hat in our lobby here!" Lorischen would say spitefully, on the widow seeking to

excuse the little man's pertinacity in visiting her. "Much he cares whether poor Master Fritz gets well or ill; he takes more interest in somebody else, I think!"

"Oh, Lorischen!" Madame Dort would remonstrate. "How can you say such things?"

"It is 'Oh, mistress!' it strikes me," the other would retort. "I wish the young master were only here!"

"And so do I heartily," said Madame Dort, at the end of one of these daily skirmishes between the two on the same subject. "We agree on that point, at all events!" and she sighed heavily. The old servant was so privileged a person that she did not like to speak harshly to her, although she did not at all relish Lorischen's frequent allusions as to the real object of the Burgher's visits, and her surmises as to what the neighbours would think about them. Madame Dort put up with Lorischen's innuendoes in silence, but still, she did not look pleased.

"Ach Himmel, dear mistress!" pleaded the offender, "never mind my waspish old tongue. I am always saying what I shouldn't; but that little fat man does irritate me with his hypocritical, oily smile and smooth way—calling me his 'dearest maiden,' indeed!"

"Why, don't you see, Lorischen, that it is you really whom he comes here after, although you treat him so cruelly!" said the widow, smiling.

This was more than the old spinster could bear.

"What, me!" she exclaimed, with withering scorn. "Himmel, if I thought that, I would soon scratch his chubby face for him—me, indeed!" and she retreated from the room in high dudgeon.

Bye-and-bye, there came another letter from the now familiar correspondent, saying that Fritz was really recovering at last; and, oh what happiness! the mother's heart was rejoiced by the sight of a few awkwardly scrawled lines at the end. It was a postscript from her son himself!

The almost indecipherable words were only "Love to Mutterchen, from her own Fritz," but they were more precious to her than the lengthiest epistle from any one else.

"Any news?" asked Burgher Jans of Lorischen soon afterwards, when he came to the house to make his stereotyped inquiry.

"Yes," said the old nurse, instead of replying with her usual negative.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the little man. "The noble, well-born young Herr is not worse, I hope?" and he tried to hide his abnormally bland expression with a sympathetic look of deep concern; but he failed miserably in the attempt. His full-moon face could not help beaming with a self-satisfied complacency which it was impossible to subdue; indeed, he would have been unable to disguise this appearance of smiling, even if he had been at a funeral and was, mentally, plunged in the deepest woe—if that were possible for him to be!

"No, not worse," answered Lorischen. "He is—"

"Not dead, I trust?" said Burgher Jans, interrupting her before she could finish her sentence, and using in his hurry the very word to which he had objected before.

"No, he is not dead," retorted the old nurse, with a triumphant ring in her voice. "And, if you were expecting that, I only hope you are disappointed, that's all! He is getting better, for he has written to the mistress himself; and, what is more, he's coming home to send you to the right-about, Burgher Jans, and stop your coming here any more. Do you hear that, eh?"

"My dearest maiden," commenced to stammer out the little fat man, woefully taken aback by this outburst, "I—I—don't know what you mean."

"Ah, but I do," returned Lorischen, not feeling any the more amiably disposed towards him by his addressing her in that way after what Madame Dort had said about his calling especially to see her. "I know what I mean; and what I mean to say now, is, that my mistress told me to say she was engaged when you came, should you call to-day, and that she is unable to see you, there! Good-morning, Burgher Jans; good-morning, most worshipful Herr!"

So saying, she slammed the door in the poor little man's face, leaving him without, cogitating the reason for this summary dismissal of him by the widow; albeit Lorischen, in order to indulge her own feelings of dislike, had somewhat exaggerated a casual remark made by her mistress—that she did not wish to be interrupted after the receipt of the good news about Fritz, as she wanted to answer the letter at once!

Chapter Nine.

A Mutual Understanding!

"Do you know what is going on to-day?" said Madaleine Vogelstein to her patient, a couple of days after she had aided him to scrawl that postscript to her letter to his mother in his own handwriting, when he had so far recovered that he might be said to be almost convalescent. "No, what—anything important?" he replied, answering her question in questionable fashion by asking another.

"Guess," said she teasingly, holding up her finger. "I'm sure I can't."

"The capitulation of Metz!" she said slowly with some emphasis, marking the importance of the news she was telling.

"Never—it can't be!" ejaculated Fritz, making an effort to spring up in the pallet bed on which he was still lying, but falling back with a groan on finding himself too weak. "What an unlucky beggar I am!"

"Lie still," said she, putting her hand gently on his, which was outside the quilt. "You must keep quiet, or you'll never get better, so as to be able to stand up and walk about again—no, you won't, if you try to hurry matters now."

"That's more than the French have done if they've only just given in! Is it true, though? Perhaps you've only heard a rumour, for there are always such false reports flying about. Why, in the camp it used to be the current cry every morning, after we began the siege, that Metz had fallen."

"It is true enough now, I can tell you," said Madaleine. "The whole French army commanded by Bazaine has capitulated, and the Germans have marched in and taken possession of the fortress."

"I must believe you; but, is it not aggravating that this should just happen when I am invalided here, and not able to take part in the final triumph? It is rather hard lines, after serving so long in the trenches all during our wearisome environment, not to have had the satisfaction in the end of being a witness to the surrender!"

"It's the fortune of war," said she soothingly, noticing how bitterly Fritz spoke. "Although all may fight bravely, it is not every one who reaps the laurels of victory."

"No," he replied, smiling at some thoughts which her words suggested—so much is dry humour allied to sentiment that the mention of laurels brought to his mind a comic association which at once dispelled his chagrin. "When did you say the capitulation took place?"

"Well, I heard that the formal agreement was signed by the French officers on behalf of Marshal Bazaine two days ago; but the actual surrender takes place to-day, the Marshal having already left, it is said, to join his imprisoned emperor at Cassel."

What Madaleine told Fritz was perfectly true.

On the 27th of October, the seventieth day after it had been driven under the guns of Metz on the disastrous termination of the battle of Gravelotte, Bazaine's army, in addition to the regular garrison of the fortress and an unknown number of Gardes Mobiles, was forced to surrender to the Germans—thus now allowing the latter to utilise the giant legions hitherto employed in investing the stronghold of Lorraine, in further trampling out the last evidences of organised resistance in France, and so, by coercing the country, sooner put an end to the duration of the war.

Notwithstanding all the comments made—especially those by his own countrymen in their unreasoning prejudice against every one and everything connected with the late empire, from its unfortunate and much-maligned head downwards—in the matter of this capitulation, and on Marshal Bazaine's conduct, it is absolutely certain that he held out as long as it was possible to do so. Indeed, it is a surprising fact that his provisions lasted such a length of time; and it would be a cause for sorrow to believe that the brave defender of Metz was in any way stained by the crime of "treachery" as his act was stigmatised by the demagogues of Paris. Those who assert that a clever commander ought somehow or other to have made his escape from the place, do not take into consideration the strength of the investing force, which comprised the united armies of Prince Frederick Charles and Steinmetz—more than two hundred and fifty thousand men, in addition to their reserves, all capable of being concentrated at any given point where an attack was anticipated, and protected, besides, by entrenched lines of great strength. Nor do these biassed critics consider the ruin that must have fallen on Bazaine's army, even if it had succeeded in cutting its way through the ranks of the besiegers, as the general tried gallantly, but unsuccessfully, to do on more than one occasion, besides making numerous sorties. It is apparent to most unprejudiced minds now, at this distance of time from the momentous epoch of the struggle between the two nations, that the Marshal, in his situation, accomplished all that could have been expected in detaining for such a length of time a huge German army nearly on the frontier, thus giving the invaded country breathing time to collect its resources for just so long a period. The fact is, that when an army like that of Bazaine's is severed from its communications and supplies, its surrender can only be a question of time; and, therefore, unparalleled as is the capitulation of Metz in modern history, the unprecedented catastrophe—can be fully accounted for on military grounds.

"I'm sorry I missed the sight," said Fritz presently, after thinking over the news. "It would have been some fair return for all that bitter night work I had in the trenches before I was wounded. Still, I'm glad it's all ended now, for my corps will be able to march onward on Paris like the rest."

"That will not benefit you much, my poor friend," remarked Madaleine sympathisingly. "I'm afraid it will be some time before you will be strong enough to move from this room, although you're improving each day."

"Oh, will it?" said Fritz triumphantly; "that's all you know about it, young lady! Why, Doctor Carl said this morning that he thought I would be able to report myself fit for duty in another week."

"I suppose you'll rejoice to get back to your friends and comrades in the regiment? You must find it miserable and dull enough in this place!"

"No, not quite that. I've been very happy and comfortable here the last few days; and I shall never forget all your kindness and care of me—no, never!"

"Don't speak of that, pray; it's only what any one else would have done in my place. Besides," she added demurely, "you know that in attending to you as a wounded soldier, I have only been carrying out the orders of the baroness, my employer."

"Hang the fussy old thing!" said Fritz impatiently trying to shrug his shoulders. He had had the honour of one interview with Madaleine's distinguished patroness, and did not crave for another; for, she had a good deal of that old-fashioned, starched formality which the German nobility affect, mixed up with a fidgety, condescending, patronising manner which much annoyed the generous-minded young fellow. He burned with indignation all the time the visit of the old lady to him had lasted, for she ordered Madaleine to do this and corrected her for doing that, in, as he thought, the rudest manner possible. Her exquisitely dignified patronage of himself, as a species of inferior animal, who, being in pain and distress, she was bound in common charity to take some notice of, caused him no umbrage whatever; but it annoyed him to see a gentle, ladylike girl like Madaleine subjected to the whims and caprices of an old woman, who, in spite of her high birth, was naturally vulgar and inconsiderate. "Hang the fussy old thing!" he repeated, with considerable heat. "I wish you had nothing to do with her. I'm sure she would drive me mad in a day if I were constantly associated with her!"

"Ah, dear friend, beggars mustn't be choosers," said Madaleine sadly. "You forget my position, in your kind zeal on my behalf! A poor orphan girl such as I, left friendless and penniless, ought to be glad to be under the protection of so grand a lady as the Baroness Stolzenkop. She is kind to me, too, in her way."

"But, what a way!" interposed Fritz angrily. "I wouldn't speak to a dog in that fashion."

"You are different."

"I should hope so, indeed!"

"Besides, Herr Fritz, remember, that if it hadn't been for this old lady, of whom you speak in such disrespectful terms, I should never have come here to Mézières and been able to nurse you."

"I forgot for the moment, Fraulein. My blessing on the old catamaran for the fancy that seized her, so auspiciously, to go touring on the trail of the war and thus to bring you here. I don't believe I would have lived, if it had not been for your care and kindness!"

"Meinherr, you exaggerate. It is to your own good constitution and to Providence that your thanks are due; I have only been a simple means towards that happy end."

"Well, I shall always attribute my recovery to you, at all events; and so will my good mother, who I hope will some day be able to thank you in person for all that you've done for me and her."

"I should like to see her," said Madaleine; "she must be a kind, good lady, from her letters to you."

"And the fondest mother in the world!" exclaimed Fritz with enthusiasm. "But, you will see her—some day," he added after a pause. "I vow that you shall."

"I don't know how that will be," said Madaleine, half laughing in a constrained fashion, as if wishing to conceal her real feelings. "In a week or two you will be off to the wars again and forget me—like a true soldier!"

"Stay," interposed Fritz, interrupting her. "You have no right to say that! Do you think me so ungrateful? You must have a very bad opinion of me! I—"

"Never mind explanations now," interrupted the girl in her turn, speaking hurriedly in a nervous way, although trying to laugh the matter off as a joke. "If the doctor says you can soon report yourself as fit for duty, of course you'll have to rejoin your regiment."

"Ah, I wonder where that is now?" said Fritz musingly. "Since our camp round Metz is broken up, the army will naturally march on farther into the interior. No matter, there's no good my worrying myself about it. They'll soon let me know where I've got to go to join them; for, the powers that be do not allow any shirking of duty in the ranks, from the highest to the lowest!"

"I saw that here," remarked Madaleine. "The baroness wanted to get her son to return home with her; but she was told that, if he were allowed to go he could never come back to the army, as his reputation for courage would be settled for ever."

"Yes, that would be the case, true enough. He would be thought to have shown the white feather! But, about your movements, Fraulein Madaleine—the baroness is not going to remain here long, is she?"

"No; she spoke this morning about going away. She said that, as the siege of Metz was raised, and the greater portion of the wounded men would be removed to Germany, along with the prisoners of war, she thought she would go back home—to Darmstadt, that is."

"And there you will stop, I suppose?" asked Fritz.

"Until she has a whim to go somewhere else!" replied Madaleine.

"May I write to you there?"

"I will be glad to hear of your welfare," answered she discreetly, a slight colour mantling to her cheeks. "Of course, you have been my patient; and, like a good nurse, I should like to know that you were getting on well, without any relapse."

"I will write to you, then," said Fritz in those firm, ringing tones of his that clearly intimated he had made a promise which he intended to keep. "And you, I hope, will answer my letters?"

"When I can," replied the girl; "that is, you know, if the Baroness Stolzenkop does not object."

"Bother the Baroness Stolzenkop!" said he energetically, and he stretched out his hand to her with a smile. "Promise to write to me," he repeated.

Madaleine did not say anything; but she returned his smile, and he could feel a slight pressure of her fingers on his, so with this he was perfectly contented for the while.

"Ah, when the war is over!" he exclaimed presently, after a moment's silence between the two, which expressed more than words would have done perhaps. "Ah, when the war is over!"

"Eh, what?" said the doctor, coming in unexpectedly at that instant and catching the last words.

"I—I—said," explained Fritz rather confusedly, "that when the war was over, I'd be glad to get home again to my mother and those dear to me;" and he looked at Madaleine as he spoke meaningly.

"Eh, what?" repeated the doctor. "But, the war isn't over yet, my worthy young lieutenant, and I hope we'll patch you up so as to be able to play a good part in it still for the Fatherland!"

"I hope so, Herr Doctor," answered Fritz. "I've no desire yet to be laid on the shelf while laurels and promotion are to be won."

"Just so, that is good; and how do you feel this afternoon, eh?"

"Much better."

"Ah yes, so I see! You will go on improving, if you take plenty of food. I bet that in a week's time I shall be able to turn you out of these nice quarters here."

So saying, the surgeon bustled out of the room, with a kind nod to his patient and a bow to Madaleine, who was shortly afterwards summoned by a servant to the baroness—the footman telling her that her ladyship requested her presence at once.

She returned later on, but it was only for a very brief interval, to say good-bye. The Princess of Alten-Schlossen, she said, was about to leave Mézières immediately for Germany, and the baroness could not think of staying behind, even for the charitable consideration of nursing any more wounded, if the exalted lady, whose actions traced the pattern for her own conduct, thought fit to go away! Madaleine, therefore, had orders to pack up all the old dowager's numerous belongings, being also given permission to make any arrangements she pleased for the poor fellows who remained in the villa, in order to have them handed over to the regular authorities, now that this amateur ambulance of the baroness was going to abandon its voluntary labours.

"It's a shame," said Madaleine indignantly. "It is like putting one's hand to the plough and then turning back!"

"Never mind, Fraulein, do not fret yourself," interposed Fritz. "The old lady has done some good by starting this hospital here, even if she did it in imitation of the Princess; and, although she may now give it up, it will be carried on all right by others, you see if it won't! As I am getting well, too, and will have to go, as the doctor says; why, I shall not regret it as I should otherwise have done."

"Oh, you selfish fellow!" said she, smiling. "Now you have been attended to and nursed into convalescence, you do not care what becomes of those who may come after you!"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied Fritz; "only, as I shall be away serving with my regiment, I should prefer to think of you ensconced in the quiet security of the baroness' castle on the Rhine, to being here amidst the excitement of the war and in the very thick of bands of stragglers to and from the front."

"Especially since I would lose your valuable protection!" laughed Madaleine.

"Ah, wait till I get up and am strong!" said Fritz. "When you see me again, I promise to be able to protect you."

"Aye, when!" repeated the girl with a sigh. "However, I must say good-bye now, Herr Lieutenant I have told our man Hans, whom the baroness leaves behind, to see that you want for nothing until you shall be able to attend to yourself. I'm sorry you'll have no female nurse now to look after you."

"I wouldn't let another woman come near me after you go!" exclaimed Fritz impulsively. "Mind, you have promised to write to me, you know."

"Yes," said she, "I will answer your letters; and now, good-bye! Don't forget me quite when you get amongst the gay ladies of Paris, who will quite eclipse your little German nurse!"

"Never!" he ejaculated. "Good-bye, till we meet again!" and he pressed her hand to his lips, looking up into her eyes.

"Good-bye!" said she in a husky voice, turning away; when the dog, which had been lying down in his usual place by his master's bedside, started up, "Good-bye you, too, my darling 'Fritz!'" she added, throwing her arms round the retriever's neck and kissing his smooth black head; "I nearly forgot you, dearest doggie, I do declare!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed the other Fritz, mortally jealous of his dog for the moment, "I wish you would only say farewell to me like that!"

Madaleine blushed a celestial rosy red.

But "Auf wiedersehen!" was all she said, as she left the room with a speaking glance from her violet eyes; and, towards the evening, from the confused bustling about which he heard going on within the villa, and the sound of carriage wheels without driving off, Fritz knew that the Baroness Stolzenkop and her party—amongst whom, of course, was Madaleine—had quitted Mézières, on their way back to the banks of the Rhine.

Chapter Ten.

On the Move again.

"I wonder if she cares about that French fellow still?" thought Fritz to himself when Madaleine had gone. "I don't believe she could have felt for him much, from the manner in which she listened when I told her of his death and the way she looked at that ring. Himmel! Would she receive the news of my being shot in the same fashion, I wonder?"

Fritz, however, could not settle this momentous question satisfactorily to his own mind just then; so he had, consequently, to leave the matter to be decided at that blissful period when everybody thought that "everything would come straight"—the period to which he had alluded at the interesting instant when his slightly confidential conversation with Madaleine was so inopportunistically interrupted by the maladroit entrance of Doctor Carl. In other words, "when the war should be over!" But, as the worthy disciple of Aesculapius had sapiently remarked on the occasion of his accidental interference with what might have been otherwise a mutual understanding between the two, the war was not over yet. The halcyon time had not arrived for the sword to be beaten into a ploughshare, nor did there seem much prospect of such a happy contingency in the near immediate future; for, although the contest had already lasted three months—during which a series of terrible engagements had invariably resulted in the defeat of the French—from the commencement of the campaign to the capitulation of Metz, each crushing disaster only seemed to have the effect of nerving the Gallic race to fresh resistance and so prolong the struggle. Indeed, at the beginning of November, 1870, with Paris laughing the idea of a siege to scorn and new armies being rapidly organised, in the north at Saint Quentin, in the west at Havre, and in the south at Orleans, the end of the war appeared as far off as ever!

Fritz missed the attentions of his unwearying little nurse much, and his convalescence did not progress so rapidly in consequence; but one morning, some three weeks after the departure of the party of the baroness' from Mézières, he was agreeably surprised by Doctor Carl giving him permission to rejoin his corps.

"I don't quite think you exactly strong enough yet, you know; but I've received orders to clear out the hospitals here, sending forward all such as are fit to their respective regiments, while those not sufficiently recovered I am to invalid to Germany. Now, which is it to be, Herr Lieutenant? I candidly don't believe you're quite up to the mark for campaigning again yet; but still, perhaps, you would not like being put on the shelf, and no doubt you'd gain strength from the change of air as you moved on with the army. Which course will you select, Herr Lieutenant? I give you the choice."

"To rejoin my regiment, certainly, doctor!" answered Fritz, without a moment's hesitation. "I'm tired of doing nothing here, and I fancy I've been well enough to move for the past fortnight."

"Ah, permit me to be the best judge of that, young man," said the other. "No doubt you feel wonderfully strong just now! Can you lift this chair, do you think, eh?"

"Certainly," replied Fritz, laying his hand on the slight little article of furniture the doctor had pointed out with his cane, and which he could have easily held up with one finger when in the possession of his proper strength. He was quite indignant, indeed, with Doctor Carl for suggesting such a feeble trial for him, as if he were a child; but, much to his astonishment, he found that he was utterly unable to raise the chair from the ground. Besides which, he quite panted after the exertion, just as if he had been endeavouring to lift a ton weight!

"Ha, what did I say, Herr Lieutenant?" said the surgeon with a laugh. "You will now allow, I suppose, that we doctors know best as to what is good for our patients! But, come, you will not be wanted to raise or carry about a greater weight than yourself until you come up with your regiment, which is now with Manteuffel's division near Amiens, for, by that time, you'll be yourself again. I'll now go and sign your certificate and papers, so that you may get ready to start as soon as you like."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Fritz. "It is 'Forwards' again—the very word puts fresh life in me!" and, trying once more, he lifted the chair this time with ease. "You see, Herr Doctor, I can do it now!"

"Ah, there's nothing like hope and will!" said the doctor, bustling out of the room—which Fritz, unlike many poor victims of the war, had had entirely to himself, instead of being only one amongst hundreds of others in a crowded hospital ward. "By the time you join your comrades again, you'll be double the man you were before you came under my care!"

"Thanks to you, dear doctor," shouted out Fritz after him in cordial tones; and he then proceeded to overhaul his somewhat dilapidated uniform to see whether it was in order for him to don once more.

On the termination of the siege of Metz, by its capitulation at the end of October, the large German force which had been employed up till then in the investment of Marshal Bazaine's entrenched camp before the fortress, became released for other duties; thus enabling Von Moltke, the great strategical head of the Teuton legions, to develop his plans for the complete subjugation of the country.

In accordance, therefore, with these arrangements, two army corps, each of some thirty thousand men, proceeded at

once to aid the hosts encircling Paris with fire and steel; while two more corps were led by Prince Frederick Charles towards the south of France, where they arrived in the nick of time to assist the Duke of Mecklenburgh and the defeated Bavarians under Van der Tann in breaking up the formidable army of the Loire commanded by Chanzy, which had very nearly succeeded in altering the condition of the war; the remainder of the German investing force from Metz were sent northwards, under Manteuffel, in the direction of Brittany and the departments bordering on the English Channel, so as to crush out all opposition there.

With this latter force marched the regiment of our friend Fritz, which he was able to rejoin about the beginning of December at Amiens, where were established the headquarters of General Manteuffel, the present commander of the first army—"Old Blood and Iron."

Steinmetz having been shelved, it was said, on account of his age and infirmities, he having fought at Waterloo, but more probably on account of his rather lavish sacrifice of his men, especially at Gravelotte. This force kept firm hold of Normandy with a strong hand, threatening Dieppe and Havre on either side.

Fritz had a tedious journey to the front.

Partly by railway where practicable, and partly by roads that were blocked by the heavy siege guns and waggon loads of ammunition going forwards for the use of the force besieging Paris, the young lieutenant made his way onwards in company with a reserve column of Landwehr proceeding to fill up casualties in Manteuffel's ranks—the journey not being rendered any the more agreeable by the frequent attacks suffered from franc-tireurs when passing through the many woods and forests encountered on the route, in addition to meeting straggling bands of the enemy, who opposed the progress of the column the more vigorously as it abandoned the main roads leading from the frontier and struck across country.

It was not by any means a pleasure trip; but, putting all perils aside, regarding them merely as the vicissitudes of a soldier's lot, what impressed Fritz more than anything else was the ruin and devastation which, following thus in the rear of a triumphant army, he everywhere noticed.

The towns he entered on his way had most of their shops shut, and the windows of the private houses were closed, as if in sympathy with a national funeral, those which had been bombarded—and these were many—having, besides, their streets blocked up with fallen masonry and scattered beams of timber, their church steeples prostrate, and the walls of buildings perforated with round shot and bursting shells that had likewise burnt and demolished the roofs; while, in the more open country, the farms and villages had been swept away as if with a whirlwind of fire, only bare gables and blackened rafters staring up into the clouds, like the skeletons of what were once happy homes. The vineyards and fields and gardens around were destroyed and running to waste in the most pitiful way, for every one connected with them, who had formerly cherished and tended them with such care and attention, had either been killed or else sought safety in flight to the cities, where their refuge was equally precarious. Along the highway, the trees, whose branches once gave such grateful shade to wayfarers, were now cut down, only rows of hideous, half-consumed stumps remaining in their stead; while here and there, as the scene of some great battle was passed, great mounds like oblong bases of flattened pyramids rose above the surface of the devastated plain—mounds under whose frozen surface lay the mouldering bodies of thousands of brave men who had fallen on the bloody field, their last resting-place unmarked by sepulchral cross or monumental marble. Everywhere there was terrible evidence of the effects of war and the price of that "glory" which, the poet sings truly, "leads but to the grave!"

Fritz was sickened with it all; but, what struck his keen sense of honour and honesty more, was the wholesale pillage and robbery permitted by the German commanders to be exercised by their soldiery on the defenceless peasantry of France. A cart which he overhauled, proceeding back to the frontier, contained such wretched spoil as women's clothes, a bale of coffee, a quantity of cheap engravings and chimney ornaments, an old-fashioned kitchen clock, with an arm-chair—the pride of some fireside corner—a quantity of copper, and several pairs of ear-rings, such as are sold for a few sous in the Palais Royale!

The sight of this made his blood boil, and Fritz got into some trouble with a colonel of Uhlans by ordering the contents of the cart to be at once confiscated and burnt, the huckster being on the good books of that officer—doubtless as a useful collector of curios!

It was a current report amongst the French at the time that the German army was followed by a tribe of Jew speculators, who purchased from the soldiers the plunder that they certainly could not themselves expect to carry back to their own country; and this incident led Fritz to believe the rumour well founded.

"Heavens, little mother," as he wrote home subsequently to Madame Dort, after his experience of what went on at headquarters under his new commander. "I do not fear the enemy; but the only thing which will do us any harm, God willing that we come safely home, is that we shall not be able to distinguish between mine and thine, the 'meum' and 'tuum' taught us at school, for we shall be all thorough thieves; that is to say, we are ordered to take—'requisition' they call it—everything that we can find and that we can use. This does not confine itself alone to food for the horses and people, but to every piece of portable property, not an absolute fixture, which, if of any value, we are directed to appropriate and 'nail' fast!

"Through the desertion of most of the castles here in the neighbourhood by their legitimate proprietors, the entry to all of them is open to us; and now everything is taken out of them that is worth taking at all. The wine-cellars in particular are searched; and I may say that our division has drunk more champagne on its own account than I ever remember to have seen in the district of Champagne, when I visited it last year before the war.

"In the second place, our light-fingered forces carry off all the horses we can take with us; all toilet things, glasses, stockings, brushes, boots and shoes, linen—in a word, everything is 'stuck to!'

"The officers, I may add, are no exception to the private soldiers, but steal in their proper precedence, appropriating

whatever objects of art or pictures of value they can find in the mansions we visit in these archaeological tours of ours. Only yesterday, the adjutant of my regiment, a noble by birth, but I am sorry to say not a gentleman either by manners or moral demeanour, came to me and said, 'Fritz Dort, do me the favour to steal for me all the loot you can bring me. We will at all events show Moltke that he has not sent us into this war for nothing.' Of course, this being an order from a superior officer, I could not say anything but 'At your command, your highness!' But what will come of it all only God knows! I'm afraid, when there is nothing left to lay our hands on, we will begin to appropriate the goods and chattels of each other; although, little mother, I will endeavour to keep my fingers clean, if only for your sake!"

Fritz, however, soon had something more exciting to think about than the morals of his comrades; for, only a few days after he joined his regiment, he went into action again at the battle of Amiens, when the Germans drove back Faidherbe's "army of the north," routing them with much slaughter, and taking many prisoners, besides thirteen cannon. A French regiment of marines was ridden down by a body of German Hussars, who were almost decimated by the charge—which resembled that of Balaclava, the "sea soldiers" standing behind entrenchments with their guns.

Later on, too, Fritz was in a more memorable engagement. It occurred on the morning of the 23rd of December at Pont Noyelles, where the army of General Manteuffel, numbering about fifty thousand men with some forty guns, attacked a force of almost double the strength, commanded by Faidherbe, the last of the generals on whom the French relied outside of Paris. The two armies confronted each other from opposing heights, separated by the valley of the Somme and a small, winding stream, which falls into the larger river at Daours, on the right and left banks of which the contending forces were respectively aligned; and the combat opened about eleven o'clock in the forenoon with a heavy cannonade, under cover of which the German tirailleurs smartly advanced and took possession of several small villages, although the French shortly afterwards drove them out of these at the point of the bayonet, exhibiting great gallantry. In the evening, both armies rested in the same positions they had occupied at the commencement of the fight; but, although the French greatly outnumbered their antagonists, being especially superior in artillery, the fire of which had considerably thinned the German ranks, they did nothing the whole of the succeeding day. On the contrary, they rested in a state of complete inactivity, when, if they had but pushed forwards, they might have compelled the retreat of Manteuffel.

The next morning was that of Christmas Day.

Fritz could not but remember it, in spite of his surroundings, for he received a small parcel by the field post, containing some warm woollen socks knitted by Lorischen's own fair fingers, and sent to him in order "to prevent his appropriating those of the poor French peasantry," as he had intimated might be the case with him in his last letter home, should he be in need of such necessaries and not have any of his own. His good mother, too, did not forget him, nor did a certain young lady who resided at Darmstadt.

It was the morning of Christmas Day; but not withstanding its holy and peaceful associations, Fritz and every one else in Manteuffel's army corps expected that the anniversary would be celebrated in blood. Judge of their surprise, however, when, as the day advanced, the vedettes and outposts they sent ahead returned with the strange intelligence that the enemy had abandoned the highly advantageous ground they had selected on Pont Noyelles, retiring on Arras.

The news was almost too good to be true; but, nevertheless, the German cavalry were soon on the alert, pursuing the retreating force and slaughtering thousands in the chase—thus Christmas Day was passed!

The new year opened with more fighting for Fritz; for, on the 2nd of January, occurred the battle of Bapaume, and on the 19th of the same month the more disastrous engagement for the French of Saint Quentin, which finally crumbled up "the army of the north" under Faidherbe, which at one time almost looked as if it would have succeeded in raising the siege of Paris, by diverting the attention of the encircling force. However, in neither of these actions did Fritz either get wounded or gain additional promotion; and from thence, up to the close of the war, his life in the invaded country was uneventful and without interest.

Yes, to him; for he was longing to return home.

"Going to the war" had lost all its excitement for him, the carnage of the past months and the sorrowful scenes he had witnessed having fairly satiated him with "glory" and all the horrors which follow in its train.

Now, he was fairly hungering for home, and the quiet of the old household at Lubeck with his "little mother" and Lorischen—not forgetting Mouser, to make home more homelike and enjoyable, for Fritz thought how he would have to teach Gelert, who had likewise escaped scathless throughout the remainder of the campaign in the north of France, to be on friendly terms with the old nurse's pet cat.

He was thinking of some one else too; for, lately, the letters of Madaleine had stopped, although she had previously corresponded with him regularly. He could not make out the reason for her silence. One despatch might certainly have been lost in transmission through the field post; but for three or four—as would have been the case if she had responded in due course to his effusions, which were written off to Darmstadt each week without fail—to miss on the journey, was simply impossible!

Some treachery must be at work; or else, Madaleine was ill; or, she had changed her mind towards him.

Which of these reasons caused her silence?

It was probably, he thought, the former which he had to thank for his anxiety; and the cause, he was certain, was the baroness. What blessings he heaped on her devoted head!

It was in this frame of mind that Fritz awaited the end of the war.

Chapter Eleven.

A Pleasant Surprise!

That winter was the dullest ever known in the little household of the Gulden Strasse, and the coldest experienced for years in Lubeck—quiet town of cold winters, situated as it is on the shores of the ice-bound Baltic!

It was such bitter, inclement weather, with the thermometer going down to zero and the snow freezing as it fell, that neither Madame Dort nor old Lorischen went out of the house more than they could help; and, as for Mouser, he lived and slept and miaow-wowed in close neighbourhood to the stove in the parlour, not even the temptation of cream inducing him to leave the protection of its enjoyable warmth. For him, the mice might ravage the cupboards below the staircase, his whilom happy hunting-ground, at their own sweet will; and the birds, rendered tame by their privations, invade the sanctity of the balcony and the window-sills, whereon at another season their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase. He heeded them not now, nor did he, as of yore, resent the intrusion of Burgher Jans' terrier, when that predatory animal came prowling within the widow's tenement in company with his master, who had not entirely ceased his periodic visits, in spite of "the cold shoulder" invariably turned to him by Lorischen. Mouser wasn't going to inconvenience himself for the best dog in Christendom; so, on the advent of the terrier, he merely hopped from the front of the stove to the top, where he frizzled his feet and fizzed at his enemy, without risking the danger of catching an influenza, as he might otherwise have done if he had sought refuge elsewhere out in the cold.

Aye, for it was cold; and many was the time, when, rubbing their tingling fingers, both the widow and Lorischen pitied the hardships to which poor Fritz was exposed in the field, almost feeling angry and ashamed at themselves for being comfortable when he had to endure so much—as they knew from all the accounts published in the newspapers of the sufferings which the invading armies had to put up with, although Fritz himself made light of his physical grievances.

At Christmas-tide they were sad enough at his absence, with the memory of the lost Eric also to make that merry-making time for others doubly miserable to them; but, on the dawn of the new year, their hopes began to brighten with the receipt of every fresh piece of news from France concerning the progress of the war.

"The end cannot be far off now," they said to one another in mutual consolation, so as to cheer up each other's drooping spirits. "Surely the campaign cannot last much longer!"

The last Sunday in the month came, and on this day Madame Dort and Lorischen went to the Marien Kirche to service.

Previously they had been in the habit of attending the Dom Kirche, from the fact of Eric's liking to see, first as a child and afterwards as a growing boy, the great astronomical clock whose queer-looking eyes rolled so very curiously with the swing of the pendulum backwards and forwards each second; but, now, they went to the other house of God for a different reason. It, too, had an eccentric clock, distinguished for a procession of figures of the saints, which jerked themselves into notice each hour above the dial; still it was not that which attracted the widow there. The church was filled with large monumental figures with white, outstretching wings, that hovered out into prominence above the carvings of the old oak screens, black with age. These figures appeared as if soaring up to the roof of the chancel; and Madame Dort had a fancy, morbid it might have been, that she could pray better there, surrounded as it were by guardian angels, whose protection she invoked on behalf of her boy lost at sea, and that other, yet alive, who was "in danger, necessity," and possibly "tribulation!"

After she and Lorischen had returned home from the Marien Kirche, the day passed quietly and melancholy away; but the next morning broke more cheerfully.

It was the 30th of January, 1871. Both the lone women at the little house in the Gulden Strasse remembered that fact well; for, on the morrow, the month from which they had expected such good tidings would be up, and if they heard nothing before its close they must needs despair.

Seeing that the morning broke bright and cheerily, with the sun shining down through the frost-laden air, making the snow on the roofs look crisper and causing the icicles from the eaves to glitter in its scintillating rays, Lorischen determined to go to market, especially as she had not been outside the doorway, except to go to church, since the previous week.

She had not much to buy, it is true; but then she might have a gossip with the neighbours and hear some news, perhaps—who knows?

Anything might have happened without the knowledge of herself or her mistress, as no one, not even Burgher Jans, had been to visit them for ever so long!

Clad, therefore, in her thick cloak and warm boots, with her wide, red-knitted woollen shawl over her head and portly market-basket on arm, Lorischen sallied out like the dove from the ark, hoping perchance to bring back with her an olive branch of comfort; while the widow sat herself down by the stove in the parlour with her needle, stitching away at some new shirts she was engaged on to renew Fritz's wardrobe when he came back. Seeing an opportunity for taking up a comfortable position, Mouser jumped up at once into her lap as soon as the old nurse had left the room, purring away with great complacency and watching in a lazy way the movements of her busy fingers, blinking sleepily the while at the glowing fire in front of him.

Lorischen had not been gone long when Madame Dort heard her bustling back up the staircase without. She knew the old nurse's step well; but, besides hers, she heard the tread of some one else, and then the noisy bark of a dog. A sort of altercation between two voices followed, in which the old nurse's angry accents were plainly perceptible; and

next there seemed a hurried scuffle just without the parlour door, which suddenly burst open with a clatter, and two people entered the room.

They were Lorischen and Burgher Jans, who both tried to speak together, the result being a confused jangle of tongues from which Madame Dort could learn nothing.

"I say I was first!" squeaked the Burgher in a high treble key, which he always adopted when excited beyond his usual placid mode of utterance.

"And I say it was me!" retorted the old nurse in her gruff tones, which were much more like those of a man. "What right have you to try and supplant the servant of the house, who specially went out about it, you little meddling teetotum, I'd like to know, hey?"

"But I was first, I say! Madame Dort—"

"Don't listen to him, mistress," interposed Lorischen. "I've just—"

"There's news of—"

But, bang just then came Lorischen's market-basket against the side of the little man's head, knocking his hat off and stopping his speech abruptly; while the old nurse muttered savagely, "I wish it had been your little turnip-top of a head instead of your hat, that I do!"

"Good people! good people!" exclaimed Madame Dort, rising to her feet and dropping her needlework and Mouser—who rapidly jumped on to the top of the stove out of the reach of Burgher Jans' terrier, which, of course, had followed his master into the parlour and at once made a dart at the cat as he tumbled on to the floor from the widow's lap. "Pray do not make such a noise, and both speak at once! What is the matter that you are so eager to tell me—good news, I trust, Lorischen, or you would not have hurried back so soon?"

Madame Dort's voice trembled with anxiety, and tears of suspense stood in her eyes.

"There," said Lorischen triumphantly to the Burgher, who remained silent for the moment from the shock of the old nurse's attack. "You see for yourself that my mistress wishes me to tell her."

"Oh, what is it—what have you heard?" cried the widow plaintively. "Do not keep me in this agony any longer!"

And she sat down again nervously in her chair, gazing from one to the other in mute entreaty and looking as if she were going to faint.

"There now, see what you've done!" said Lorischen, hastening to Madame Dort's side. "I told you what it would be if you blurted it out like that!"

Burgher Jans' eyes grew quite wide with astonishment beneath the broad rims of his tortoise-shell spectacles, giving him more than ever the appearance of an owl.

"Peace, woman!" he exclaimed. "I—"

"Yes, that's it, dear mistress," interrupted the old nurse, half laughing, half crying, as she knelt down beside the widow's chair and put her arm round her caressingly. "There's peace proclaimed at last, and the dear young Herr will come home again to you now!"

"Peace?" repeated the widow, looking up with an anxious stare from one to the other.

"Yes, peace, most worthy lady," said Burgher Jans pompously in his ordinary bland voice; adding immediately afterwards for Lorischen's especial benefit—"and I was the first to tell you of it, after all."

"Never mind," replied that worthy, too much overpowered with emotion at the happiness of the widow to contest the point. "We both brought the glad tidings together. Madame, dearest mistress, you are glad, are you not?"

But Madame Dort was silent for the moment. Her eyes were closed, and her lips moving in earnest prayer of thankfulness to Him who had heard her prayers and granted the fervent wish of her heart at last.

"Is it really true?" she asked presently.

"Yes, well-born and most worthy lady," replied the little fat man, whom Lorischen now allowed to speak without further interruption. "Our Bismark signed an armistice with the French at Versailles on Saturday by which Paris capitulates, the forts defending it being given over to our soldiers, and the starving city allowed to be reprovisioned by the good English, who have prepared ever so many train-loads of food to go in for the use of the population."

"Ah, those good English!" chimed in Lorischen.

"You have reason to say that, dearest maiden," continued the Burgher, bowing suavely to the old woman. "They subscribed, ah! more than a million thalers for this purpose in London."

"And I suppose the war will now cease?" said Madame Dort.

"Most certainly, worthy lady," replied Burgher Jans. "The armistice is to last for three weeks to enable the French to have an election of members to an assembly which will decide whether the contest shall go on any further; but there is no doubt, as their armies have all been defeated and their resources exhausted, that hostilities will not be again

resumed. All parties are sick of fighting by this time!"

"So I should think," exclaimed Lorischen warmly. "It has been a bloody, murdering work, that of the last six months!"

"Yes, but good for Germany," put in the little man in his bland way.

"Humph! much good, with widows left without their husbands and children fatherless, and the stalwart sons that should have been the help of their mothers made food for French powder and the chasseur! Besides, I don't think the German states, Mein herr," added the old nurse more politely than she usually addressed the Burgher, "will get much of the plunder. Mark my words if Prussia does not take the lion's share!"

"You have reason, dearest maiden," answered the other, agreeing with his old opponent for once. "I've no doubt that, like the poor Bavarians who had to do the heaviest part of the fighting, we shall get only the kicks and Prussia the halfpence!"

"That's more than likely," said Lorischen, much pleased at the similarity of their sentiments; "and I suppose we can expect Herr Fritz home soon now, eh?"

"Probably as soon as peace is regularly established; for then, our troops will commence to evacuate France and march back to the Rhine," replied Burgher Jans,— "that Rhine whose banks they have so valiantly defended."

"Ah, we'd better begin at once to prepare to receive our soldier lad," said the old nurse with much cheerfulness, as if she wished to set to without a moment's delay at making things ready for Fritz; seeing which, Burgher Jans took his departure, the widow and Lorischen both expressing their thanks for the good news he had brought, and the old nurse actually escorting him to the door in a most unusual fit of civility!

The definite treaty of peace between France and Germany was completed on the 28th February, 1871, when it was ratified by the constituent assembly sitting at Bordeaux, the conquered country surrendering two of her richest provinces, Alsace and Lorraine, together with the fortresses of Metz and Belfort—the strongest on the frontier—besides paying an indemnity of no less a sum than five milliards of francs, some two hundred millions of pounds in English money, to the victors!

It was a terrible price to pay for the war; for, in addition to these sacrifices must be reckoned:— 2,400 captured field guns; 120 eagles, flags, and standards; 4,000 fortress guns; and 11,669 officers and 363,326 men taken prisoners in battle and interned in Germany—not counting 170,000 men of the garrison of Paris who must be held to have surrendered to their conquerors, although these were not led away captive like the others, who were kept in durance until the first moiety of their ransom was paid!

But, Prince Bismark over-reached himself in grinding down the country as he did. He thought, that, by fixing such an enormous sum for the indemnity, France would be under the heel of Germany for years to come, as the Prussian troops were not to leave until the money was paid. Instead of which, by a general and stupendous movement of her population, inflamed by a praiseworthy spirit of patriotism, the five milliards were paid within a year and the French soil clear of the invader—this being the most wonderful thing connected with the war, some persons think!

Meanwhile, Madame Dort's anxiety to behold her son again at home and his earnest wish to the same effect had to await gratification.

The news of the armistice before Paris reached Lubeck on the 30th January; but it was not until March that the German troops began to evacuate their positions in front of the capital of France, and nearly the end of the month before the last battalion turned its face homeward.

Before that wished-for end was reached, Fritz was terribly heart-sick about Madaleine.

After a long silence, enduring for over a month, during which his mind was torn by conflicting doubts and fears, he had received a short, hurried note from her, telling him that she had been ill and was worried by domestic circumstances. She did not know what would become of her, she wrote, adding that he had better cease to think of her, although she would always pray for his welfare.

That was all; but it wasn't a very agreeable collapse to the nice little enchanted "castle in Spain" he had been diligently building up ever since his meeting with Madaleine at Mézières:— it was a sad downfall to the hopes he had of meeting her again!

Of course, he wrote to his mother, telling her of his misery; but she could not console him much, save by exhorting him to live in hope, for that all would come well in good time.

"Old people can't feel like young ones," thought Fritz. "She doesn't know what I suffer in my heart."

And so time rolled on slowly enough for mother and son; he, counting the days—sadly now, for his return was robbed of one of its chief expectations; she, gladly, watching to clasp her firstborn in her arms once more. Ample amends she thought this would be to her for all the anxiety she had suffered since Fritz had left home the previous summer, especially after her agonised fear of losing him!

Towards the close of March, the Hanoverian regiments returned to their depôt, Fritz being forwarded on to Lubeck.

As no one knew the precise day or hour when the train bearing him home might be expected to arrive, of course there was no one specially waiting at the railway station to welcome him back. Only the ordinary curiosity-mongers amongst the townspeople were there; but these were always on the watch for new-comers. They raised a sort of cheer when he and his comrades belonging to the neighbourhood alighted from the railway carriages; but, although

the cheering was hearty, and Fritz and the others joined in the popular Volkslied that the townspeople started, the young sub-lieutenant missed his mother's dear face and Lorischen's friendly, wrinkled old countenance, both of whom, somehow or other without any reason to warrant the assumption, he had thought would have been there.

It was in a melancholy manner, therefore, that he took his way towards the Gulden Strasse and the little house he had not seen for so long—could it only have been barely nine months ago?

How small everything looked now, after his travels and experiences of the busy towns and handsome cities of France which he had but so lately passed through! All here seemed quiet, quaint, diminutive, old-fashioned, like the resemblance to some antique picture, or the dream city of a dream!

Presently, he is in the old familiar street of his youth. It seemed so long and wide then; now, he can traverse its length in two strides, and it is so narrow that the buildings on either side almost meet in the middle.

But, the home-coming charm is on him; love draws him forward quickly like a magnet! He sees his mother's house at the end of the street. He is up the outside stairway with an agile bound.

With full heart, he bursts open the door, and, in a second, is within the parlour. He hears his mother's cry of joy.

"My son, my son!" and she throws herself on his neck, as he clasps her in a fond embrace, recollecting that once he never expected to have lived to see her again.

And Lorischen, too, she comes forward with a handshake and a hug for the boy she has nursed on her knee many a time in the years ago.

But, who is this besides?

"What! Madaleine?" exclaims Fritz.

"Yes, it is I," she replies demurely, a merry smile dancing on her face, and a glad light in the bright blue eyes.

This was the surprise Madame Dort had prepared for Fritz—a pleasant one, wasn't it, with which to welcome him home?

Chapter Twelve.

Family Councils.

"I have to thank you, dear mother, for this!" said Fritz, with an affectionate smile, to Madame Dort. "How did you contrive such a pleasant surprise?"

"You told me of your trouble, my son," she replied; "so I did my best to help you under the circumstances."

"And you, little traitress," exclaimed he, turning to Madaleine. "How could you keep me in suspense all those weary weeks that have elapsed since the year began?"

"I did not think you cared so much," said she defiantly.

"Cared!" he repeated.

"Well, it was not my fault," she explained. "When I wrote to you last, I really never thought I should see you again."

"You don't know me yet," said Fritz. "I should have hunted you out to the world's end! I had determined, as soon as I had seen mother, to go off to Darmstadt and find out what had become of you."

"And a nice wild-goose chase you would have had," answered Madaleine, tossing her head, and shaking the silky masses of golden hair, now unconfined by any jealous coiffe, with her blue eyes laughing fun. "You wouldn't have found me there! The baroness—"

"Hang her!" interrupted Fritz angrily; "I should like to settle her!"

"Ah, I wouldn't mind your doing that now," continued the girl naïvely; "she treated me very unkindly at the end."

"The brute!" said Fritz indignantly.

"Her son—the young baron, you know—came home from the war in January. He was invalided, but I don't think there was anything the matter with him at all; for, no sooner had he got back to the castle than he began worrying me, paying all sorts of attention and pestering me with his presence."

"Puppy!" exclaimed Fritz; "I would have paid him some delicate little attentions if I'd been there!"

"Oh, I knew how to treat him," said Madaleine. "I soon made him keep his distance! But it is the Baroness Stolzenkop that I complain of; she actually taxed me with encouraging him!"

"Indeed?" interrogated Fritz.

"Yes; and, when I told her I wouldn't choose her fop of a son if there wasn't another man in Germany, why she

accused me of impertinence, telling me that the fact of my having attracted the young baron was an honour which an humble girl in my position should have been proud of—she did, really!”

“The old cat!” said Fritz indignantly; “I should like to wring her neck for her.”

“Hush, my son,” interposed Madame Dort. “Pray don’t make use of such violent expressions. The baroness, you know, is exalted in rank, and—”

“Then all the greater shame for her to act so dishonourably,” he interrupted hotly. “She ought to be—I can find no words to tell what I would do to her, there!”

“Besides, Master Fritz,” said old Lorischen, “I won’t have you speak so disrespectfully of cats, the noblest animals on earth! Look at Mouser there, looking his indignation at you; can’t you see how he feels the reproach of your comparing him to that horrid baroness?”

This remark at once diverted the conversation, all turning in the direction the old nurse pointed, where a little comedy was being enacted.

Mouser—with his tail erected like a stiff bottle-brush, and every individual hair galvanised into a perpendicular position on his back, which was curved into the position of a bent bow with rage and excitement, his whiskers bristling out from each side of his head and his mouth uttering the most horrible anathemas the cat language is capable of—was perched on the back of Madame Dort’s arm-chair in the corner; while poor Gelert, the innocent cause of all this display of emotion on Mouser’s part, was calmly surveying him and sniffing interrogatory inquiries as to whom he had the pleasure of speaking. The dog had not yet been formally introduced to his new cat friend, and from the commanding position he had taken up, with his hind legs on the hearthrug and his fore paws on the seat of the easy chair, he had considerable advantage over pussy, should that sagacious creature think of fleeing to another vantage-ground; although the thought of this, it should be added, never crossed for an instant the mind of old Mouser; he knew well when he was safe.

Fritz burst out laughing.

“Lie down, Gelert!” he cried; and the retriever at once obeyed.

“Is that the dear dog?” inquired Madame Dort, stooping to pat him.

“Yes,” said Fritz, “this is Gelert, the brave, faithful fellow but for whom I would have bled to death on the battlefield and never have been saved by Madaleine!”

“Thanks be to God!” exclaimed the widow piously. “What a nice dog he is!”

“He is all that,” replied Fritz; “still, he must be taught not to molest Master Mouser. Here, Gelert!”

The dog at once sprang up again from his recumbent position on the hearthrug; while Mouser, his excessive spiny and porcupinish appearance having become somewhat toned down, was now watchfully observing this new variety of the dog species, which his natural instinct taught him to regard with antagonism and yet who was so utterly different from Burgher Jans’ terrier, the only specimen of the canine race with whom he had been previously acquainted.

“See,” said Fritz to the retriever, laying one hand on his head and stroking the cat with the other, “you mustn’t touch poor Mouser. Good dog!”

The animal gave a sniff of intelligence, seeming to know at once what was expected of him; and, never, from that moment, did he ever exhibit the slightest approach of hostility to pussy—no, not even when Mouser, as he did sometimes from curiosity, would approach him at the very delicate juncture when he was engaged on a bone, which few dogs can stand—the two ever after remaining on the friendliest of friendly terms; so friendly, indeed, that Mouser would frequently curl himself to sleep between Gelert’s paws on the hearthrug.

This little diversion had drawn away the conversation from Madaleine’s treatment by the old Baroness Stolzenkop; but, presently, Madame Dort proceeded to explain to Fritz that, on account of his telling her in one of his letters home how anxious he was in the matter, and knowing besides how much she was indebted to Madaleine for saving his life by her kindly nursing when he was in the villa hospital at Mézières, she had written to her at Darmstadt, asking her to pay her a visit and so light up a lonely house with her presence until her son should have returned from the war. “And a veritable house fairy she has been,” concluded the widow, speaking from her heart, with tears in her eyes. “She has been like sunshine to me in the winter of my desolation.”

“And Mouser likes her, too,” said Lorischen, as if that settled the matter.

“She’s the best manager in the world,” next put in Madame Dort. “She has saved me a world of trouble since she’s been in the house.”

“And she cooks better than any one else in Lubeck!” exclaimed the old nurse, not to be beat in enumerating all the good qualities of Fritz’s guardian angel, who had taken her heart, as well as the widow’s, by storm.

Meanwhile, the subject of all these remarks stood in the centre of the room, blushing at the compliments paid her on all sides.

“Dear me, good people, I shall have to run away if you go on like that,” she cried at last. “I have been so happy here,” she added, turning to Fritz. “It’s the first time I’ve known what home was since my mother died.”

"Poor child," said Madame Dort, opening her arms. "Come here, I'll be your mother now."

"Ah, that's just what I've longed for!" exclaimed Fritz rapturously. "Madaleine, will you be her daughter in reality?"

The girl did not reply in words, but she gave him one look, and then hid her face in the widow's bosom.

"Poor Eric," said the widow presently, resigning Madaleine to the care of Fritz, who was nothing loth to take charge of her—the two retreating to a corner and sitting down side by side, having much apparently to say to each other, if such might be surmised from their bent heads and whispered conversation. "If he were but here, my happiness would now be almost complete!"

"Yes," chimed in Lorischen as she bustled out of the room, Madame Dort following her quietly, so as to leave the lovers to themselves—"the dear flaxen-haired sailor laddie, with his merry ways and laughing eyes. I think I can see him now before me! Ah, it is just nineteen months to the day since he sailed away on that ill-fated voyage, you remember, mistress?"

But, she need not have asked the question. Madame Dort had counted every day since that bright autumn morning when she saw her darling for the last time at the railway station. It was not likely that she would forget how long he had been absent!

Later on, when the excitement of coming home to his mother and meeting with Madaleine had calmed down, Fritz, having ceased to be a soldier, his services not being any longer required with the Landwehr, turned his attention to civil employment; for, now, with the prospect of marrying before him, it was more urgent than ever that he should have something to do in order to occupy his proper position as bread-winner of the family, the widow's means being limited and it being as much as she could do to support herself and Lorischen out of her savings, without having to take again to teaching—which avocation, indeed, her health of late years had rendered her unable to continue, had she been desirous of resuming it again.

Madaleine, of course, could have gone out as a governess, Madame Dort being, probably, easily able to procure her a situation in the family of one of her former pupils; or she might have resumed the position of a hospital nurse, for which she had been trained at Darmstadt, having been taken on as an assistant in the convalescent home established in that town by the late Princess Alice of Hesse, when the Baroness Stolzenkop turned her adrift. But Fritz would not hear of Madaleine's leaving his mother.

"No," said he decisively to her, "your place is here with mutterchen, who regards you as a daughter—don't you, mother?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the widow readily enough—"so long as I'm spared."

"There, you see, you've no option," continued Fritz triumphantly. "Mother would not be able to do without you now. Besides, it is not necessary. I will be able to earn bread enough for all. Look at these broad shoulders and strong arms, hey! What were they made for else, I'd like to know?"

Still, Fritz did not find it so easy to get employment as he thought.

Herr Grossnapper had kept the clerkship he had formerly filled in his counting-house open for him some time after the commencement of the war; but, finding that Fritz would be away much longer than he had expected, he had been forced to employ a substitute in his place. This young man had proved himself so diligent and active in mastering all the details of the business in a short time, that the worthy shipowner did not wish to discharge him now when his original clerk returned, and Fritz himself would have been loth to press the matter; although, he had looked upon his re-engagement in the merchant's office as a certainty when he came back to Lubeck.

Fritz had thought, with that self-confidence which most of us possess, that no one could possibly have kept Herr Grossnapper's books or calculated insurances with such ability as he could, and that the worthy merchant would have been only too delighted to welcome so able a clerk when he walked into the counting-house again. He had not lived long enough to know that as good, or better, a man can always be found to fill the place of even the best; and that, much as we may estimate our own value, a proportionate equivalent can soon be supplied from other sources!

So, much to Fritz's chagrin, on going down to the merchant's place of business on the quay, all eagerness to resume work again on the old footing, he found that he was not wanted: he would have to apply elsewhere for employment.

"Oh, that will not be a hard matter," he thought to himself.

"Softly, my friend," whispered fickle Dame Fortune in his ear, "not quite so fast! Things don't always turn out just as you wish, young sir, with your reliant impetuosity!"

Lubeck had never been at any time a bustling place, for it had no trade to speak of; and now, since the war had crippled commerce, everything was in a state of complete stagnation. Ships were laying up idle all along the banks of the great canal, although spring was advancing and the ice-chains that bound up the Baltic would soon be loosed. There were no cargoes to be had; and perforce, the carriers of the sea were useless, making a corresponding dearth of business in the houses of the shipping firms. Why, instead of engaging fresh hands at their desks, they would have need soon to discharge some of their old ones! This was the answer that met his ear at every place he applied to, and he had finally to give up all hope of finding work in his native town.

It was the same elsewhere.

The five milliards of ransom paid by France, brought no alleviation of the enormous taxation imposed on Germany to bear the expense of organising the great military machine employed to carry out the war. The Prussian exchequer

alone reaped the benefit of this plunder of the conquered nation; as for the remaining states of the newly created empire, they were not a farthing to the good for all the long train of waggons filled with gold and silver and bales of bank-notes that streamed over the frontier when the war indemnity was paid. If possible, their position was made worse instead of better; as, from the more extravagant style of living now adopted, in lieu of the former frugal habits in vogue—on account of the soldiers of the Fatherland learning to love luxury through their becoming accustomed during the campaign to what they had never dreamt of in their lives before—articles of food and dress became increased in price, so that it was a difficult matter for people with a small income to make both ends meet.

Ah, there was wide-spread poverty and dearth of employment throughout the length and breadth of the land, albeit there might be feasting and hurraing, and clinking of champagne glasses *Unter den Linden* at Berlin!

However, Fritz was not the sort of fellow to grow despondent, or fail to recognise the urgency of the situation.

Long before Eric had gone to sea, he had fancied that Lubeck, with its slow movements and asthmatic trade, offered little opening for the energy and ability with which he felt himself endowed; for, he might live and die a clerk there, without the chance of ever rising to anything else. He had frequently longed to go abroad and carve out a fortune in some fresh sphere; but the thought of leaving his mother alone prevented him from indulging in this day-dream, and he had determined, much against the grain, to be satisfied with the humble lot which appeared to be his appointed place in life.

Now, however, circumstances had changed. His place was filled up in the old world; Providence itself forced him to seek an opening in the new.

His mind was made up at once.

"Little mother," said he one evening, when he had been home a month, seeing every prospect of employment shut out from him—his last hope, that of a situation in the house of a comrade's father at Coblenz, from which he had expected great things, having failed—"I've determined to emigrate to America—that is, if you do not offer any objection; for I should not like to go without your consent, although I see there's no chance for me here in Germany."

"What!" exclaimed Madame Dort, so startled that she let her knitting drop. "Go to America, across the terrible sea?"

Fritz had already explained matters to Madaleine, and she, brave-hearted girl that she was, concealing her own feelings at the separation between them which her lover's resolve would necessitate, did not seek to urge him against his will to abandon his project. She believed in his honesty of purpose, relying on his strong, impulsive character; and what he had decided on, she decided, too, as a good wife that was to be, would be best not only for them both but for all.

"Yes, to America, *mutterchen*," he replied to the widow's exclamation, speaking in a tender voice of entreaty. "It is not so very far, you know, dear little mother, eh? It will be only from Bremerhaven to Southampton in England,—you recollect going there with me for a trip, don't you, the year before last?—and from Southampton to New York; and, there, I shall be in my new home in ten days' time at the outside! Why, it's nothing, a mere nothing of a voyage when you come to consider it properly."

"Across the wide, wild ocean that has already robbed me of Eric, my youngest," went on poor Madame Dort, unheeding his words; "you, my firstborn—my only son now—I shall never see you more, I know!" and she gave way to a burst of tears.

"Say not so, darling mother," said Madaleine, throwing her arms round her and joining in her weeping with a sympathetic heart, feeling quite as great grief at the idea of parting with her lover. "He will return for us both bye-and-bye. He is only going to make that home for us in the Far West we've read about so often lately, which he cannot hope to establish here; and then, my mother,—for you are my mother too, now, are you not?—he will come back for you and me, or we will go out and join him."

"And I should like to know what will become of me, Fraulein Madaleine," interposed Lorischen indignantly. "Am I to be left behind to be bothered all my life long by that little plague, Burgher Jans?"

"No, no, Lorischen," laughed Fritz; "a home across the sea in America would not be a home without you—or Mouser, either," he added.

"That's all right, then," said the old nurse affably; her digression serving to break the gravity of the conversation, and make Madame Dort take a better view of the matter.

"But, it's a terrible journey, though, a terrible journey—almost worse than parting with him to go to the war," said the widow sadly to herself.

"Ah, but you did not have Madaleine with you then," replied Fritz, turning a look of affection to the fair girl clinging to his mother. "She will be a daughter to you, and comfort you in my absence, I know."

"Aye, that I will," exclaimed Madaleine fondly, caressing her adopted parent and gazing at Fritz with the blue eyes full of love, although blinded with tears. "I shall love her dearly for your sake, my darling, as well as for her own—and my own too; and we will all look forward to meeting again happily after our present parting, with hope and trust in the good God who will protect and watch over you in return for our prayers!"

"Amen to that," said Lorischen heartily. "And I tell you what it is, Master Fritz—we'll be all ready when you give the word to follow you across the sea to that wonderful America! I declare I'm quite longing to see it, for I don't think much of this Lubeck now, with such curious, meddling, impertinent people in it like that odious little fat man, Burgher

Jans."

These words of the old nurse put them all in a merry mood, and the family council thus terminated more cheerily than it had begun.

Chapter Thirteen.

Across the Atlantic.

Fritz was as prompt in action as he was rapid in resolve; so in a few days after he had imparted to Madaleine and his mother his intention of emigrating to America, his last good-byes were exchanged with the little household in the Gulden Strasse—not forgetting the faithful Gelert, now domiciled in the family, whom it was impossible to take with him on account of the expense and trouble his transit would have occasioned, besides which, the good doggie would be ever so much better looked after by those left behind and would serve "as a sort of pledge," Fritz told Madaleine, "of his master's return!"

Yes, within a week at the outside, he had left Lubeck once more, and was on his way to that western "land of the free" which Henry Russell the ballad writer, has sung of:— where the "mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea," and where imperial autocrats and conscription are undreamt of—although, not so very, very many years ago, it was convulsed in the throes of a civil war which could boast of as gigantic struggles between hostile forces and as terrible and bloodthirsty battles as those which had characterised that Franco-German campaign, in which Fritz had but so recently participated and been heartily sick of before it terminated!

The love of colonisation seems to be the controlling spirit of modern times.

Some sceptics in the truth of historical accuracy, have whispered their suspicions that, the "New World" was actually discovered at a date long anterior to the age of Columbus; but, even allowing that there might be some stray scrap of fact for this assertion, it may be taken for granted that the first nucleus of our present system of emigration, from the older continent to the "new" one, originated in the little band of thirty-nine men left behind him by Christopher in Hispaniola, at the close of his first "voyage beyond seas," in the year 1493, or thereabouts. This small settlement failed, as is well-known, and the bones of the Genoese mariner who founded it have been mouldering in dust for centuries. Sir Walter Raleigh—the gallant imitator of Columbus, treading so successfully in his footsteps as to illustrate the old adage of the pupil excelling the master, the original expounder, indeed, of the famous "Westwards Ho!" doctrine since preached so ably by latter-day enthusiasts—has also departed to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. So have, likewise, a host of others, possessing names proudly borne on the chronicle of fame as martyrs to the universal spread of discovery and spirit of progress. But, the love of enterprise, and consequent expansion of civilisation and commercial venture, inaugurated by the brave old pioneers of Queen Elizabeth's day, have not ceased to impel similar seekers after something beyond ordinary humdrum life. The path of discovery, although narrowed through research, has not yet been entirely exhausted; for "fresh fields and pastures new," as hopeful as those about which Milton rhapsodised and as plenteously flowing with typical milk and honey as the promised land of the Israelites, are being continually opened up and offered to the oppressed and pauperised populations of Europe. Thus, the tide of emigration, swelled from the tiny ocean-drop which marked its first inception more than three hundred years ago to its present torrentine proportions and bearing away frequently entire nationalities on its bosom, still flows from the east to the west, tracing the progress of civilisation from its Alpha to its Omega, as steadily as when it originally began—aye, and as it will continue to flow on, until the entire habitable globe shall be peopled as with one family by the intermixture and association of alien races!

It is curious how this migratory spirit has permeated through the odd corners of the old world, leading the natives of different countries to flock like sheep to every freshly spoken of colony; and how, by such means, Englishmen, Celts, Germans, French, Hollanders, Italians, Norsemen, Africans, as well as the "Heathen Chinees," are scattered in a mixed mass over the whole face of the earth now-a-days, as widely as the descendants of Noah were dispersed from the plain of Shinar after their unsuccessful attempt at building the tower of Babel—the result being, that some of the highest types of advancement are at present to be found where, but a few years back, uncultivated savages, as rude but perhaps not quite so inquisitive as the late Bishop Colenso's apocryphal Zulu, were the sole existing evidences of latent humanity!

Fritz, however, was not proceeding to any of these newly colonised countries. Like the majority of other Germans who had emigrated before him, he was aiming for "the States," where, according to the popular idea in Europe, money can be had for nothing in the shape of any expenditure of labour, time, or trouble. Really, the ne'er-do-well and shiftless seem to regard America as a sort of Tom Tiddler's ground for the idle, the lazy, and the dissolute—although, mind you, Fritz was none of these, having made up his mind to work as hard in the New World as he would have been forced to do in the Old for the fortune he could not win there, and which he had been forced to turn his back on.

Bremerhaven to Southampton; Southampton to Sandy Hook, as he had told his mother; and, in ten days altogether, the ocean steamer he travelled in, one of the North German line, had landed him safely in New York.

Seven years before, when he would have reached the "Empire City" during the height of the Secession War, he might have sold himself to a "bounty jumper," as the enlisting agents of the northern army were termed, for a nice little sum in "greenback" dollars; now, he found sharpers, or "confidence men," ready to "sell" him in a similar way—only, that the former rogues would have been satisfied with nothing less than his body and life, as an emigrant recruit for Grant or Sherman's force; while the present set cared but for his cash, seeking the same with ravenous maw almost as soon as he had landed at Castle Garden!

Fritz had taken a steerage passage, so as to save money; and, being dressed in shabby clothes, in keeping with his third-class ticket, the loafers about the Battery, at the end of Manhattan Island, on which the town of New York is

built, thought he was merely an ignorant German peasant whom they might easily impose on. They, however, soon found that he had not been campaigning six months for nothing, and so their efforts at getting him to part with the little capital he had were pretty well thrown away—especially as Fritz, in his anxiety to find some work to do at once, did not “let the grass grow under his feet,” but proceeded up Broadway instead of wasting his time by lounging in the vicinity of the emigrant depôt, as the majority of his countrymen generally do, apparently in the expectation that employment will come in search of them.

Still, he soon discovered that New York was overstocked with just the species of labour he was able to supply.

Of course, if he had been at the pitch of desperation, he might have found a job of some sort to his hand; but, writing and speaking English and French fluently in addition to his native tongue, besides being a good correspondent and book-keeper, he did not feel disposed to throw away his talents on mere manual labour. He had emigrated to “make his fortune,” or, at all events, to achieve a position in which he could hope to build up a home for the dear ones left behind at Lubeck; and there would not be much chance of his accomplishing this by engaging himself out as a day labourer—to assist some skilled carpenter or bricklayer—which was the only work offered him.

“No, sir; nary an opening here!” was the constant reply he met with at every merchant’s office he entered from Wall Street upwards along Broadway until he came to Canal Street; when, finding the shops, or “stores” as the Americans call them, going more in the “dry goods” or haberdashery line, he wended his way back again “down town,” investigating the various establishments lying between the main thoroughfare and the North and East rivers, hoping to find a situation vacant in one of the shipping houses thereabouts.

But, “No, sir; all filled up, I guess,” was still the stereotyped response to his applications, with much emphasis on the “sir”—the majority of the Manhattanese uttering this word, as Fritz thought, in a highly indignant tone, although, as he discovered later on, this was the general pronunciation adopted throughout the States.

“I suppose,” he said to one gentleman he asked, and who was, it seemed to Fritz, the master, or “boss,” of the establishment, from the fact of his lounging back in a rocking chair contiguous to his desk, and balancing his feet instead of his hands on the latter,—“I suppose it’s because I can give no references to former employers here, that all the men I speak to invariably decline my services?”

“No, sirree; I reckon not,” was the reply. “Guess we don’t care a cuss where you come from. We take a man as we find him, for just what he is worth, without minding what he might have been in the old country, or bothering other folks for his ka-racter, you bet! I reckon, mister, you’d better start right away out West if you want work. Book-keepers and sich-like are played out haar; we’re filled up to bustin’ with ’em, I guess!”

It was good advice probably; but, still, Fritz did not care to act upon it. Having been accustomed all his life to the shipping trade, he wished to find some opening in that special branch of business; and, if he went inland to Chicago or elsewhere, he thought, he would be abandoning his chances for securing the very sort of work he preferred to have. Besides, going away from the neighbourhood of ships and quays and the sea would be like cutting adrift every old association with Lubeck and Europe; while, in addition, he had directed his letters from home to be sent to the “Poste Restante, New York,” and if he left that city, why he would never hear how Madaleine and his mother were getting on in his absence!

So, for days and days he patrolled the town in vain; seeking for work, and finding none. The place, as his candid informer had said, was filled with clerks like himself in search of employment; and they, linguists especially, were a drug in the market—the cessation of the Franco-German War having flooded the country with foreign labour.

What should he do?

Before making a move, as everybody advised him, he determined to await the next mail steamer. This would bring him a letter from home, in answer to the one he had written, immediately on landing, telling of his safe arrival in the New World. He was dying to have, if only, a line from those dear ones he had left with a good-bye in the Gulden Strasse, recounting all that had happened since he had started from home—his passage across the Atlantic having lasted, according to his morbid imagination, at least as long as the war he had lately served through!

At last, a letter came; and, as it really put fresh heart in him—cheering up his drooping energies and banishing a sort of despondent feeling which had begun to prey upon him, altering him completely from his former buoyant self—he made up his mind in his old prompt fashion to visit some of the other seaports on the coast, “Down East,” as Americans say, in order to try whether he might not be able there to get a billet.

He had very little money left now; for, he had not brought much with him from home, originally and the greater part of what he had in his pockets when he came ashore had melted away in paying for his board and lodging while remaining in New York. Although he had put up at the cheapest boarding-house he could find, it was far dearer than the most expensive accommodation in Lubeck or even at a first-class hotel in any large town on the Continent. Living in such a city was actually like eating hard cash!

Fritz saw that he would have to proceed on his journey along the coast as cheaply as possible:— he had not much to spare for railway and steamboat fares.

With this resolution staring him in the face, he made his way one afternoon to the foot of Canal Street, from the quays facing which, on the North River, start the huge floating palaces of steamers that navigate the waters of Long Island Sound—visiting on their way those New England States where, it may be recollected, the Pilgrim Fathers landed after their voyage in the *Mayflower*, of historic renown, a couple of odd centuries ago.

One of these vessels had “Providence” marked on her; and the name at once arrested the attention of Fritz.

"Himmel!" he said to himself, with a superstitious sort of feeling like that which he used to ridicule in old Lorischen when she read omens in Mouser's attitudes and cat language of a night—"this looks lucky; perhaps providence is going to interpose on my behalf, and relieve me from all the misery and anxiety I'm suffering! At all events, I will go on board and see where the steamer is bound for."

No sooner said than done.

Fritz stepped on to the gangway; and, quickly gaining the vessel, asked one of the deck hands he saw forward where she was going to.

"Ha-o-ow?" repeated the man—meaning "what?"

"Where are you bound for?" said Fritz again.

"Providence, Rhode Island, I guess, mister. Can't ye see it writ up?"

"And where's that?" further inquired Fritz.

"New England way, I reckon, whar I wer raised."

"Any ships or shipping trade there?"

The man laughed out heartily.

"Jerusalem, that's prime, anyhow!" he exclaimed. "Any ships at Providence? Why, you might as well ask if thar wer any fish in the sea! Thar are heaps and heaps on 'em up to Rhode Island, mister, from a scoop up to a whaler; so I guess we can fix you up slick if you come aboard!"

"All right, I will," said Fritz; "that is, if the fare is not too high."

"Guess two-fifty won't break you, hey?" responded the deck hand, meaning two-and-a-half dollars.

"No," said Fritz; "I think I can manage that. What time do you start?"

"Five o'clock sharp."

"That will just give me time to fetch my valise," said Fritz, thinking aloud.

"Where away is that?" asked the man.

"Chatham Street," answered Fritz, "just below the town hall."

"Oh, I know, mister, well enough whar Chatham Street is! Yes, you'll have plenty of time if you look smart."

"Thank you, I will," said Fritz; and, going back to the boarding-house where he had been stopping, he soon returned to the quay with the little valise that carried all his impedimenta—reaching the steamer just in the nick of time as she was casting off.

As he jumped on to her deck, the gangway was withdrawn.

"All aboard?" sang out the captain from the pilot-house on the hurricane deck.

"Aye, aye, all aboard," was the response from Fritz's friend the deck hand, who, with only a red flannel shirt on and a pair of check trousers—very unsailorlike in appearance altogether—stood in the bows.

"Then fire away and let her rip!" came the reply from the captain above, followed by the tinkle of an electric bell in the engine-room, the steamer's paddles revolving with a splash the moment afterwards and urging her on her watery way.

Round the Battery at Manhattan Point she glided, and up the East River through Hell Gate into Long Island Sound—one of the most sheltered channels in the world, and more like a lake or lagoon than an arm of the sea—leaving a broad wake of creamy green foam behind her like a mill-race, and quivering from stem to stern with every revolution of her shaft, with every throb of her high-pressure engines!

Chapter Fourteen.

An Unexpected Meeting.

The Rhode Island steamer was a splendid boat, Fritz found, when he came to look about her; for, she was a "floating palace," every inch of her, with magnificent saloons and state-cabins stretching away the entire length of the vessel fore and aft. A light hurricane deck was above all, on which the passengers could promenade up and down to their hearts' content, having comfortable cane-bottomed seats along the sides to sit down upon when tired and no gear, or rope coils, or other nautical "dunnage," to interrupt their free locomotion on this kind of quarter-decks, which had, besides, an awning on top to tone down the potency of the western sun.

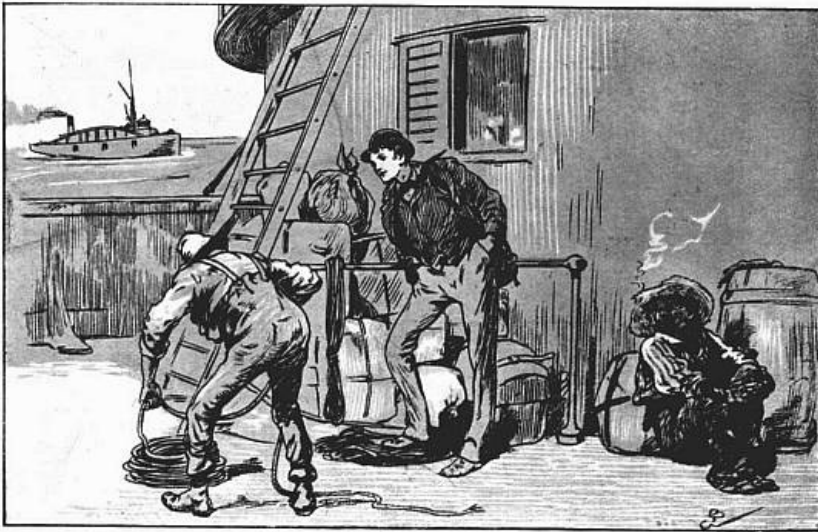
With three tiers of decks—the lowermost, or main, containing the engine-room and stowage place for cargo, as well as the men's quarters; the lower saloon, in which were the refreshment bars, and what could only appropriately be

called the "dining hall," if such a term were not an anachronism on board ship; and, thirdly, the upper saloon, containing the principal cabins and state-rooms, in addition to the graceful promenading hurricane deck surmounting the whole—the steamer had the appearance of one of those bungalow-like pretended "houses" which children build up with a pack of cards. Only that, this illusion was speedily destroyed by the huge beam of the engine, working up and down like a monster chain-pump on top of the whole structure—not to speak of the twin smoke-stacks on either side of the paddle-boxes emitting volumes of thick, stifling vapour, and the two pilot-houses, one at each extremity of the hurricane deck; for, like most American river steamers, the boat was what was called a "double-ender," built whale-boat fashion to go either backwards or forwards, a very necessary thing to avoid collision in crowded waters.

Fritz could not but realise that the ingenious construction which he was gazing at was essentially a Yankee invention, resembling nothing in European waters.

If he had not yet been fully convinced of this fact, the eldritch screech which the steam whistle shortly evolved, in obedience to the pressure of the captain's finger on a valve in the pilot-house forward—whence the vessel was steered—would have at once decided his mind on the point. It was the most fearful, ear-deafening, blood-curdling sound he had ever heard in his life!

Fritz thought something had happened—that the boiler was in danger of bursting, or the vessel sinking at the least—but, on making a startled inquiry of the nearest person, he was reassured by learning that the "whistle," as the frightful noise was called, was only emitted in courteous salutation to another steamer passing in the distance, bound down to New York; and soon, an answering squeal from the boat in question,



"Nice song that," said Fritz.

mercifully tempered by the distance into a faint squeak that lent more "enchantment" to its notes than was possessed by the one which had just startled him, corroborated the truth of this statement.

After enjoying the scenery from the hurricane deck for some little time, Fritz made his way below to the forward part of the main deck running into the bows, where he had noticed, while looking down from above, his friend the deck hand of the Garibaldi shirt and blue cotton check trousers—or "pants" as the man would himself probably have called these garments.

He was busily engaged coiling down ropes and otherwise making himself useful, singing the while in a light-hearted way a queer sort of serio-comic and semi-sentimental ditty, the most curious composition Fritz had ever come across.

He, therefore, could not help laughing when the singer arrived at the end of his lay.

The man turned round at once on hearing the sound of his merriment.

"Nice song, that," said Fritz, as soon as he could compose his face sufficiently to speak. "Just the sort of tender tone about it that I like!"

"None o' your gas, mister," replied the other with a smile, which showed that he was not offended at Fritz's chaff. "It's only a lot o' nonsense I picked up somehow or other out West."

"It is a very funny mixture," said Fritz. "It is a wonder to me who imagines these absurd things and makes them up!"

"Right you air," replied the man. "A heap more curious it is than the folks who write the clever things; and the queerest bit about it is, too, that the nonsense spreads quicker and faster than the sense!"

"Human nature," said Fritz laconically, expressing thus his opinion of the matter.

"You're a philosopher, I reckon?" observed the deck hand in reply.

"No, not quite that," answered Fritz, rather surprised at such a remark from a man of the sort. "I merely form conclusions from what I see. I'm only a clerk—and you?"

"I'm a deck hand now," said the other, speaking rather bitterly. "Last fall, I was a cow boy, Minnesota way; next year, I'll be goodness knows what. Once, I was a gentleman!"

"And how—" began Fritz, when the other interrupted him brusquely.

"Put it all down to the cussed drink, mister, and you won't be far out," said he, laughing mockingly, so as to disguise what he really felt by the avowal; "but," he added, to turn the conversation, "you speak very good English for a German, which I ken see you are."

"I was educated partly in England," said Fritz.

"Ah, that accounts for it. Been long in this country?"

"About six weeks," replied Fritz.

"Travelling for pleasure, or looking about you?" was the next query from the deck hand, whom Fritz thought strangely inquisitive for an utter stranger. Still, the man did not mean any harm; it was only the custom of the country, as all new-comers speedily find out.

"I'm looking about for work," he answered rather curtly. "I wish you would get me some."

Fritz thought this would have silenced his interlocutor; but, instead of that, the deck hand proceeded with a fresh string of questions.

"What can you do?" he asked amiably, his smile robbing the words of any impertinence. "You don't look like one who has roughed it much."

"No?" said Fritz, somewhat amused. "You would not think, then, that I had been all through the terrible war we've had with France, eh?"

"Pst!" ejaculated the other. "You don't call that a war, do you? Why, you don't know what a war is in your miserable, played-out old continent! Look at ours, lasting nearly four years, and the battle of Gettysburgh, with thirty thousand dead alone! What do you think of that, hey?"

"Gravelotte had nearly as many," said Fritz quietly.

"All right, mister; we won't argy the p'int now; but you haven't answered me yet as to what you ken do."

"Well, then," answered Fritz, "I can speak and write three languages, keep books, and act as a good correspondent and manager."

"I like that," exclaimed the other admiringly. "You speak slick and straight to the p'int, without any bunkum or blarney, like some of them that come over here. But, what line have you run on in the old country?"

"The shipping business is what I know best about," replied Fritz.

"Ah, that's the reason, I suppose, you asked me if thar wer any ships up to Providence, hey, mister?"

"Yes," said Fritz. "I have applied to all the houses in New York in vain, and I thought I would try my chance at some other seaport town."

"Didn't like going inland, then!"

"No," he answered.

"And so you selected Providence?"

"I only did so from chance. If I had not seen the name painted on the steamer, I would not have thought of speaking to you and asking where she was going."

"And if you had not spoken to me again, why, I would not have known anything about you, nor been able to put you in the way of something," replied the deck hand, more earnestly than he had yet spoken.

"You can do that?" said Fritz eagerly.

"Yes; but wait till we get to Providence. As soon as the old ship is moored alongside the wharf and all the luggage ashore, you come along of me, and I'll show you whar to go. I shall be my own boss then, with no skipper to order me about."

The man hurried off as he said these last words, in obedience to a hail from above—telling him to go and do something or other, "and look smart about it too"—which had probably influenced his remark about being his own "boss" when he got to land; and Fritz did not see him again until the next morning, by which time the steamer had reached its destination.

To Fritz's eyes, Providence was more like a European town than New York, the more especially from his being accustomed to the look of seaports on the Baltic and banks of the Elbe; for the houses were mostly built of stone, and there was much less of that wooden, flimsy look which the newly sprung up cities of America possess.

This old-fashioned appearance is a characteristic of all the New England states—Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—for, here the original "Pilgrim Fathers" settled down and built unto themselves dwellings as nearly like those they had left behind them as it was possible with the materials to their hands, their descendants seemingly keeping up the habit of building in like manner. If this is not the case, then, most certainly, the old buildings of two

centuries ago have lasted uncommonly well!

Fritz waited to go ashore until his friend the deck hand should be disengaged. He had seen him soon after they reached the steamer's wharf; and, again, a second time when the crowd of passengers, with the exception of himself, brought up from New York had all disembarked—the man telling him he was just going to “clean himself down a bit,” and he would then be ready to take him to a decent place to stop, where he would not be charged too exorbitantly for his board.

And so Fritz waited on the steamer's deck alongside the quay, gazing with much interest at the scene around him.

There were not quite so many ships as his casual acquaintance had led him to expect when he told him he would “see heaps up thaar”; but, still, the port evidently had a large import trade, for several big vessels were moored in the harbour and others were loading up at the wharves or discharging cargo, the latter being in the majority, while lots of smaller sailing craft and tiny boats were flying about, transporting goods and bales of merchandise to other places further up the river.

He had hardly, however, seen half what was in view when some one tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned round.

It was his friend the deck hand of the red flannel shirt and blue check cotton trousers; but, a wonderful transformation had taken place in his dress!

Clad now in an irreproachable suit of black, with a broad, grey felt hat on his head, the man looked quite the gentleman he had represented himself as once being. His manners, too, seemed to have changed with his outer apparel, the off-hand boorishness of the whilom “deck hand” having vanished with his cast-off raiment.

“I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, sir,” he said to Fritz, still, however, with the strongly accentuated “sir” he had noticed in those who had spoken to him at New York, “but I've hurried up as quickly as I could. Shall we now go ashore?”

“Certainly,” said Fritz, “although you've not detained me, I assure you. I have had plenty to look at during the little time I've been waiting.”

“Ah, you've not seen half of Providence yet,” replied the other, as the two stepped from the gangway that led from the deck of the steamer on to the stone quay alongside. “Why, some of the houses further up are finer than those of Broadway!”

“This is your native place, I suppose?” said Fritz slyly.

“Yes,” answered his companion, “but I do not flatter it on that account.”

The two walked on, until presently the Rhode Islander stopped in front of one of the smaller hotels. This looked, despite its lesser proportions, in comparison with its larger rivals, far more respectable and aristocratic—if such terms may be permitted to anything appertaining to the land of so-called “equality” and “freedom,” where, according to the poetical belief, there is no aristocracy save hat of merit and shoddy!

“Let's go in here,” said the deck hand. “It is a great place for the merchants and sea-captains, and I might be able to introduce you to some one I know while we're having a drink.”

“It's too early for that,” said Fritz, feeling inclined to draw back, remembering what his companion had confessed the night before about his habits.

“Ah, I see,” exclaimed the other, colouring up as he took the hint, being evidently highly sensitive. “But you need not be afraid of that now. I'm always on my good behaviour whenever I come up to Providence. I'm really not going in here to drink now, I assure you; this is a house of call for business people, and I want to see some one just come home whom I know.”

“All right, then,” said Fritz, going into the hotel without any further protest; when, following his companion through several long passages, they at length entered a large room at the back.

“Jerusalem!” ejaculated the Rhode Islander almost the very instant he had crossed the threshold of this apartment. “If that aren't the identical coon right oppo-site, mister!”

“Where?” asked Fritz.

“There,” said the other, pointing to where a rather short, broad-shouldered man was engaged in conversation with a lithe lad, whose back was turned but the colour of whose hair reminded Fritz of poor Eric.

“Hullo, Cap'en Brown,” sang out the whilom deck hand at this juncture; and, the broad-shouldered man looking round in the direction whence the voice proceeded, the lad also turned his face towards Fritz.

Good heavens! It was his brother Eric, whom he and every one at home had believed to be buried beneath the ocean with the rest of the boat's crew that had escaped when the *Gustav Barentz* foundered, nothing of them having been heard since!

With one bound he was across the room.

“Eric!” he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Fritz!" ejaculated the other; and, forgetting their surroundings in the joy of thus meeting again, the two brothers fell into each other's arms, almost weeping with joy.

"By thunder!" said the Rhode Islander to his friend the sea captain, both looking on with much interest at the affecting scene, "I'm glad I made him come in here anyhow, and we'll have a licker-up on the strength of it, Cap'en Brown. It seems it wer a sort of providence that made him take our boat away haar, after all!"

Chapter Fifteen.

The Yankee Skipper.

"And how on earth did you escape?" asked Fritz, when he and Eric had somewhat recovered from their first surprise and emotion at meeting again in so unexpected a manner.

"Well, it's a long story to tell, brother," replied Eric, as soon as he could speak calmly, putting his arm through that of Fritz and drawing him towards a sort of long sofa, like a divan, which stretched across one side of the wide apartment where they had so strangely encountered—the other and opposite side of the room being occupied by the usual long hotel "bar," common in most American towns, in front of which various little detached groups of people were standing up, drinking and chatting together. "Suppose we come to an anchor here awhile, and I'll reel you off a yarn about all that has happened to me since I left Lubeck."

"All right, we may as well sit down, at all events," said Fritz. "They won't charge us for that, eh?"

"Oh no, I guess not," answered Eric, with that old light-hearted laugh of his, which his brother had never thought he should ever hear again. "This is a free country, they say, you know!"

"Now tell me all about yourself," said Fritz, when they had ensconced themselves comfortably in the furthest corner of the divan, or settee, which they had pretty much to themselves. "I'm dying to know how you were saved!"

"Right you are, my hearty," replied Eric, in sailor fashion. "Here goes for the log of my cruise in the poor old *Gustav Barentz*!"

"Fire away!" said Fritz; and then, the lad thereupon began his story.

The ship, Eric declared, was found to be terribly leaky almost as soon as they had started on the voyage, and this necessitated their having to put into Plymouth for repairs, which detained them a considerable time. Indeed, it was as much as they could do to patch her up at all; for, her timbers were so rotten and the vessel had been strained so much from overloading that she was really unfit to be sent to sea. However, as Fritz already knew, the *Gustav Barentz* managed to clear out of the Channel, reaching the latitude of the Cape de Verde Islands all right, and it was shortly after passing Teneriffe that Eric had been enabled to forward that letter of his which had so gladdened his mother's heart, to Lubeck by a homeward-bound ship. After that, however, all went wrong with the ill-fated vessel. She had knocked about in the doldrums for weeks; and, after making a long leg over to the South American coast, had succeeded at last in getting round the Cape of Good Hope safely—although taking a terrible time over it, and dragging out a most tedious passage from Plymouth—when she met a south-east gale, just as she had entered the Indian Ocean and was shaping a course towards the Straits of Sunda, so as to fetch Java.

Leaky and strained and overladen as the ship was, she was in no condition to fight the elements on fair terms; so the result of it was, that, after being buffeted by the gale for some four days and then, finally, pooped by a heavy following sea as she tried to run before the wind, it was discovered that she was making water too fast for the pumps to be of any avail. Consequently, as nothing further could be done, it was determined to abandon her. Accordingly, the jolly-boat and pinnace were provisioned and launched over the side, the crew being divided between the two, under the direction of the captain and chief officer; and they had hardly time to get into these frail craft, to encounter once again on worse terms the perils of the ocean that had already proved too strong for their vessel, and push off from her side, when they saw the old *Gustav Barentz* go down before their eyes—foundering almost without a moment's warning.

"It was terrible for you all to be left tossing about on the raging sea in a couple of open boats!" said Fritz sympathisingly, pressing his brother's arm,—“worse than being in a leaky ship, I should think.”

"Yes," answered Eric; "but we kept up our courage well, the captain sustaining us with brave words, saying that, as we were not many miles south of Cape Arguilhas and had the wind blowing right on to the land, we must soon reach shore. But, I don't know, I'm sure, how he came to place the ship where he did; for, according to my reckoning, we were several degrees, at the least, to the eastward of the Cape. However, I suppose he said what he did to prevent our giving way to despair, which, perhaps, we might otherwise have done, eh?"

"Most probably," said Fritz, agreeing with his brother. "It would be very unlikely for the captain to make so great an error in his calculations as that. He was esteemed a good navigator, you know, by Herr Grosschnapper."

"Well, anyway," continued Eric, without waiting to argue this point with his brother, "we did not reach land that day, which some of the men expected from his words; nor did we the next morning, although, then much to our sorrow, we could see the pinnace no longer near us, she having parted company in the night time and gone to the bottom, as we thought."

"You were wrong," interrupted Fritz; "the boat was picked up by an Australian ship, the survivors being taken on to Melbourne. It was through these that we heard later on of the loss of the *Gustav Barentz*; and naturally, as you had

not been rescued at the same time, we all gave you and the captain's party up."

"Oh, indeed!" said Eric. "I'm right glad to hear that! Why, we thought that they were the lost ones, not us, lamenting them much accordingly! That Groots, the first mate, was a capital chap, as fine an officer as ever stepped aboard a ship; so I'm pleased to know he's safe. But, to go on with my yarn, there we found ourselves alone in the morning on the wild waste of waters, dancing about in an angry sea that threatened every moment to overwhelm us, and with the gale increasing instead of having blown itself out, as we hoped. We didn't feel very comfortable, I can tell you, Fritz."

"I should think not," responded his brother.

"No; for it was as much as we could do to prevent the boat from filling every moment, the waves were breaking over her so continually. It only escaped sinking by constantly baling her out with our boots and keeping her head to the wind with a floating anchor, which we rigged together out of all the spare oars and spars we had aboard, veering the little craft to leeward of this by the painter. All that day, too, the gale kept up; and the sea, you may be sure, did not calm down, rolling mountains high, as it seemed to us just down to its level in the jolly-boat! So it was the next night, there not being the slightest lull, we having to ride it out all the while; but, on the third morning, the gale moderated sufficiently for us to be able to scud before it in the direction of the Cape. It was lucky for us that the wind, by the way, did not shift once while we were lying-to, blowing steadily from the same quarter it began in, from the south-east. If it had changed at all, especially during the night at any time, it would have been all up with us!"

"Yes?" said Fritz interrogatively.

"Why, of course it would, for it was as dark as pitch, so that you could not see your hand before your face; and if the wind had chopped round, bringing us athwart the heavy rolling sea that was running, we should have been swamped in a moment, without the chance of saving ourselves by turning the boat's head so as to meet the waves; do you see now?"

"I see," said Fritz, with a shudder. "It was bad enough to confront your peril in daylight, but it would have been awful to have been engulfed in the darkness!"

"That was what was in our minds," proceeded Eric; "at least, I can answer for my own thoughts. However, on the morning of the third day, as I've told you, the wind slackening down somewhat, although still blowing steadily from the south-east, we hauled up to our floating anchor, which we quickly proceeded to take to pieces, hauling on board again the oars and old boat-stretchers that had composed it, and which had served the purpose of fending off somewhat the rollers, these breaking over the spars, under whose lee we had comparatively still water. We then, with a great deal of difficulty, as it was a dangerous operation on account of getting broadside on to the waves, managed to slew the jolly-boat's head round; when, rigging up a scrap of a sprit-sail amidships, so as not to bury the little craft's nose, which might have been the case if we had tried to step our proper mast more forward, with the captain steering with an oar out to windward to give him greater command of her than the rudder would have done, we scudded away towards the African coast, giving up the pinnace as lost, and looking out only for ourselves."

"You had plenty to do," said Fritz, "without thinking of any one else."

"Yes," replied Eric; "but still, we could not forget them so easily as all that. Shore folk think sailors are heartless, and that when a poor chap is lost overboard, they only say that 'So-and-so has lost the number of his mess!' and, after having an auction over his kit in the fo'c's'le, then dismiss him from their memory! But, I assure you, this is not always the case. You see, a ship is a sort of little world, and those on board are so closely bound together—getting to know each other so thoroughly from not having any others to associate with—that when one is taken away from amongst them, particularly by a violent death, his absence, cannot but be felt. A sailor often misses even a messmate whom he may dislike. How much the more, therefore, did we feel the loss of the whole boat's crew of the pinnace, every man of whom was almost as much a brother to me as you!"

"I beg your pardon if I spoke thoughtlessly," said Fritz; "but I should have imagined that being in such imminent danger, you would not have had much time to mourn your lost comrades."

"Nor did we," continued Eric, "so long as we had something to do, either in helping to bale the boat out or keeping her head to wind; but, when we began to run before the gale, the men stretched out in the bottom and along the stern-sheets, doing nothing,—for there was nothing for us to do,—we began to think of the poor fellows. This was only for a short time, however, as presently we had a more serious consideration on our minds than even the fate of the others. During all the strain on us, when we were in such danger, none of us had thought of eating or drinking; and, consequently, we had not examined the provisions—put hastily on board as we were leaving the sinking ship. But, now, feeling almost famished, on proceeding to overhaul the lockers, we found to our dismay that the sea water had spoilt everything, our biscuit being paste and the other food rendered unfit for use."

"What a calamity!" exclaimed Fritz.

"Yes," said Eric, "it was. Fortunately, we had some water, although our two barricoes did not contain an over-abundant supply for seven men as there were of us in the jolly-boat all told, including me. The captain, too, had stowed away a bottle of rum in the pocket of his pea jacket; and this being served out all round in a little tin pannikin we had, diluted to the strength of about four-water grog, it strengthened us all up a bit, bracing up our energies for what lay before us."

"What did you do?" asked Fritz.

"Why, what could we do, save let the boat go where the wind chose to take us, and trust in providence!" said Eric, seemingly surprised at the question.

"Ah, we had an awful time of it," he resumed presently. "When you come to being five days in an open boat, with nothing to eat and only a small quantity of water to assuage your burning thirst with at stated intervals, exposed all the time, too, to rough seas breaking over you—encrusting your hair and skin and everything with salt that blistered you when the sun came out afterwards, as it did, roasting us almost as soon as the gale lessened—why it was a painful ordeal, that's all! The rum did not last out long; and soon after the final drop of this was served out, the captain succumbed to weakness, having been dying by inches, and the stimulant only sustaining him so long. We kept him a couple of days, and then flung the body overboard, along with those of two other men who had died in the meantime from exposure and want of food; thus, only three others were now left in the jolly-boat besides me."

"And then?" interrupted Fritz anxiously.

"I don't know what happened afterwards," said Eric. "I got delirious, I suppose, for I remember fancying myself at home again in Lubeck, with Lorischen bending over me and offering me all sorts of nice things to eat! Really, I do not recollect anything further as to what occurred in the boat."

"How were you saved, then?" asked Fritz.

"It was that good Captain Brown there, talking to the gentleman whom you came in here with," replied Eric, pointing out the broad-shouldered, jolly-looking, seafaring man whom Fritz's friend, the deck hand of the steamer, had accosted and was now conversing with, close to where the two brothers were seated on the divan.

"Oh, he rescued you!" said Fritz, looking at the seafaring man with some interest. "I should like to thank him."

"Yes; he's a good fellow," Eric went on. "The first thing I saw when in my right senses again, I think, after we had heaved the bodies of our dead shipmates overboard the boat, was Captain Brown bending over me. I must have confused his face with that of Lorischen, whom I had been dreaming of, for I thought it was hers, and called the captain by her name."

"You did?"

"Yes; I remember his laughing and saying, 'poor little chap,' meaning me. He took care of me well, though; and it was only through his kind care that they were able to bring me round again. They told me afterwards that I was in a most pitiable state of emaciation—a skeleton, they said, with only fragments of burnt, blistered skin covering my poor bones!"

"And the others," inquired Fritz,—“did they recover too?”

"No; not one of the three was alive when Captain Brown's ship came across our boat. I was the only one who had any life remaining. They thought me a corpse, too, and would have left me to die with the rest, if it hadn't been for the captain, who declared there was breath still in my apparently dead body, and kindly had me hoisted on board and attended to."

"But how was it you never wrote home?" said Fritz after a bit, the recollection of what he had gone through overcoming Eric and making him silent for a moment.

"How could I, when the first land I touched, since I was picked up in the ocean south of the Cape, was when I stepped ashore here last week!"

"I can't make that out," said Fritz, puzzled at this.

"Why," replied the other, "you must know that Captain Brown's ship, the *Pilot's Bride*, is a whaling vessel; and she was on her usual cruise for her fishing ground in the Southern Ocean, when I was rescued. If there had been a boatload of us, or had our skipper been alive, perhaps Captain Brown would have put in to the Cape to land us and so give news of the loss of our ship; but, as there was only me, a boy, and I was for days insensible and unable to give him any particulars about the vessel I belonged to, of course he continued his voyage. When I came to myself, he promised to put me on board the first home-going ship we met; but, as we were far out of the track of these, we never came across a sail. We did land at Tristan d'Acunha, about which I'll have to tell you something bye-and-bye as to a plan I've got in my head, however, as no vessel with the exception of ourselves had been there for six months, there was not much use in my leaving a letter to be forwarded home, on the chance of its being called for, was there?"

"No," said Fritz, laughing. "A bad sort of post office that!"

"So," continued Eric, "I had to wait till I landed here last Friday, when I wrote at once to dear mother and you, whom I thought would of course still be at Lubeck."

"Ah, you don't know all that has happened since you left," said Fritz solemnly.

"Nothing is the matter with mother, dear mutterchen?" asked Eric in a frightened voice.

"No; she's quite well, thank God," said Fritz, who then proceeded to give his brother a history of all that had transpired in his absence—the account taking all the longer from Eric's ignorance of the war and everything connected with it, he not having seen a newspaper from the time of his leaving home until his arrival at Rhode Island, when, the events of the past memorable year being of course stale news, they had no chance of being communicated to him.

"And now," said Fritz, when he had made an end of his confidences in return for his brother's story, "I want to know Captain Brown, and thank him for all his kindness to you, Eric."

As Fritz said this, the broad-shouldered, jolly, seafaring man Eric had pointed out—who was still talking to Fritz's acquaintance of the steamboat, close to the divan and within sound of the brothers' voices—hearing his name spoken, looked towards Fritz, who at once raised his hat politely.

"Sarvint, sir," said he, coming forward and stretching out an open hand about the size of a small-sized ham.

"You're the brother, I reckon from the likeness, of this young shaver I picked up off the Cape, hey? My name's Brown, Cap'en Brown, sir, of the *Pilot's Bride*, the smartest whaling craft as ever sailed out o' Providence, I guess. Glad to know you, mister!"

Chapter Sixteen.

An Invitation.

"Yes, I'm Eric's brother," said Fritz, grasping the huge paw of the other, and shaking hands cordially,—“Fritz Dort, at your service. I'm only too glad to have the pleasure of personally thanking you, on my own and my mother's behalf, for your bravery in saving my poor brother here from a watery grave, as well as for all your kindness to him afterwards! He has told me about you, captain, and how you rescued him at sea, besides treating him so very handsomely afterwards.”

"Avast there!" roared out the Yankee skipper in a voice which was as loud as if he were hailing the maintop from his own quarter-deck, albeit it had a genial, cheery tone and there was a good-natured expression on his jolly, weather-beaten face. "Stow all thet fine lingo, my hearty! I only did for the b'y, mister, no more'n any other sailor would hev done fur a shepmate in distress; though, I reckon I wer powerful glad I overhauled that there jolly-boat in time to save him, afore starvation an' the sun hed done their work on him. I opine another day's exposure would hev settled the b'y's hash; yes, sir, I du!"

"I've no doubt of that," said Fritz kindly. "From what he says, you must have picked him up just in the nick of time."

"Yes, sirree, you bet on thet," responded the skipper. "Six hours more driftin' about in thet boat, with the sun a-broilin' his brain-box an' his wits wool-gatherin' in deliriums, would ha' flummuxed him to a haar, I guess. He wer so mad when we got him aboard thet he took me fur his gran'mother, Lorry sunthin' or other—I'm durned if I ken kinder rec'lect the name!"

"So he tells me," said Fritz, laughing at the idea of old Lorischen being mistaken for the broad-shouldered, red-faced, whaling captain. The old nurse, who was very particular about her personal appearance, would have had a fit at the bare supposition, much less at such an allusion to her age as would have supposed her ancient enough to be Eric's grandmother!

"Never mind, mister," continued the skipper, giving Eric a hearty slap on the back, which made the lad wince although he smiled at what the worthy sailor intended for a little friendly attention. "He's all right now, the b'y is—ain't you, my bully, hey?"

"Yes; all right, captain, all right, sir, thanks to you," replied Eric.

"Thet's your sort," said the skipper exultantly. "We've coddled him up an' made a man of him ag'in, we hev, sirree. Jerusalem, mister, you wouldn't know him ag'in for the skillagalee young shaver we h'isted aboard! An', what is more, mister, look here, we've made a sailor of the b'y since he's been along of us in the *Pilot's Bride*—none of your lazy, good-for-nothin' idlers; but, a reg'ler downeaster cat block, clear grit an' no mistake, a sailor every inch of him, yes, sir!"

"I should have thought he had seen enough of the sea, eh?" said Fritz, turning to Eric with a smile.

"Thunder, mister!" exclaimed the Yankee skipper indignantly. "What d'ye mean with your 'nough of the sea,' when he's only jest cut his eye-teeth an' taken to larnin'? Why, mister, it would be a sin to let thet b'y turn his hand to anythin' else, fur he's a born sailor to the very backbone!"

"What say you, Eric?" said Fritz to his brother.

"Oh, I'm with the captain," replied he. "I always loved the sea, and the wreck of the old *Gustav Barentz* has not altered my thinking about it just the same. I don't believe I could ever settle down to a shore life now! I have learnt a lot of seamanship, too, with Captain Brown; and he says, that if I will go with him on his next whaling voyage, he'll make me third mate of the *Pilot's Bride*."

"Jest so, my young cock shaver," said that gentleman; "an' what old Job Brown sez, why I guess he'll stick to! You rec'lect what I told you 'bout wages, hey? We whalin' men don't gen'rally give a fixed sum, as we go shares in the vally o' the venture; but, if yer brother haar likes it better, I'll give you twenty dollars a month, besides yer keep an' mess money, thaar!"

"I'm sure, Captain Brown, that is a very generous offer," replied Fritz, acting as spokesman for his brother; "still, I hardly think my poor mother would like his being away for so long a time as your voyage would last."

"We'll be away, I reckon, fur a twelvemonth, countin' from next month, when we'll start—thet is if my shep's ready for the v'y'ge, as I kinder guess she'll be, with me to look arter her an' see the longshore men don't lose time over the job," interrupted the skipper. "Say now, she sails latter end o' July, so as to git down to the Forties afore October, or tharabouts; waall, I guess we'll cast anchor in Narraganset Bay ag'in 'fore next fall—will that du for you, mister,

hey?"

"You see," explained Fritz, "my poor mother thinks him dead; and, of course, after she gets the letter he tells me he has just sent home, it will be as bad as a second death to her to know that he has now started on another voyage without returning to see her first! Besides that, I've read and heard that whaling life is terribly dangerous—isn't it?"

"Not a bit of it," said the skipper bluntly, in sea-dog fashion. "I reckon it's nary half so dangerous as sailin' back'ards an' for'ards across the herrin' pond 'twixt Noo Yark an' your old Eu-rope in one o' them ocean steamers, thet are thought so safe, whar you run the risk o' bustin' yer biler an' gettin' blown up, or else smashin' yer screw-shaft an' goin' down to Davy Jones' locker! Why, thaar ain't a quarter the per'l 'bout it, much less half, as I sed jest naow! You jest ax my friend haar, whom you seem to hev known afore. Say, Nat, what d'ye think o' whalin' life?"

"Safe as the National Bank, I guess, Job," promptly responded the individual addressed, Fritz's acquaintance the "deck hand," whose full name he now learnt was Nathaniel Washington Slater—usually addressed as "Nathaniel W Slater," or called familiarly "Nat" by his friends!

"Thaar!" exclaimed the skipper, "what more d'ye want than thet, hey? You see, mister, the *Pilot's Bride* don't do whalin' up in Baffin's Bay an' further north, whar I'll allow the fishin' is a bit risky. We only makes reg'ler trips once a year to the Southern Ocean, callin' in on our way at Saint Helena an' the Cape o' Good Hope. Thaar, I guess, we meets a fleet of schooners thet do all the fishin' fur us 'mongst the islands. We fetch 'em out grub, an' sich-like notions, an' take in return all the ile an' skins they've got to bring home. In course, sometimes, we strike a fish on our own 'count; but, we don't make a trade of it, 'cept the black fins comes under our noses, so to speak! The b'y'll run no risk, you bet, if you're skeart about him."

"No, not a bit, mister," corroborated Nat; "and it's a downright capital openin' for him, I guess, too. Why, there are scores of people would give something handsome as a premium to get the cap'en to take their sons along o' him!"

"Thet's a fact," said the skipper; "though I reckon I don't kinder like to be bothered with b'ys—specially sich as are mother's darlin's. They're gen'rally powerful sassy, or else white-livered do-nuthins! I've taken a fancy to this lad, howbeit; an' thet's the reason I wants fur to hev him with me."

"Besides, Fritz," put in Eric, who had refrained from speaking as yet throughout the conversation, although so interested in it, "you must recollect what a sum mother paid for my outfit? Well, I have lost every stitch of it, and shall not get the slightest return from the owners for what went down in the *Gustav Barentz*—merchant sailors have to run the risk of all such casualties, you know! Now, I should not like to go back on mother's hands again, like a bad penny, with nothing to bless myself with; but, here's a capital chance for me. As Captain Brown says, I shall return in a year, and then my wages would be something handsome to take home to mutterchen, even if I then gave up the sea."

"Did you tell mother of this in your letter?" asked Fritz.

"Certainly; for, of course, I did not expect to see you here. I told her that I had almost pledged my word with Captain Brown to go with him, even if it were only to pay him for what he had already done for me, in advancing me money to buy clothes and other necessaries, for I hadn't a rag on when he rescued me, as well as promising to keep me here till the vessel is ready to start again on her next voyage. Why, Fritz, he's so kind, that he actually offered to pay my passage home, if I were bent on seeing mother first before deciding about his offer!"

"That settles it then, Eric, for mother will be certain to say that the right thing to do will be to pay your debts first; in addition to which, knowing I am now out here, she will not expect you to return yet. Really, Captain Brown," added Fritz, turning to the skipper, who appeared to be anxiously awaiting the result of the colloquy between the two brothers, "I'm quite at a loss to express my gratitude to you, both on my brother's and my own behalf! I hope you will not think me lukewarm in the matter, from my taking so long to make up my mind?"

"Sartenly not, sirree," said the Yankee skipper with emphasis, as he gripped Fritz's hand again. "Sartenly not, sirree. Bizness is bizness, an' pleasure's another kind o' notion altogether! I only gev' the b'y an invitation, thet's all, I reckon!"

"An invitation which he now accepts with thanks," replied Fritz. "Eh, Eric?" he added, turning to the lad, who was looking at Captain Brown with a face as beaming as his own.

"Of course I will," answered Eric, without a moment's hesitation. "I should be a donkey to refuse such an offer."

"Waall," drawled out the skipper in high good humour, "I'm raal glad to hear you say thet so. You won't repent j'inin' me, I ken tell you, nor regret slingin' yer hammock aboard the *Pilot's Bride*!"

He then proceeded to wring Eric's hand as cordially, and forcibly too, in his big fist as he had done his brother's.

"Now thet's all settled an' fixed up slick," said Captain Brown, when he had finished hand-shaking, passing on the friendly civility to Mr Nat Slater. "I guess we'd better hev a liquor-up to seal the barg'in; an' when thet's done, if you've got nuthin' better to du, I reckon you'd better come along o' me to my little shanty at the head of the bay—your brother's ben made welcome thaar already."

"You are very kind," replied Fritz, to whom this courteous speech was addressed; "but this gentleman here," indicating Nat, "was just going to show me a boarding-house where I can put up at. He has also promised to introduce me to some shipping firm where I can get work."

"Out o' collar, then?" asked the skipper, with deep interest.

"Yes," answered Fritz. "I could get no employment in New York, and that is what made me come up here, so providentially as it has now turned out."

"Waall, come home along o' me, anyhow, till you find sunthin' to put yer hand to," said the other kindly. "My folks'll make you downright welcome, you bet, mister."

"Thank you, I will," replied Fritz, accepting the kind invitation in the same spirit in which it was offered; and presently the two brothers, reunited so strangely, were on their way, in company with the good-hearted skipper to his "shanty," as he called it, on Narraganset Bay—a comfortable, old-fashioned house, as Fritz presently found out, commanding a fine view of the Providence river on one hand, and of the wide Atlantic, rolling away into the illimitable distance, on the other.

"Nat" declined to accompany the party, on the plea of an engagement. He made an appointment, however, with Fritz for the morrow, promising then to introduce him to some business men, who, he said, would probably find the young German employment; after which he took leave of the Yankee skipper and the two brothers, with a brief parting, "So long!"

Chapter Seventeen.

Eric's Project.

Fritz was not long in the company of Mr Nathaniel Washington Slater on the following day before he discovered, much to his disappointment, that he was one of those superficial characters who are given largely to dealing in promises that they either have no intention of keeping when making them originally, or which they never were or would be in a position to carry out.

When coming up Long Island Sound on board the Rhode Island steamer and having that friendly chat in the bows of the boat, the deck hand had been lavishly expansive as to what he would be able to accomplish for his newly-made acquaintance, in the way of procuring him employment; but, when Fritz met him again, according to their arrangement of the previous afternoon, "Nat" did not appear to exhibit that eager alacrity in introducing him to business men—or "big bugs," as he termed them—which his words of the night before had led Fritz naturally to expect.

Whether this arose from the fact that the deck hand's desire to aid the young German had evaporated as rapidly as it had arisen, or because his morning reflections had convinced him that he had too rashly promised something which he was unable to perform, Fritz, of course, could not precisely tell. Whatever was the reason, the result came to the same thing, that Mr Slater showed a most unmistakable inclination to "back out" of the matter in the same easy way in which those double-ender floating palaces Fritz had noticed on the way up could go astern in order to avoid an obstruction; albeit Nat was prolific in the extreme with all manner of excuses—excuses that were as baseless and unsubstantial as the foam churned up by the steamboat's paddle-wheels!

He "felt ugly" and was "no end sorry," but he really "hadn't the time that morning." This was his first attempt at shunting the engagement; but then, when Fritz, in the exuberance of hopeful possibilities, offered to meet him at the same place and time on the following day, "Nat" "couldn't think of putting him to the trouble," as he "might have to return to New York in the boat at a moment's notice." Besides, he said, it would be "better to put off the appointment awhile," as he'd just heard that the "boss" of the very identical shipping firm where he thought he could have got Fritz a berth had started "right away" for Boston, and he was such a "durned electric eel of a cuss, here, there, and everywhere," that it would be "just dubersome to kalkerlate" when he would "reel his way back to hum!"

Fritz could not understand many of these very choice Americanisms; still, he was sufficiently gifted with common sense to see pretty plainly that all the deck hand's "tall talking" of the previous evening had been, to use his own expressive vernacular, nothing but "bunkum," and that, if he wished to get any situation in the place, he must trust more to his own good fortune than to Mr Slater's kind offices as a go-between.

This disheartened him at the time; but when he got back to Captain Brown's shanty later on, the worthy old skipper, noticing his despondency, soon cheered him out of it.

"Bless you, sonny," said he affectionately, for he seemed to have taken as great a fancy to Fritz as he had to Eric—the young fellow having told him all his plans and prospects, besides giving him an epitome of his adventures during the war when narrating the same for his brother's edification,—"Bless you, sonny, nary you mind what thet ne'er-dowell Nat Slater sez. I'd half a mind to tell you thet yesterday, when I seed you so thick with him! Jerusalem, mister, he's a coon thet's bin allers a loafer all his life, stickin' to nuthin' even fur a dog-watch, an' as shifty as one o' them sculpens in the creek thaar! You jest wait an' make yourself comf'able haar till bye-em-bye, an' I reckon we'll fix you up to sunthin'."

The same evening, when the two brothers were alone together, and speaking of old Captain Brown's kindness, Eric suddenly, as if in a moment of inspiration, said, "Why should you not come along with me in the *Pilot's Bride* when we start next month?"

"What!" exclaimed Fritz in astonishment.

"Don't look so startled, brother," said Eric, laughing at the expression of the other's face. "Recollect, that as you say, you've been unable to get any work here, so, why not go with me? I'm sure Captain Brown would take you with us if you ask him."

"But I'm not a sailor," argued Fritz; "and, besides, if I were one, going to sea would not be the way to make the fortune I have planned, so that I may be able to return home and marry Madaleine."

"Ah, that dear Madaleine!" said Eric. "I wonder when I'll see her, and whether I shall think her all that you describe? Never mind," he added, seeing that Fritz appeared vexed at this speech, "I've no doubt she's a beautiful maiden, and that you'll both be as happy as the day is long! But, I'm going to speak about business now, my brother; and, if you listen, you'll see that my idea of your coming in the *Pilot's Bride* is not such a wild-goose chase, after all."

"I confess I don't see it yet," interposed Fritz, with a smile at Eric's boyish eagerness. "In what way will going whaling with Captain Brown and your important self advance my fortunes?"

"Listen," said the other, "and I'll soon tell you. Do you recollect when I was recounting my story, that after I was picked up from the boat and taken on board the *Pilot's Bride*, I mentioned the fact of the ship calling at Tristan d'Acunha?"

"Yes; and you also said that you would inform me of something important about the place 'bye-and-bye,' if you alluded then to what you're going to tell me now."

"Precisely, 'bye-and-bye' is 'now,'" said Eric, laughing again and tossing his mane-like hair back from his forehead in the old fashion. "We landed at Tristan d'Acunha—"

"Where on earth is that place?" interrupted Fritz. "I've a confused notion that it is an island of some sort; but, in what precise spot it is situated, I'm sure I can't tell!"

"Well, then," commenced Eric grandiloquently—only too glad of the opportunity of having to instruct his elder brother, who had been regarded in the family circle as the centre of all wisdom—"Tristan d'Acunha' is the centre island of a group, so-called after the Portuguese navigator who discovered them in the early beginning of the sixteenth century. The islands are probably the most isolated and remote of all the abodes of men, lying as they do almost in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and nearly equidistant from the continents of America and Africa; for, they are situated nearly on the line that could be drawn between Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope—from the latter of which they are distant some fifteen hundred miles in a westerly direction, while Saint Helena, the nearest other land to them on the north, is thirteen hundred miles away."

"You're very explicit, I'm sure," said Fritz in a chaffing way; "you must have been coaching up your geography recently."

"I disdain vulgar interruption and idle clamour," returned the other in a similar vein. "But, to proceed. The group consists of the larger island of Tristan and two smaller islands—Inaccessible Island, some eighteen miles to the south-west, and Nightingale Island, twenty miles to the south. These islands are uninhabited, save by penguins and seals; but an interesting little colony of some eighty souls occupies Tristan, breeding cattle and cultivating vegetables, with which they supply passing vessels, mostly whalers—these calling there from time to time, on their way to and from their fishing grounds in the great Southern Ocean."

"Your account is highly interesting, my dear Eric," said Fritz, when his brother had completed this exhaustive description of the Tristan d'Acunha group; "still, I confess I do not see in what way it affects me."

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Then you will soon; listen a moment longer. I told you that, with the exception of the larger one, these islands are uninhabited save by the penguins and seals and such-like marine animals."

"Yes, you've told me that; and I don't wonder at it when they are situated so remotely from all civilisation."

"That fact has its advantages none the less," proceeded Eric. "Being so cut off from communication with men makes these islands just the favourite resort of those animals that shun the presence of their destroyers. Seals, as you know, are very nervous, retiring creatures seeking their breeding-places in the most out-of-the-way, deserted spots they can find; and the advance of the human race, planting colonies where the poor things had formerly undisputed sway around the shores of the South American continent, has driven them further and further afield, or rather to sea, until they are now only to be met with in any numbers in the Antarctic Ocean, and such islands as lie adjacent to that great Southern continent which has never yet been discovered—although Lord Ross pretty nearly put foot on it, if any explorer can be said to have done that."

"Really, Eric," exclaimed Fritz jokingly, "you surpass yourself!"

"Oh, I've read up all this in some books Captain Brown lent me," said the boy. "I wanted to learn everything that was to be learnt about a whaler's life, and to become acquainted with the special parts of the ocean that have to be visited by vessels in the trade in order to find a profitable fishing ground."

"But you've been talking about seals, not whales," remarked Fritz.

"Yes, because it is with seals that my present business lies," said the other, not a bit put out by the correction.

"Banished now from their once favourite waters around Cape Horn, adjacent to the islands of the Pacific, there are yet some stray outlandish spots left which the animals frequent, so as to be able to breed in peace and multiply, without fear of that wholesale extermination which is their unhappy lot elsewhere. Amongst such isolated places is the Tristan d'Acunha group; and, to Inaccessible Island as well as the other islets they come in countless numbers

every year. Seal fishing is a very profitable concern; for, not only is the oil valuable, but the skins fetch the most extravagant prices in the market, especially those of the finer sort. Now, do you see what I'm after, brother?"

"You want to go sealing, I suppose; but, won't you have plenty of that in the *Pilot's Bride* with Captain Brown, eh?"

"Not in the way I mean," replied Eric. "I have an idea of settling for a time at Tristan d'Acunha, going in thoroughly for the thing as a business on shore."

Fritz appeared to prick up his ears at this.

"But, I thought you said there was a colony there already; why don't the people manage to cultivate the trade? Besides, if they have it all their own way, I think they would not like a couple of strange interlopers, like you and me, going amongst them to rob them of their harvest from the sea!"

"Ah, I see you're bitten with the idea," exclaimed Eric, clapping his hands triumphantly. "But, it was not of Tristan, the larger island, I was thinking; it was of Inaccessible Island, where there wouldn't be another living soul but ourselves, the seals, and sea birds."

"'Monarchs of all we survey,' eh, like Robinson Crusoe?" said Fritz with a smile. "That would be very nice, wouldn't it?"

"Don't laugh, brother," returned Eric, speaking earnestly. "I assure you I've considered this thing well. The people living at Tristan told me that they went fishing to the other islands once a year; but, the weather is generally so rough and the beach so hard to land at or get off from, on account of the heavy ocean rollers coming in when the wind is up at all, that the islanders can never make a long stay at the islets—and so cannot get half the number of sealskins which might be easily procured by any one stopping ashore there for any length of time. I really thought, I assure you, of asking Captain Brown, when I went on my next voyage with him, to land me at Inaccessible Island, with provisions enough to last me six months or so, and to call for me on his return voyage from the Cape, as he was wending his way back home again here."

"And you would have gone there alone?"

"Yes; why not? But now, oh, Fritz, if you would only go with me, we might settle at this place like regular Robinson Crusoes—as you said just now—and make a pile of money, or, rather, of skins, in a year or two!"

"The idea is feasible," said Fritz in a reflective way. "I'll talk to Captain Brown, and see what he says of it." The elder brother had a good deal of German caution in his composition; so that, although prompt of action, he was never accustomed to undertake anything without due deliberation.

Eric, on the contrary, all impulse, was thoroughly carried away by the notion, now that he saw that Fritz, instead of ridiculing it, thought it worth consideration.

The project of going to settle on a real uninhabited island, like Robinson Crusoe, that hero of boyhood throughout the world, exceeded the realisation of his wildest dreams, when first as a little chap he had planned how he should go to sea as soon as he was big enough. Why, he and Fritz would now be "Brother Crusoes," if his project were carried out, as there seemed every likelihood of its being—crusoes of their own free-will and not by compulsion, besides having the satisfaction of knowing that within a certain period it would be in their power to end their solitary island life; that is, should they find, either that it did not come up to their expectations in a business point of view, or that its loneliness and seclusion combined with the discomforts of roughing it were more than they could bear.

It was a glorious plan!

This was Eric's conclusion, the more he thought of it; while Fritz, on his part, believed that there was something in the suggestion—something that had to be weighed and considered carefully—for, might he not really conquer Fortune in this way?

Captain Brown did not throw any cold water on the matter either, when it was brought before him.

"By thunder! it's a durned good plan, it air, mister," said he to Fritz, "thet it air, fur a young scaramouch like thet youngster thaar! I seed him palaverin' with one o' them islanders at Tristan—they're a sort of half-caste tan colour there, like mulattoes in the States. I rec'lect one of the men who wer oncest on a whaler with me a v'y'ge or two to Kerguelen Land an' back, tellin' me 'bout the lot of seals that were on Inaccessible Island, now I come to think of it; but I've never been thaar myself. Its name's good enough fur me, since most of us thet go by thaar gives it a pretty wide berth, you bet; fur it air inaccessible, with a vengeance—a rocky coast plungin' down abruptly into the sea, with a terrible surf breakin' ag'in the cliffs, an' no anchorage ground anywheres nigh thet's safe!"

"And how could we land then?" asked Fritz.

"Oh, it ken be done, mister, fur the Tristaners go over thaar, as the b'y told you, every year fur a week or so; an' they hev to git ashore somehow or other. Yes, we'll manage to land you, safe enough, in a whale-boat when the time comes. What I meant to say was, thet the ship couldn't stay any while lyin' off, so as to see whether you liked the place or not. If you land, thaar you'll hev to stay till we come back fur you next v'y'ge!"

"All right, I shan't mind that, with Eric. If I were alone, of course it would be another matter."

"Jest so," replied the Yankee skipper; and he then proceeded to advise the brothers what would be best to take with them, Fritz wishing to lay out his small remaining stock of money to advantage.

He also told them, good-naturedly, that he would convey them to their contemplated destination for nothing, so that they would have no passage to pay. Eric, indeed, would work his, being considered as attached to the ship, his name besides being retained on the list of the crew while sealing on shore; and, as for Fritz, Captain Brown said, he would "grub him and give him a bunk into the barg'in."

Then, again, in respect of the provisions they would need for their maintenance during their stay on the island, the skipper promised to supply them from the ship's stores, on their arrival there, at cost price; so that, not only would they thus get them much cheaper than they would have been able to purchase them in open market, but they would likewise save the cost of their freighting to Inaccessible Island, which any one else would have expected them to pay.

Could Fritz desire more?

Hardly.

"I guess, mister," concluded the skipper, "so be it as how you kinder makes up yer mind fur the venture, thet you two coons will start in bizness with a clean sheet an' no book debts, like the boss of a dry goods store; an' if you don't make a pile in less than no time, why it won't be Job Brown's fault, I reckon!"

This settled the matter; when, the captain giving them a short memorandum of certain necessary articles which they would find useful on the island and which they could readily procure in Providence while the *Pilot's Bride* was refitting, the two brothers set to work making their preparations without delay for the novel enterprise to which Eric's project had given birth—that of going crusoeing in the South Atlantic!

Chapter Eighteen.

The "Pilot's Bride."

The more Fritz thought over the project, the more enthusiastic he became about it.

Unlike Eric, he was deeply reflective, never adventuring into any scheme or undertaking action in any matter until he had fully weighed the pros and cons and had considered everything that could be said for and against it; but, once his judgment was convinced, there was no more hearty co-operator than he.

It was so in this instance.

Eric's idea had struck him as feasible at the first blush, the boy being so eager in giving vent to his own impressions and experiences of what he had seen at Tristan d'Acunha with regard to the advantage of starting a new sealing station of their own; but, when Fritz came to ponder over the plan, it seemed so chimerical that he felt inclined to be angry with himself for having entertained it for a moment. These second thoughts, however, did not long stand their ground after old Captain Brown had been consulted; for, that experienced mariner, who had, as he thought, such better means of judging than himself, immediately took so sanguine a view of the enterprise, that Fritz's original opinion in favour of it became confirmed, and he entered upon the preparations for the expedition with even greater zest than Eric, its first inceptor and propounder.

"Brother," said he to the latter, on Captain Brown's approving of the plan and promising his cordial assistance in helping them to carry it out to a successful issue, "we'll not leave anything to chance. We will put our shoulders to the wheel and determine to win!"

"Aye," responded the other, "and we oughtn't to make a failure either; for, you know, the old adage has it that, 'Fortune favours the brave,' eh?"

"Yes," said Fritz, the practical. "However, it is in little things that success is attained, so we must not neglect these."

Nor did they. Indeed, so much did Fritz impress Eric with the value of carefully considering every petty detail of their outfit, so that they might not find something omitted at the last moment which would be of use, that there was danger of their forgetting more important articles—the "little things," apparently, absorbing all their attention.

So engrossed were they in this enthusiasm for collecting and packing up the most out-of-the-way trifles which it struck one or other of the two brothers that they might want—getting these ready, too, for their departure weeks before the *Pilot's Bride* could possibly be refitted for her voyage—that they were the subject of many a joke from the hospitable household of the little "shanty" on Narraganset Bay.

The captain and Mrs Brown, or else Celia their daughter—a lively American lassie of Eric's age, who seemed to have taken as great a fancy to the young sailor as her father had done towards Fritz—would ever be suggesting the most extraordinary things as likely to "come in handy on the island," such as a warming pan or a boot-jack; with which latter, indeed, the skipper gravely presented the elder brother one day, telling him it would save him time when he was anxious to get on his slippers of an evening after sealing on the rocks!

But, although they "chaffed" them, the kind people helped them none the less good-naturedly in completing their equipment, the old captain's "missis" and his "gal" plying their needles as energetically on their behalf as Madame Dort and Lorischen would have done in the little house at home in the Gulden Strasse of Lubeck. The very eagerness and "thoroughgoingness" of the hopeful young fellows enlisted sympathy for them, in addition to those good qualities which had already made them prime favourites.

"Bully for them, old woman," as the skipper said, when talking them over to his wife. "They're raal grit an' bound to

run into port with a fair wind an' no mistake, you bet; they're such a tarnation go-ahead pair o' coons, with no empty gas or nonsense about 'em!"

But, full as he was of the venture, and embarking heart and soul into its details with every energy he possessed, Fritz did not neglect to write home a long letter to his mother and Madaleine, telling them all about the new undertaking in which his hopes and prospects alike were centred and expressing his feelings thoroughly in the matter—thus showing the amount of reflection he had given to the scheme.

Eric, he said, was a sailor; and, therefore, should the venture not succeed, its failure would not affect him much, as it would be merely an episode in his nautical life, Captain Brown promising to retain his name on the books of the *Pilot's Bride* and allow him to ship again as third mate in the event of his taking to the sea once more when the two got tired of their sojourn on the island or found that sealing did not answer their expectations; but, for him, Fritz, the enterprise was a far more important one, changing the whole aspect of his career.

However, he wrote, he not only hoped for the best, but believed the undertaking would result more favourably than his most sanguine wishes led him to estimate its returns; still, in any case, it was better, he thought, to engage in it, rather than waste any further time in vainly searching for employment in the States.

But, whether successful or unfortunate, he was fully determined, so he concluded his letter, to return home within the period of three years to which he had limited his absence when leaving Lubeck; and, he prayed that his coming back would be the opening of a new era of happiness for them all—that is should the good God, who had so mercifully preserved their Eric from the dangers of the deep and restored the dead to life, prosper the joint enterprise of the reunited brothers, who, come what may, would now be together.

"Good-bye, dear mutterchen, and you, my darling Madaleine," were his last words. "Watch and pray for us, and look forward to seeing us again beneath the old roof-tree in time for our third Christmas festival from now; and, then, won't there be a home-coming, a house-warming, with us altogether once more!"

Much to Fritz's satisfaction, before the *Pilot's Bride* was ready to put to sea, a reply was received to this communication, bidding the brother crusoes a cheery "God speed!" from home. Madame Dort was so overjoyed with the unexpected news of Eric's safety that she made no demur to the prolongation of his absence from home, the more especially now that he would be in Fritz's company. As for Madaleine, she expressed herself perfectly contented with her betrothed's plans, considering, as she did, that he would know best; but she was all the better pleased, she wrote, that he was going to an uninhabited island, as then he would be unable to come across other girls, who might blot her image from his heart.

"The little stupid!" as Fritz said fondly to himself when he read this,—“as if that were possible, the darling!"

If Madaleine, however, could have known that, when she penned those words, Master Fritz was engaged making himself agreeable to a party of New York belles who had come up from the stifling "Empire City" to see their cousins the Browns and sniff the bracing sea breezes of Narraganset Bay, she might not have been quite so easy in her mind!

But, she need not have alarmed herself much, for Fritz was too busily engaged, along with Eric, in helping Captain Brown to prepare the *Pilot's Bride* for her forthcoming voyage, to spare much time to the fascinating fair ladies from Fifth Avenue.

The elder brother could do but little to aid the skipper in a nautical way; still, as a clerk, he proved himself of great assistance, attending to all the captain's correspondence and acting as a sort of supercargo.

Eric, however, having now had considerable experience of the sea, besides, as the skipper had said, being "a born sailor," came out in strong colours in all those minutiae required in getting a vessel ready for sea.

Really, he showed himself so active and intelligent that the skipper looked upon him as "his right-hand man"—at least, so declared he one day in the presence of Mrs Brown, Celia, and the entire family at the shanty, in full and open conclave; and no one disputed his statement, albeit Master Eric was sadly confused at the compliment.

But, how was it with the ship, in which, like twin Caesars, the brothers were about to embark "all their fortunes?"

Well, the *Pilot's Bride*, after going into dry dock and discharging cargo on her return home, first had her sheathing stripped and the exterior of her hull carefully examined to see that no rotten timber-work should be overlooked that might subsequently be fatal to her when battling with the billows in mid-ocean. She had then been recaulked and coppered; besides having her rigging set up again and tarred down, as well as the coverings and seizings replaced, and the chaffing gear paid over. Finally, on the yards being sent up and the rigging completed, with all the running gear seen to and thoroughly overhauled, a good coat of paint, and an overcoat, too, in addition was given to the vessel from bow to taffrail down to the water-line, with a white streak, in regular Yankee fashion, running along her ports. The stern gallery and rail were then gilded, as was also the figure-head—a wooden damsel, with arms akimbo, of the most unprepossessing appearance, representing the bride of the "pilot" whose name she bore.

This completed the exterior refitting of the ship.

Much remained to be done to her interior, however; and, here it was that Eric was able to be of considerable service, having learnt all of a sailor's duty in reference to the stowage of a vessel's hold—a matter that might seem easy enough to a landsman who only has to do with the packing of boxes, but which is of serious importance on board a ship, where the misplacement of the cargo may not only affect her sailing properties but also the safety of those she carries.

To commence with, the *Pilot's Bride* being a whaler would have to start from her home port comparatively "light"—

as, having no cargo to speak of, save the provisions for her own crew for twelve months and the stores she carried for the use of the sealing schooners amongst the islands, she was forced to take in a great deal of ballast to ensure her stability, and this had to be so apportioned in her hold as to make her of good trim.

This being done, the water and provisions were then shipped and a large number of empty casks placed on top of all the stores in the hold, amidships. These latter were carried to be subsequently filled with the oil and skins that might be collected by the schooners acting as tenders to the *Pilot's Bride* amongst the islands; and, besides, the ship had "trying pots" of her own to melt down the blubber of any whales or odd fish she might capture "on her own hook."

The brothers' belongings were next taken on board and placed in the cabin appropriated by Captain Brown to Fritz's use; and then, only the live stock remained to be shipped and the crew mustered for the vessel to be ready for sea, as now, with her sails bent she lay along the wharf at Providence, waiting but to be hauled out into the stream.

She was a barque of some three or four hundred tons, riding rather high out of the water in consequence of being mostly in ballast. In appearance she looked somewhat wall-sided, and she had those heavy round bows that are seen mostly in whaling vessels, which are thus protected forwards in order to resist the pressure of the ice in those arctic regions whither they go to and fro; but, in spite of her build, which resembled more that of a Dutch galliot—such as Fritz's eyes were accustomed to see in the ports of the North Sea—than an American merchantman, with her freshly painted hull, whose ports were picked out in white, and her tall shapely spars all newly varnished, the *Pilot's Bride* looked as dapper and neat as her namesake. Eric certainly thought this, no matter what his brother's opinion might be, and believed there was every reason for Captain Brown taking the pride in the vessel that he did.

"There you are," said the skipper to the brothers, taking them with him to survey her from the jetty when all her preparations were finished, the vessel only waiting his mandate to haul out into the river—"did you ever see sich a tarnation duck of a beauty in all yer born days, hey?"

"She looks very pretty," observed Fritz admiringly.

"Blow thet!" exclaimed the skipper with a laugh. "Folks would think you were talkin' 'bout a gal; but, what ken a longshore fellow know 'bout a shep!" he added compassionately. "What d'ye say 'bout her Mas' Eric, hey?"

"I say she's a regular clipper, captain," answered the lad in prompt sailor fashion, much to the skipper's delight. Eric's encomium was all the more appreciative from the fact of his having been familiar with the ship through part of her last voyage. Then, she was all battered and bruised from her conflict with the elements during her cruise in southern seas; so, now, her present transformation and gala trim made the difference in her appearance all the more striking to him, causing her good points to shine out with all the greater display and hiding most of her drawbacks.

"Ah, thet's your sort of 'pinion I likes," said the skipper in reply to Eric's tribute to the vessel's merits. "Yes, suttently, she's a clipper, if ever there wer one; an' a beauty to the back of thet, I reckon, hey, sonny?" and he gave the lad one of his thundering pats of approval across the shoulders with his broad hand that almost jerked him off the jetty.

"I guess," he added presently, "the only thing we've got to do now is to shep a to'able crew aboard; an' then, I kalkerlate, mister, she'll be the slickest whaler this v'y'ge as ever loos'd tops'les an' sailed out o' Narraganset Bay!"

"Will there be any difficulty in getting men?" asked Fritz.

"No, I reckon not, mister," replied the skipper, with a huge guffaw at his ignorance. "Why, the crimpers would send 'em to me in shoals, fur Job Brown is as well-known in Providence as Queen Victoria is in England, God bless her fur a good woman, too! The diff'culty lies in pickin' out the good ones thet air worth their salt from the green hands, as ain't up to a kid of lobsouse fur all the work they ken do aboard a shep!"

"Well, I hope you'll get the men you want," said Fritz cordially.

"Nary a doubt 'bout thet," answered the other, slewing round and trotting across the wharf to a line of warehouses and merchants' offices on the other side. "I'm just a-goin' to my agents now; an' I ken tell you, fur a fact, thet Job Brown is never licked, no, sir, not when he makes up his mind to anythin'!"

In the evening of the same day he astonished Fritz somewhat.

"Who d'ye think wished fur to sign articles with me to-day fur the v'y'ge?" said he, after he mentioned that he had shipped his crew and that the *Pilot's Bride* would haul out into the stream the next morning, preparatory to starting off altogether on the following day.

"I'm sure I can't say," replied Fritz.

"Who but our old friend Nat Slater!" said the skipper with a broad grin. "I guess Nathaniel Washington hez come down in the world ag'in, fur all his tall talkin' about what he wer goin' to do to help you, hey?"

"Have you taken him on?" asked Fritz, somewhat dubious about the pleasure which the society of the whilom "deck hand" of the steamboat would afford him when the two of them should be cooped together on board the same vessel for any length of time, especially after the way in which that individual had behaved to him.

"Yes, I let him jine," answered the skipper. "I couldn't do else, considerin' the poor cuss wer so down on his luck as to ask me; 'sides, mister, I knewed him afore he went to the bad; an' if he du come with me, it'll do him good in one way. He'll never get none o' thet infarnal drink till he comes back ag'in to Providence, fur I never allows a drop o' pizen in any craft I sails from the time we leaves port till we casts anchor ag'in!"

"I'm glad to hear that," said Fritz. "There's mischief enough done with it on land without taking it to sea."

"Right you air, mister," rejoined the other; "but, mind you, I don't ask my men to do what I don't do myself. This old hoss doesn't believe in a fellow's preachin' one thing and practisin' another; no, sirree! I ain't a teetotaler, nohow; but I never touches a drop o' lickor from the time I sots foot aboard ship till I treads land ag'in—an' what I does, every man Jack o' my crew shall do ditto, or I'll know an' larn 'em the reason why, you bet! Howsomedever, mister, I guess we'd all better turn in now," he added, making a signal which Mrs Brown and Celia always interpreted as meaning their departure to bed. "Recollect, this'll be our last night ashore, fur we shall all hev to rise airly in the mornin' to git the *Pilot's Bride* under weigh."

Chapter Nineteen.

The Voyage of the Ship.

When Fritz awoke the next day, however, he could not quite make out what was going on in the place. There was a strong smell of gunpowder in the air, and he could hear the cracking reports of small cannon, let off at frequent intervals with much noise in the streets by a crowd of boys, whose voices mingled with the excruciating sound of squeaking trumpets and the shrill, ear-piercing scream of penny whistles.

For the moment, he thought he was dreaming again of the old days of the war, and that the confused medley, which became each moment louder, was but the half-waking recollection of the bivouac around Metz, with its many constant alarms of sallies and sorties from the beleaguered fortress; but, when he came downstairs from his bedroom, he was speedily undeceived as to the reason for the pandemonium without.

The captain and Eric had already started off for the ship, and only Mrs Brown and Celia were below waiting breakfast for him.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked. "It seems like Bedlam broken loose. Is there an insurrection going on?"

"Ah, they're having a fine time, ain't they!" said Miss Celia.

"But, what is it all about?" he repeated, gazing from one to the other of the smiling ladies, almost bewildered by the uproar out of doors.

"Fourth of July," replied the lady of the house, as if that was quite a sufficient answer and accounted for everything.

"The fourth of July!" he repeated mechanically. "What has the day of the month got to do with it—is it an anniversary of some sort—some national holiday?"

"An anniversary, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Celia indignantly. "I thought you were such a good hand at history. Why, haven't you ever heard of our glorious Declaration of Independence, when the free states of America severed the hated yoke that bound them under the thralldom of the tyrant England?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot. I'm sure I beg your pardon for not recollecting what must be to you a sacred day!" said Fritz, somewhat deceived by the girl's affected enthusiasm, Celia having spoken as grandiloquently as if she were an actress declaiming tragedy.

"Sacred day, fiddlesticks!" she replied, laughing at his grave face and solemn manner. "I guess we don't worry ourselves much about that! We try and have a good time of it, and leave it to the politicians and skallywags to do the speechifying and bunkum! The boys have the best time of it, I reckon."

"Yes," he replied, his ideas as to the patriotic associations of American citizens considerably modified. "They seem to enjoy themselves, if the noise they're making affords any criterion of that!"

"I guess so," answered the girl. "They've burnt a few fire crackers this morning; but, it's nothing to what they do at Boston. Law, why you should see the goings on there'll be in front of Faneuil Hall to-night, when the 'Bonfire Boys' set to work!"

"By that time, I imagine, I'll be on the sea," said Fritz. "Your father told us last evening that he would start to-day if the wind was fair, and I noticed a bit of a breeze blowing through my window when I was dressing."

"Yes," put in Mrs Brown; "and he said this mornin', 'fore he went off down town, to tell you to be sure and hurry up as soon as ever you'd swallowed your breakfast—not for what I want to hasten you away, though!"

"Did he?" said Fritz, bolting a bit of buckwheat cake and hastily rising from the table. "If that's the case, I'd better be off to see about my traps."

"Bless you, they're all aboard hours ago! Eric took them with him when he started off with pa," remarked Celia demurely.

"Oh, you saw him before he went, then?" said Fritz.

"Yes, I wished your brother good-bye," replied the girl, colouring up.

"Oh!" repeated Fritz meaningly, with a sly glance at her.

"And now, Mr Dort, we must wish you good-bye, too," interposed Mrs Brown, in order to distract his attention from Celia, who looked a bit confused by Fritz's interrogatories respecting Master Eric.

"Aren't you coming down to see us off?" said he.

"Guess not," replied Mrs Brown with much composure, her husband's departure with his ship being of such periodic occurrence as to have long since lost all sense of novelty. "We'll see you when you get out in the bay, and wish you good luck in the distance. I hope, mister, that you and your brother will be successful in your venture—that I do heartily."

"Thank you," said Fritz, shaking the hand of the good-natured woman cordially. "I can't express how grateful we both are to you and your husband for all your kindness to us, strangers in a foreign land!"

"What, do you leave me out?" put in Miss Celia saucily.

"I should think not," returned Fritz gallantly. "I included you, of course, when thanking your mother. I'm sure words would fail to give you any idea of my feelings on the subject; but I dare say Eric spoke on my behalf this morning."

"Indeed, he had too much to say for himself," retorted the girl; "and, instead of his behaving like a quiet German lad, as I thought him, he was more of a saucy American sailor boy! Not that I minded that much," she added demurely. "It made him more sparkish-like and all the pleasanter."

"Really?" said Fritz, smiling. "I think I shall have to talk to Master Eric when I get on board the ship."

"No, nary you mind that," pleaded Miss Celia most magnanimously. "I forgive him this time; but you can tell him, though, I'll pay him out when he comes back to our shanty, that I will!"

"All right, I will give him your message," replied Fritz, as he shook hands with the fair little Rhode Islander, whose eyes were full of tears as she said good-bye, in spite of her sprightly manner and off-hand way. "And now, ladies," he added, addressing them both collectively, "I must say farewell, hoping to have the pleasure of seeing you again on our return from Inaccessible Island, somewhere about two years hence."

"I'm sure I hope so, too," said the lady of the house kindly, Celia joining cordially in the wish; and Fritz then left the shanty, directing his steps down to the quay, where he expected to find the *Pilot's Bride* still moored.

She was not here, however; but, after a moment, he could discern the vessel lying out in the river some little distance from the shore. There, anchored almost in mid-stream and with a blue peter flying at the fore as well as the American stars and stripes trailing over her stern, she looked even more picturesque than when Fritz had seen her lying along the wharf on his first view of her.

It was much earlier in the month than Captain Brown had stated was his usual time for starting on his annual voyage to the South Atlantic; but the skipper had accelerated his departure in order to have time to go to Tristan d'Acunha on his outward trip, instead of calling there as he usually did just before returning to Providence—so as to allow the brothers to pick up a little information that might be of use to them from the little colony at Tristan, before proceeding to their own selected settlement on Inaccessible Island.

The ship was now, therefore, quite ready to start as soon as the wind and her captain willed it; for, her sails were bent, with the gaskets cast-off and the topsails loose, ready to be let fall and sheeted home at the word of command. A nautical man would have noticed, too, that she was hove short, right over her anchor, so that no time should be lost in bousing that up to the cathead and getting under weigh, when the time came to man the windlass and heave up the cable, with a "Yo-heave ho!"

Presently, Fritz observed a boat that had been towing astern of the ship hauled up alongside, and then this put off for the shore, with some one in the stern-sheets whom he did not recognise at first, on account of the person having a gilt-banded cap on; but, as soon as the boat got nearer, he saw that it was Eric, who now hailed him while yet a hundred yards away.

"Hullo!" he shouted; "how is it you're so late? The captain is only waiting for you to set sail, for the pilot's coming on board now!"

"I didn't think you were going until the evening," replied Fritz, descending the steps of the jetty, which the boat had now nearly approached.

"Nor were we, if this breeze hadn't sprung up since morning so very suddenly, when we least expected it! I suppose it's because of all that gunpowder firing that the air's got stirred up a bit? But, jump in, old fellow, the skipper seems a bit impatient; and the sooner we're all on board the better he'll be pleased."

With these words, Eric stretched out a hand to help his brother into the little dinghy, which could barely carry two comfortably besides the man pulling amid-ship, and then the frail little craft started on her way back to the mother ship, of which she seemed the chicken!

No sooner were they alongside and up the ladder, than Captain Brown's voice was heard rapidly giving orders, as if no time were to be lost.

"Veer that boat astern an' hook on the falls," he roared in stentorian accents. "I want her walked up to the davits 'fore I can say Jack Robinson! There, that's the way to do it, men. Now, get her inboard an' secure her; we shan't want her in a hurry ag'in, till we come back to the bay!"

"Mr Dort," he sang out presently to Eric, who was standing by ready for the skipper's orders and watching his eye—prepared to jump anywhere at a second's notice, and looking so full of eagerness and attention that Fritz felt quite proud of him!

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the lad, touching his cap; for, nowhere is deference insisted on so stringently from inferior officers to their superiors as on board ship, especially in merchantmen commanded by captains worth their salt. In no other way can proper respect be paid to authority, or the necessary orders requisite for the safety and comfort of all enforced.

"I give you charge o' the mizzen mast," said Captain Brown, meaning that Eric would have to see to all that was necessary for making sail in the after part of the ship. At the same time, the second mate stationed himself amidships, and the first officer went forward to the bows, to superintend the getting up of the anchor, each of them repeating the several directions of the captain in turn.

"All hands make sail!" then shouted the skipper, who, with his hands in the pockets of his monkey jacket, stood on the poop deck aft, looking everywhere apparently in one glance, it was so comprehensive of everything that was going on below and aloft; whereupon, the men, racing up the rigging with alacrity, the topsails were soon sheeted home and the yards hoisted, after which more canvas was unfolded to the breeze, that came in short, sharp puffs off the land.

The headsails were then backed, as the ship brought up over her anchor; and, the windlass coming round with a ringing "clink, clank!" of the pawl to the hearty long heaves of the sailors—who worked at it with a will, singing in chorus the while—the heavy weight of metal that still attached the *Pilot's Bride* to the sand and shells at the bottom of Narraganset Bay was ere long lifted gradually above the water and run up to the cathead. The jib and foretop-sail were then allowed to fill again and the yards squared; when, the vessel, paying off, began to move, at first slowly, and then more rapidly as she gathered way, out of the harbour away towards the open sea, some thirty miles beyond.

The wind being light and flickering, the crew were soon ordered aloft again to set the top-gallant-sails, for the breeze was so far favourable that the ship did not have to beat out of the bay; consequently, she was able to spread more canvas than if she had been forced to tack, or had to be steered by her sails.

Nor was Captain Brown satisfied with top-gallants alone; for, quickly, the order came to set the royals and flying jib before the men could climb down the ratlins; and, soon, the vessel was under a cloud of sail aloft and aloft, taking advantage of every breath of air. Towards the afternoon, the north-westerly breeze still lasting, the ship cleared Narraganset Bay, running before the wind; when, shaping a course between the treacherous Martha's Vineyard on the one hand and Gardiner's Island on the other, she was steered out into the open Atlantic.

No sooner had they got to sea than Captain Brown called all hands aft, mustering the crew—who numbered some twenty in all, including the cook and a couple of boys. He then gave them a short speech from the poop.

Some of the men had been with him before, he said, so they knew what he was; but, as for those who didn't, he would tell them that, as long as they did their duty manfully, they would find him always considerate towards them. If they "turned rusty," however, why then "they'd better look out for squalls," for they would discover, should they try on any of their notions, that he was "a hard row to hoe!"

The men were next divided into watches and dismissed to their several duties; after which the *Pilot's Bride* settled down steadily to her voyage.

At first, Fritz found the life on board very enjoyable. The motion of the ship was so slight, as she slipped through the water with the wind on her quarter, that there was no rolling; and the difference of her arrangements, with clean cabins and the absence of that sickening smell of the engine-room which had permeated the steamer in which he had made the passage from Bremen to New York—his only previous acquaintance with the ocean—made him fancy that he could spend all his days on the deep without discomfort. But, after a time, the routine grew very monotonous; and long ere the *Pilot's Bride* had reached tropical latitudes, Fritz would have been glad if she had reached their appointed destination.

Truth to say, the vessel was not that smart sailer which a stranger would have imagined from all the skipper had said about her. It was nearly three weeks before she ran into the north-east trades; and three more weeks, after she got within these favouring winds, before she managed to cross the Line, which she did somewhere about 24 degrees West. All this time, too, to add to Fritz's disgust, they never passed a single other sail!

The weather throughout the voyage, up to now, had treated the vessel fairly enough, so no complaint could be made on that score; but, no sooner had they arrived at the equator, than the wind suddenly shifted round to the west and south-west, accompanied by a violent squall that would have settled the *Pilot's Bride*, if Captain Brown had not fortunately anticipated it and prepared in time.

The ship was nearing Pernambuco, off the South American coast, on a short "leg," before taking the long one that would fetch down towards Tristan d'Acunha, proceeding in the ordinary track of vessels going round the Cape of Good Hope; when, suddenly, towards evening, it fell nearly calm and sheet lightning was noticed towards the eastward, where a dense bank of dark clouds had mounted up, obscuring the sky.

This was enough for Captain Brown, who had gone through a similar experience before.

"All hands take in sail!" came his order, without a moment's delay.

The men sprang aloft immediately and furled the royals and top-gallant-sails; while others below took in the flying jib and hauled up the mainsail and trysail—the hands wondering all the time what on earth the skipper was at, taking in all the spread of the vessel's canvas, when there wasn't a breath of air blowing!

However, the "old man," as he was generally called by the crew, knew better than they; and so, with the ship's yards

stripped and squared, he awaited what science and forethought had taught him to expect.

Science and forethought had not caused him to make these preparations in vain!

The blackness in the south-east extended round the horizon to the west, and, presently, a thick mist came rolling up from that quarter, enveloping the vessel in its folds and covering the stars in front like a curtain, although those lesser lights of the night shone out brightly in other parts of the sky.

Then, all at once, the squall burst with a furious blast that made the ship heel over almost on her beam ends, the wind being followed by a shower of rain and hail that seemed as if it would batter in the decks.

“Let go the halliards!” sang out Captain Brown; and, his order being promptly attended to, the vessel was not taken aback—otherwise every spar would have snapped away, or else she would have gone down stern foremost.

Now, however, instead of any accident happening, the good ship, although reeling with the blow like a drunken man, paid off from the wind handsomely—running on for some time before the gale and tearing through the water with everything flying, “as if old Nick were after her,” the men said!

All hands being then called again, the topsails and trysails were close-reefed, the courses furled, and the foretopmast-staysail set; when, the barque was brought round nearly to her course again, with the weather-braces hauled in a bit to ease her.

This was the first rough weather Fritz experienced, and it cannot be said to have increased his admiration for a sea life, all he saw of which only tended to make him wonder more and more every day what could induce his brother Eric to have such a passionate inclination towards it! It was a strange fancy, he thought, as he watched the disturbed state of the wild ocean, lashed into frenzy by the force of the gale, which seemed to wax more lusty each hour; for, the ship appeared to be, now, careering like a mad thing through some deep watery valley, between lofty mountainous peaks of spray, and, the next moment, seeming to be on the toppling edge of a fathomless abyss, into which she looked about to plunge headlong to destruction as she rose above the plane of tempest-tossed water, borne aloft on the rolling crest of one of the huge waves that were racing by each other as if in sport—the broken, billowy element boiling and seething as far as the eye could reach, in eddies of creamy foam and ridges of turbid green, with the clouds above of a leaden tinge that deepened, as they approached the horizon, to a dark slatish hue, becoming blue-black in the extreme distance.

“That Shakespeare was a fine fellow!” Fritz said to Captain Brown, who stood close by the binnacle, keeping an eye to the two men who were now at the wheel steering; for, the ship required careful handling in the heavy sea that was running to prevent her from broaching to, and it needed very prompt action frequently to jam down the helm in time, so as to let her fall off her course before some threatening mountain of water that bore down on her bows.

“Ha-ow?” ejaculated the skipper inquiringly, turning to the other, who was looking over the taffrail surveying the scene around and had spoken musingly—uttering his thoughts aloud.

“I mean Shakespeare, the great dramatist,” replied Fritz, who, like all educated Germans, had a keen appreciation of the bard and could quote his pregnant sayings at pleasure. “He wrote plays, you know,” he added, seeing that Captain Brown did not quite comprehend him.

“Oh, I rec’lect now,” replied the skipper, understanding him at last, and his face beaming with curious intelligence. “Him as wrote a piece called ‘Hamlet,’ hey? I reckon I see it once when I wer to Boston some years ago, an’ Booth acted it uncommon well, too, yes, sirree!”

“Well then,” said Fritz, going on to explain the reason for his original remark, “Shakespeare exactly expresses my sentiments, at this present moment, in the words which he puts into the mouth of one of his characters in the ‘Tempest,’ Gonzalo, I think. ‘Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground; long heath, brown furze, anything: the wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death!’”

The young fellow laughed as he ended the apt quotation.

The skipper, however, did not appear to see the matter in the same light.

“I guess thet there Gonzalo,” he remarked indignantly, “wer no sailor; an’ Mister Shakespeare must hev hed a durned pain in his stummick when he writ sich trash!”

Some hours afterwards, fortunately for Fritz’s feelings, the gale broke; when, the wind shifting round to the northward of west, the *Pilot’s Bride* was enabled to steer away from the South American coast and shape a straight course for Tristan d’Acunha.

Chapter Twenty.

Arrival at Tristan d’Acunha.

“This air prime, now ain’t it?” said the skipper to Fritz, as the ship, with her nose pointing almost south, was driving away before the north-west wind and making some ten knots an hour.

“Yes, she’s going along all right,” replied he; adding frankly, however, “I should like it all the better, though, if the vessel didn’t roll about so much.”

"Roll?" exclaimed Captain Brown indignantly; "call this rolling? Why, Jee-rusalem, she only gives a kinder bit of a lurch now an' ag'in! I thought you would hev got your sea-legs on by this time."

Fritz could only bow to this statement, of course; but, all due deference to the skipper, nevertheless, the *Pilot's Bride* did roll, and roll most unmercifully, too.

She was just like a huge porpoise wallowing in the water!

It may be remembered that she had sailed from port light, with a pretty considerable freeboard; and now, with the wind almost right aft, so that she had no lateral pressure to steady her—as would have been the case if the breeze had been abeam or on her quarter—she listed first to port and then to starboard, with the "send" of the sea, as regularly as the swing of a clock's pendulum. Really, the oscillation made it almost as impossible for Fritz to move about as if the ship had been contending with all the powers of the elements in a heavy storm, whereas the skipper said she was only "going easy," with a fair wind!

Why, the "breeze" had not lasted a day, before nearly every particle of glass and crockery-ware in the steward's cabin was smashed to atoms; while preventer stays had to be rove to save the masts from parting company.

Roll, eh? She did roll—roll with a vengeance!

Fortunately, this did not last long; the wind shifting round to the north-east, after a three days' spell from the west, which brought the ship on a bow line, steering, as she was, south-east and by south. Had not this change come when it did, "the old tub would hev rolled her bottom out," as Mr Slater, the whilom deck hand, "guessed" one morning to Fritz, while the crew were engaged in washing decks.

Of course, the brothers themselves had many a chat together while the voyage lasted, talking over their plans as well as chatting about the different scenes and circumstances surrounding the endless panorama of sea and sky, sky and sea, now daily unfolded before them.

Naturally—to Fritz, at least—all was new; and it was deeply interesting to him to notice the alteration in the aspect of the heavens which each night produced as the ship ran to the southward. The north star had disappeared with its pointers, as well as other familiar stellar bodies belonging to higher latitudes; but, a new and more brilliant constellation had risen up in the sky within his new range of view, which each evening became more and more distinct.

This was the Southern Cross, as it is called, consisting of four stars, three of the first magnitude and the fourth somewhat smaller, arranged in the form of an oblique crucifix, pointing across the firmament "athwartship-like," as the skipper explained one night-watch when the brothers were looking out together. Only once in the year, Captain Brown said, is this cross perfectly perpendicular towards the zenith; for, as it circles round our planet, it reverses its position, finally turning upside-down.

When the *Pilot's Bride* ceased to roll and began to make steady way towards Tristan, with the wind from the northward and eastwards on her beam, she ran along steadily on one tack, with hardly a lurch, covering some two hundred miles a day as regularly as the log was hove and the sun taken at noon.

All this time, no sight could now have been more glorious than the heavens presented each night after sunset. The myriads upon myriads of stars that then shone out with startling brilliancy was something amazing; and the puzzle to Fritz was, how astronomers could name and place all these "lesser lights"—following their movements from day to day and year's end to year's end, without an error of calculation, so that they could tell the precise spot in the firmament where to find them at any hour they might wish!

"And yet," said Fritz, musingly, "these wise men are puzzled sometimes."

"Nary a doubt o' thet," responded the skipper, who, in spite of his rough manner and somewhat uncultivated language, thought more deeply than many would have given him credit for; "I guess, mister, all the book-larnin' in the world won't give us an insight inter the workin's o' providence!"

"No," said Fritz. "The study of the infinite makes all our puny efforts at probing into the mysteries of nature and analysing the motives of nature's God appear mean and contemptible, even to ourselves."

"Thet's a fact," assented the skipper. "Look thaar, now! Don't thet sky-e, now, take the gildin' off yer bunkum phioserphy an' tall talkin' 'bout this system an' thet—ain't thet sight above worth more'n a bushel o' words, I reckon, hey?"

Fritz gazed upwards in the direction the other pointed, right over the port quarter of the ship and where the starry expanse of the stellar world stretched out in all its beauty.

Eastwards, near the constellation Scorpio, was the Southern Cross, which had first attracted their attention, the figurative crucifix of the heavens; while the "scorpion," itself, upreared its head aloft, surmounted by a brilliant diadem of stars that twinkled and scintillated in flashes of light, like a row of gems of the first water—the body of the fabled animal being marked out in fine curves, in which fancy could trace its general proportions, half-way down the heavens. In a more southerly direction, still, the parallel stars of the twin heroes Castor and Pollux could be seen, shining out with full lustre in a sky that was beautifully, intensely blue, conveying a sense of depths beyond depths of azure beyond; and, as the wondering lookers gazed and the night deepened, fresh myriads of stars appeared to come forth and swell the heavenly phalanx, although the greater lights still maintained their glittering superiority, Jupiter emitting an effulgence of radiant beams from his throne at the zenith, while the Milky Way powdered the great celestial dome with a smoke wreath of starlets that circled across the firmament in crescent fashion, like a sort

of triumphal arch of flashing diamonds which the angels could tread in their missions from heaven to earth, or the feet of those translated to the realms of the blest!

"Grand, ain't it?" repeated the skipper.

But Fritz said nothing; his thoughts went deeper than words.

A day or two after this, the north-east wind suddenly failed and a dead calm set in, lasting for twenty-four hours. This circumstance did not please Captain Brown much, for he hardly knew what to make of it; however, after a day and night of stagnation, the breeze returned again, although, in the interim of lull, it took it into its head to shift round more to the southwards, causing the *Pilot's Bride* to run close-hauled.

On the evening before this change of wind, and while the calm yet continued, the sea presented what seemed to Fritz—and Eric too, for he had never seen such a sight before, although he had much better acquaintance with the wonders of the deep than his brother—a most extraordinary scene of phosphorescent display, the strange effect of it being almost magical.

The sun had set early and the moon did not rise till late; but, as soon as the orb of day had disappeared below water, the horizon all round became nearly as black as ink, without any after-glow, as had invariably been noticed at previous sunsets. The whole sky was dark and pitchy like; only a few stars showing themselves momentarily for a while high up towards the zenith, although they were soon hidden by the mantle of sombre cloud that enveloped the heavens everywhere.

Meanwhile, the entire surface of the sea, in every direction as far as their eyes could reach, seemed as if covered with a coating of frosted silver; and, all around the ship, at the water-line, there appeared a brilliant illumination, as if from a row of gas jets or like the footlights in front of the stage of a theatre. Where the sea, too, was broken into foam by the slight motion of the ship, it also gave out the same appearance; and the faint wake astern was as bright as the track usually lit up by the moon or rising sun across the ocean, resembling a pathway of light yellow gold.

When Fritz first saw the reflection, on looking over the side of the ship, he thought that something had happened down below, and that the appearance he noticed was caused by different lights, streaming through the portholes and scuttles.

"What are they doing with all those lanterns in the hold?" he asked Eric in surprise.

The sailor lad laughed.

"No ship lanterns," said he, "are at work here. They say that this queer look of the sea is occasioned by thousands of little insects that float on the surface and which are like the fireflies of the tropics. Don't you recollect reading about them?"

"But then, this light is so continuous," replied Fritz. "It is bright as far away as we can see."

"Yes, I suppose the shoal of insects stretches onward for miles; still, it is only when it is dark like this, with the sky overcast, that you can see them. At least, that is what I've been told, for I never saw such a display before."

"You're 'bout right, my lad," observed Captain Brown, who had come over to leeward, where the brothers were. "I forgit what they call the durned things; but, they're as thick as muskitters on the Florida coast. You'll see 'em all clear away as soon as the moon shows a streak, though. They can't stand her candlelight, you bet!"

It was as the skipper said. Although the illumination of the sea was so vivid that it lit up the ship's sails with flashes as the water was stirred, it died away when the moon shone out. Then, too, the sky lightened all round and the clouds cleared away before the approaching wind which had thus apparently heralded its coming.

Nothing occurred after this to break the monotony of the voyage, beyond a school of whales being noticed blowing in the distance away to the windward one day, about a week after the change of wind.

"There she spouts!" called out a man who was up in the fore cross-trees, overhauling some of the running gear; but the hail only occasioned a little temporary excitement, for the animals were much too far off for pursuit and, besides, Captain Brown wished to land the brothers and clear his ship of all cargo before going whaling on his own account.

This consummation, however, was not long distant; for some sixteen days or so after they had turned their backs on the South American coast, the skipper told Fritz he hoped to be at Tristan on the morrow. This was when he and the captain were having their usual quarter-deck walk in the first watch, the evening of the same day on which they passed the school of whales.

"Yes, sirree," he said, "we've run down to 36 degrees South latitude, I guess, an' wer 'bout 13 degrees West when I took the sun at noon; so I kalkerlate, if the wind don't fail an' the shep keeps on goin' as she is, which is bootiful, I reckon, why we'll fetch Tristan nigh on breakfus-time to-morrow,—yes, sir!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Fritz. He did not think they were anywhere near the place yet; for, although it was more than two months since they had left Narraganset Bay, the ship appeared to sail so sluggishly and the voyage to be so tedious, that he would not have been surprised to hear some day from the captain that they would not reach their destination until somewhere about Christmas time!

"Ya-as, really, I guess so, mister. No doubt you're a bit flustered at gettin' thaar so soon; but the *Pilot's Bride's* sich a powerful clipper that we've kinder raced here, an' arrove afore we wer due, I reckon!"

The skipper innocently took Fritz's expression of surprise to be a compliment to the ship's sailing powers; and so Fritz would not undeceive him by telling him his real opinion about the vessel. It would have been cruel to try and weaken his belief in the lubberly old whaler, every piece of timber in whose hull he loved with a fatherly affection almost equal to that with which he regarded his daughter Celia.

Fritz therefore limited himself to an expression of delight at the speedy termination of their voyage, without hazarding any comment on the *Pilot's Bride's* progress; by which means he avoided either hurting the old skipper's feelings or telling an untruth, which he would otherwise have had to do.

He was undoubtedly glad to have advanced so far in their undertaking; for, once arrived at Tristan d'Acunha, a few more days would see them landed on Inaccessible Island, when, he and Eric would really begin their crusoe life of seal-catching and "making the best" of it, in solitary state.

Wasn't he up on deck early next morning, turning out of his bunk as soon as he heard the first mate calling the captain at four bells—although, when he got there, he found Eric had preceded him, he having charge of the morning watch and having been up two hours before himself!

However, neither of the brothers had much the advantage of the other; for, up to breakfast time, Tristan had not been sighted.

But, about noon, "a change came o'er the spirit of their dream!"

Captain Brown had just gone below to his cabin to get his sextant in order to take the sun, while Fritz, to quiet his impatience, had sat down on the top of the cuddy skylight with a book in his hand, which he was pretending to read so as to cheat himself, as it were; when, suddenly, there came a shout from a man whom the skipper had ordered to be placed on the look-out forward—a shout that rang through the ship.

"Land ho!"

Fritz dropped his book on to the deck at once and Eric sprang up into the mizzen rigging, hurriedly scrambling up the ratlins to the masthead, whence he would have a better point of observation; the skipper meanwhile racing up the companion way with his sextant in his hand.

"Land—where away?" he sang out, hailing the man on the fore cross-trees.

"Dead away to leeward, two points off the beam," was the answer at once returned by the man on the look-out, who happened, strangely enough, to be Fritz's whilom acquaintance, the "deck hand!"

"Are you sure?" hailed the captain again to make certain.

"As sure as there's claws on a Rocky Mountain b'ar," replied the man in a tone of voice that showed he was a bit nettled at his judgment being questioned; for he next added, quite loud enough for all to hear, "I guess I oughter know land when I see it. I ain't a child put out to dry nurse, I ain't!"

"There, thet'll do; stow thet palaver!" said Captain Brown sharply, "else you'll find thet if Rocky Mountain b'ars hev claws, they ken use 'em, an' hug with a prutty good grip of their own too, when they mean bizness, I guess, Nat Slater; so, you'd better quiet down an' keep thet sass o' yourn for some un else!"

This stopped the fellow's grumbling at once; and Captain Brown, after proceeding aloft to have a look for himself and see how far the island was off, gave directions for having the ship's course altered, letting her fall off a point or two from the wind.

"I guess I wer standin' a bit too much to the northward," he said to Fritz, who was waiting on the poop, longing to ask him a thousand questions as to when they would get in, and where they would land, and so on; "but thet don't matter much, as we are well to win'ard, an' ken fetch the land as we like."

The island, which at first appeared like a sort of low-lying cloud on the horizon, was now plainly perceptible, a faint mountain peak being noticeable, just rising in the centre of the dark patch of haze.

"Is it far off?" asked Fritz.

"'Bout fifty mile or so, I sh'u'd think, mister," answered the skipper—"thet is more or less, as the air down below the line is clearer than it is north, so folks ken see further, I guess. I don't kinder think it's more'n fifty mile, though, sou'-sou'-west o' whar the shep is now."

"Fifty miles!" repeated Fritz, somewhat disconcerted by the announcement; for, he would not have thought the object, which all could now see from the deck, more than half that distance away. "Why, we'll never get there to-day!"

"Won't we?" said the skipper. "Thet's all you know 'bout it, mister. The *Pilot's Bride* 'll walk over thet little bit o' water like a race hoss, an' 'ill arrive at Tristan 'fore dinner time, you bet!"

The skipper's prognostication as to the time of their arrival did not turn out quite correct, but Fritz's anxiety was allayed by their reaching the place the same night; for, the mountain peak, which had been noticed above the haze that hung over the lower part of the island, began to rise higher and higher as the ship approached, until its sharp ridges could be plainly seen beneath a covering of snow that enveloped the upper cone and which changed its colour from glistening white to a bright pink hue as it became lit up by the rays of the setting sun—the latter dipping beneath the western horizon at the same instant that the *Pilot's Bride* cast anchor in a shallow bay some little

distance off the land, close to Herald Point, where the English settlement on the island lies.

Chapter Twenty One.

An Ocean Colony.

Fritz and Eric wished to go ashore the moment the anchor plunged into the water and the chain cable grated through the hawse hole; but, darkness setting in almost immediately after sunset, as is usual in such southerly latitudes, their landing had to be postponed until the next morning, when the skipper told them they would have plenty of time to inspect the little ocean colony of Tristan d'Acunha—that is, should not a westerly-wind set in, bringing with it a heavy swell, as it invariably did; for, this would cause them “to cut and run from their anchorage in a jiffy,” if they did not desire to lay the ship's bones on the rocks by Herald Point, which he, “for one,” he said, had no intention of doing.

However, the wind still remained in the same quarter, blowing steadily from the south-east, which made it calm where the *Pilot's Bride* was lying—Captain Brown from previous experience knowing the safest berth to take up—so she did not have to shift her berth. When morning broke, too, the brothers had a better view of the place than on the evening before; for then, only a hasty peep at it could be obtained before it was hidden by night.

The small bay in which the ship was moored opened to the westward; and, on the right, a slope of rough pasture land, about a quarter of a mile in width, ran up from the beach to an almost precipitous wall of rock, a thousand feet or more in height—although a sort of misty vapour hung over it, which prevented Fritz from gauging its right altitude. On the left-hand side, the wall of rock came sheer down into the sea, leaving only a few yards of narrow shingle, on which the surf noisily broke. A stream leaped down from the high ground, nearly opposite the vessel, and the low fall with which it tumbled into the bay at this point indicated that there would be found the best landing-place, an opinion which Captain Brown confirmed as soon as he came on deck.

“I guess, though,” said the skipper, pointing out a red flag which Fritz could notice just being hoisted on one of the cottage chimneys in the distance, “we needn't hurry 'bout launchin' a boat, fur some o' them islanders are comin' off to pay us a visit an' will take you ashore. Thet's their signal for communicatin' with any vessel thet calls in here. Run up our ensign, Mr Dort,” he added to Eric, who stood at his station on the lee side of the mizzen mast; “an' tell 'em to fire the gun forrud, jest to give 'em a kinder sort o' salute, you know. Uncle Sam likes to do the civil, the same as other men-o'-war when they goes to foreign ports!”

These orders were obeyed; and no sooner were the “Stars and Stripes” run up to the masthead and the report of the little gun on the topgallant fo'c's'le heard reverberating through the distant mountain tops—the sound of the discharge being caught up and echoed between the narrow arms of the bay—than a smart whale-boat, pulled by eight men and with a white-bearded, venerable-looking individual seated in the stern-sheets, was seen coming out from the very spot which Fritz had determined to be the landing-place.

They were soon alongside the *Pilot's Bride*; when the old man—who introduced himself as Green, the oldest inhabitant of the island and with whom Captain Brown had already had an acquaintance of some years' duration—cordially invited Fritz to land, the skipper having explained that he wished to see the place and hear all about it. He told the brothers aside, however, that perhaps they'd better not mention their intention of settling on Inaccessible Island, for the inhabitants of Tristan, who sent expeditions every year on sealing excursions there, might not like to hear this news.

While on their way to the shore with the old man and four of the islanders—the other Tristaners remaining on board the ship to select certain articles they required from her stores and arrange for the barter of fresh meat and potatoes with Captain Brown in exchange—Fritz observed that, some distance out from the land, there was a sort of natural breakwater, composed of the long, flat leaves of a giant species of seaweed which grew up from the bottom, where its roots extended to the depth of fifteen fathoms. This, old Green pointed out, prevented the rollers, when the wind was from the westward, from breaking too violently on the shore, between which and the floating weed was a belt of calm water, as undisturbed as the surface of a mountain tarn.

The landing-place was of fine black sand, showing the volcanic character of the mountain peak above, which Green said was over eight thousand feet high and had an extinct crater on the top; and, when Fritz and his brother had jumped out of the boat, they proceeded up to the little settlement of the islanders, which was called “Edinburgh” out of compliment to his Royal Highness Prince Alfred, who had visited the place when cruising in HMS *Galatea*, just four years before their landing.

The village consisted of some dozen cottages or so, roughly built of square blocks of hewn stone dovetailed into each other, without mortar, and thatched with tussock-grass. The houses were scattered about, each in its own little garden, enclosed by walls of loosely piled stones about four feet high; but, as it was now the early spring of Tristan, these had very little growing in them. One of the enclosures, Fritz noticed, had a lot of marigolds in flower, another, several dwarf strawberry plants just budding, while a third was filled with young onions; but the majority displayed only the same coarse, long tussock-grass with which the cottages were thatched.

When the brothers came to examine the houses more closely, they were particularly struck with the neatness with which they were constructed and the extreme labour that must have been expended on them.

Apart from the difficulty of procuring wood, which they could only get from stray whaling ships, the islanders are obliged to build their dwellings of stone, in order to prevent their being demolished by the fierce and frequent hurricanes that assail the isolated little spot, exposed as it is to all the rude blustering blasts that career over the expanse of the Atlantic. The cottages are, therefore, put together with a dark-brown, soft sort of stone, which is hewn out in great blocks from the cliffs above the settlement and afterwards shaped with great accuracy and care with the

axe. Many of these masses of stone are upwards of a ton in weight; but, still, they are cut so as to lock into one another in a double row to form the main wall, which is some eighteen inches thick, with smaller pieces of stone, selected with equal care as to their fitting, placed in between. There is no lime on the island, so that the blocks are put together on the cyclopean plan, without cement. They are also raised into their places in the same primitive fashion, strong spars being used for inclined planes, up which these monoliths are pushed by manual labour in a similar way to that described in the old hieroglyphics of the Nineveh marbles. With all these precautions as to strength, however, the sou'-westers blow with such fierceness into the little bay where the colony is situated, that many of these massive buildings, Green said, were constantly blown down, the huge blocks being tumbled about like pieces of cork!

The roofs were thatched with the long grass that Fritz had seen growing in the gardens and with which he had later on a closer and more painful acquaintance, the tussock fibres being fastened inside to light poles that were attached to rafters placed horizontally, while the ridges outside were covered with bands of green turf, firmly fixed on.

As for the colony, which numbered some eighty souls in all, it consisted of fifteen families, who possessed from five to six hundred head of cattle and about an equal supply of sheep, with lots of pigs and poultry, each family having its own stock in the same way that each cultivated its own garden; but, there was a common grazing ground, where also large quantities of potatoes were raised—the trade of the island being principally with the American whalers, who take supplies of fresh meat and vegetables, for which they barter manufactured goods, household stuffs, and “notions.”

During their visit, Fritz and Eric were hospitably entertained by the old man Green at his cottage, which had three large rooms and was the best in the place; and the roast pig which furnished the main dish of the banquet was all the more toothsome, by reason of the long time the brothers had been at sea and so deprived of fresh meat and those good things of the land, to which they had grown somewhat accustomed during their stay at the comfortable shanty on Narraganset Bay under Mrs Brown's auspices.

Indirectly, too, Fritz found out a great deal about Inaccessible Island; and, the more he heard, the more firmly rooted became his determination to settle there. The seals, old Green said, were numerous enough; but, he added that the islanders were only able to pay a short visit in December every year, and so lost considerable chances of taking more of them.

“Aha,” thought Fritz, “we'll be there altogether, and so will have opportunities for taking them all the year round. Tristaners, my good people, look out for your sealskins and oil in future; we, crusoes, are going into the business wholesale!”

When the brothers were rowed back to the ship in the evening—having spent the entire day on the island in noticing what would be most useful to themselves subsequently for the new life they were about to adopt—the other Tristaners who had remained on board choosing goods returned to the shore, promising to send the value of the articles they had selected in beef and potatoes on the following morning. Before turning in for the night, however, Captain Brown gave Fritz to read a newspaper extract which he had posted into his logbook. This detailed the early history of the little colony, and the gist of it was as follows:—

Although discovered as early as the year 1506 by d'Acunha, the first comparatively modern navigator who visited the island was the captain of an American ship—the *Industry*, a whaler sailing from Philadelphia—who remained at Tristan from August, 1790, to April, 1791, his people pitching their tents on almost the precise spot now occupied by the settlement. At the time of this vessel's visit, it was mentioned that there was plenty of wood of a small growth excellent for firewood; but this Fritz noticed was not the case when he inspected the place during the day, hardly anything but slight brush being apparent beyond the tussock-grass. The American captain also stated that the amount of sea animals of all kinds on the island—whales, seals, and penguins—was almost inexhaustible, his party having procured over six thousand sealskins during their stay of seven months, besides killing more whales than they could find room for the oil from them in their ship! This, too, had become altered during the years which had elapsed, the seals getting scarcer at Tristan now, through the wholesale war carried on against them by the islanders, who latterly, with the exception of the visits they paid to Inaccessible Island and Nightingale Islet—according to old Green's account—had almost abandoned the pursuit for sheer want of sport.

The next mention of Tristan d'Acunha, as related in the printed chronicle Fritz read, was in the year after the American captain's sojourn there, when two British ships of war, the *Lion* and *Hindustan*, which were probably East Indiamen, with the English embassy to China on board, anchored off the north side of the island under the cliff of the mountain peak; but, a sudden squall coming on, these vessels had to leave without investigating the place thoroughly, although their commanders described it as being uninhabited at that time.

Nine years later, the captain of another ship that called there found three Americans settled on the island, preparing sealskins and boiling down oil. Goats and pigs had been set adrift by some of the earlier visitors, as well as vegetables planted, and these colonists appeared to be in a very flourishing condition, declaring themselves perfectly contented to pass their lives there. One of the men, indeed, had drawn up a proclamation, stating that he was the king of the country, a title which the others acknowledged; and the three, the monarch and his two subjects, had cleared about fifty acres of land, which they had sown with various things, including coffee-trees and sugar-canes; but, whether this plantation turned out unsuccessful, or from some other notion, the “king” and his colleagues abandoned the settlement—the place remaining deserted until the year 1817, when, during Napoleon Buonaparte's captivity at Saint Helena, the island was formally taken possession of by the English Government, a guard of soldiers being especially drafted thither for its protection, selected from the Cape of Good Hope garrison.

This was, undoubtedly, the foundation of the present colony; for, although the military picket was withdrawn in the following year, a corporal of artillery with his wife and two brother soldiers, who expressed a desire to remain on the island, stayed behind. Since then, Tristan has always been inhabited—the original little colony of four souls having

formed the nucleus of the present settlement of over eighty, men joining it at various times from passing whalers, while women were imported from the Cape when wives were wanted. From the fact of these latter being mostly Hottentots, the complexion of the younger men, Fritz noticed, was somewhat darker than that of Europeans. This explained what the skipper meant, on first telling him about the island, when he said the inhabitants were "mulattoes"; although Fritz thought them only of a brunette tinge, for they were of much lighter hue than many Spaniards and Italians whom he had met on the Continent.

Glass, the ex-artilleryman and original founder of the English settlement, was a Scotchman, born at Kelso. He seems to have been a man of great principle and energy, these qualities gaining for him the complete confidence of the little community over which his authority was quite of a patriarchal character. For thirty-seven years he maintained his position as leader, representing the colony in all its transactions with passing ships and showing himself just and honest in his dealings. The islanders had always been English-speaking, and having strong British sympathies, "Governor Glass," as he was styled, received permission from one of the naval officers visiting the island to hoist the red ensign, as a signal to vessels going by. This slight official recognition was all the notice that the settlement has received from England ever since its establishment—that is, beyond the sending out of a chaplain there by the "Religious Tract Society," who remained for five years and when leaving spoke of the members of the little settlement as being so highly moral that they did not require any spiritual ministrations, "there not being a vice in the colony to contend with!"

To this latter statement, Fritz found the skipper had appended an eccentric footnote:—"Cos why, there ain't no rum handier than the Cape, the little to be got from the whalers visiting the spot—an' they have little enough from me, you bet!—being speedily guzzled down by the old birds, an' the young uns never gettin' a taste o' the pizen!"

On Glass's death, he was succeeded in the leadership of the colony by Green, the next oldest man, who now lived in the house of the late founder of the settlement and hoisted the English ensign in his turn. Green was a venerable-looking man, with a long white beard, and seemed, from what Fritz could gather in his different conversations with the islanders, to have successfully followed in his predecessor's footsteps.

Since the Duke of Edinburgh's visit in the *Galatea*, many other stray men-of-war have occasionally called to see how the islanders were getting on; but the principal trading communication they have has always been with American whalers, some round dozen of which call at Tristan yearly for the purposes of barter.

"An' I guess it's a downright shame," said Captain Brown, when mentioning this latter fact to Fritz, "thet they don't fly the star-spangled banner instead o' thet there rag of a British ensign! If it weren't for us whalers, they'd starve fur want of wood to warm themselves in winter; an', who'd buy their beef an' mutton an' fixins, if we didn't call in, hey?"

"That's a conundrum, and I give it up," answered Fritz with a laugh.

"Ah, you're a sly coon," said the skipper, sailing away to his cabin. "I guess it's 'bout time to bunk in, mister, so I'm off. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned Fritz, shutting up the log book and going his way likewise to the small state room set apart for the use of himself and his brother, where he found Eric asleep and snoring away soundly, the tramping about ashore having completely tired out the lad.

Chapter Twenty Two.

"Alone!"

The next morning, when Fritz got on deck, he found the ship diving and courtesying to her anchor, while an ominous swell came rolling in past her from the westward towards the beach. The surf, too, was breaking against the boulders of the high rocky ramparts that came down sheer from the cliff on the left-hand side of the bay, which was now to the right of where Fritz was standing at the stern of the *Pilot's Bride*, she having swung round during the night and now laying head to sea.

There was no wind to speak of, although there was evidently a change brewing; still, any one with half an eye could see that the skipper was quite prepared for any emergency, for the headsails of the vessel, instead of being furled up, now hung loose, the gaskets being cast-off and the bunts dropped. The men, also, were forward, heaving away at the windlass and getting up the cable, of which a considerable length had been paid out, the ship riding in over forty fathoms of water.

"Hullo, mister," exclaimed Captain Brown, when he noticed Fritz looking about him, as if perplexed as to what these signs meant,—"I told you we might hev to cut an' run any moment!"

"Why?" said Fritz.

"Can't you see, man," retorted the other. "I thought you'd hev been half a sailor by this time, judgin' by your smart lad of a brother! Why, the wind is jest choppin' round to the west'ard, I reckon; an', as I don't kinder like to let the ship go to pieces on them thaar cliffs to loo'a'd, I guess we're goin' to make tracks into the offin' an' give the land a wide berth."

"Are you going to start soon?" asked Fritz.

"Waall, there ain't no 'mediate hurry, mister; but I allers like to be on the safe side, an' when them islanders bring their second boatload o' taters an' t'other grub, I reckon we'll be off. They've brought one lot already, in return for

the dry goods an' bread-stuffs I've let 'em hev; an' when they bring the second, I guess the barg'in'll be toted up!"

Not long afterwards, Fritz saw the islanders' boat coming off from the landing-place. It was pretty well laden, and the swell had increased so greatly that it sometimes was lost to sight in the trough between the heavy rollers that undulated towards the shore. The Tristaners, however, being accustomed to the water and experienced boatmen, did not make much of the waves; but, pulling a good steady stroke, were soon alongside—the bowman catching a rope which was hove from the chains and holding on, while the various contents of the cargo brought were handed on board. This operation had to be performed most dexterously; for, one moment, the little craft would be almost on a level with the ship's bulwarks, while the next she would be thirty feet below, as the billowy surface of the sea sank below her keel.

Eric was beside the skipper, checking the quantities of provisions which had been accurately calculated beforehand, for the Tristaners showed a keen eye to business and weighed everything they bartered for the whaler's goods, when one of the men hailed him. This was the identical young fellow of whom he had spoken to Fritz when first expounding his projected scheme for going sealing to Inaccessible Island, and who, he mentioned besides, had told him all about the place. Indeed, he had actually suggested his going there. Eric had wondered much at not having come across this young man on the previous day when they had visited the settlement, although he looked about for him, so he was doubly pleased to see him now.

"Hullo!" cried out this Tristaner to the young German. "So you are back again, eh?"

"Yes," said Eric. "Come aboard a moment; I want to speak to you."

"All right," exclaimed the other, who was a fine, stalwart young fellow, with jet-black hair and a bronzed face that appeared to be more tanned by the weather than owing its hue to coloured blood; when, in a jiffy, he had swung himself into the chains by the rope attached to the boat's bows and was by Eric's side on the deck of the *Pilot's Bride*, his face all over smiles.

"You're the very chap I was wanting to see," said Eric, shaking hands with him cordially. "I was puzzled to know what had become of you yesterday. I did not see you anywhere."

"I was away up the mountain, gathering grass," replied the young fellow. "So, you've returned here, as you said you would, early in the year?"

"You told me such fine accounts of the fishing," retorted Eric with a laugh, "that, really, I couldn't stop away. I want to talk to you about it again now. This is my brother," he added, introducing Fritz.

"Glad to know him," said the Tristaner, bowing politely—indeed, the manners of all the islanders struck Fritz as being more polished than what he had observed in so-called civilised society. "Is he going to join you in settling on Inaccessible Island?"

"Yes," replied Eric. "He and I have determined to start sealing there. We have come from America on purpose. Is there anything more you can tell us about it?"

"Have you got provisions to last you a year at the least? You must calculate to hold out so long, for no ship may be able to visit you earlier and you cannot count on procuring much food on the island."

"Oh, yes; we've got plenty of grub," said Eric, using the sailor's term for food.

"And the things besides that I told you would be necessary?"

"You may be certain of that," replied Eric. "The only thing I see that we'll have any difficulty about will be in rigging up a house. I'm sure that Fritz and I will never be able to build a substantial shanty like one of those you have here in your island."

"No, perhaps not," said the young fellow, smiling. "You see, when we are going to run up a house, we all join together and lend a hand, which makes it easy work for us. It would be impossible for one or two men—or many more, indeed. I'll tell you what I'll do for you, though. If the captain of your ship here will promise to bring me back again to Tristan, I will go over there with you for a couple of days or so, to see you comfortably fixed up, as you Americans say, at Inaccessible Island, before you and your brother are left to yourselves."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Eric joyfully. "I will ask the skipper at once."

To dart across the deck to where Captain Brown was now standing by the open hatchway, overseeing the provisions being passed down into the ship's hold, was, for the sailor lad, but the work of a moment!

"Oh, Captain Brown,"—commenced Eric breathlessly, his excitement almost stopping his speech for a second.

"Waall, what's all the muss about?" said the old skipper, turning round and scanning the lad's eager face. "Do you an' your brother want to back out o' the venture naow? I saw you talkin' to thet Tristaner you met here with me in the spring."

"Back out of the project?" repeated Eric very indignantly. "Give up my pet plan, when everything is turning more and more in favour of it, captain? I should think not, indeed!"

"Then, what's the matter?" asked the skipper.

"I want you to grant me a favour," said Eric, hesitating a bit as the other looked at him steadfastly, a half-smile, half-

grin on his weather-beaten countenance.

"Thought sunthin' wer up!" ejaculated the skipper. "Waall, what's this durned favour o' your'n?" he added in his good-natured way. "Spit it out, sonny, an' don't make sich a mealy mouth of it!"

"This Tristaner—young Glass, you recollect him, don't you, captain?" said Eric, proceeding with his request—"says he'll come with us and help to build our cabin for us at Inaccessible Island, and settle us—"

"Show you the ropes, in fact, hey?" interrupted the skipper.

"Yes," continued Eric. "He agrees to stop a day or two with us, till we feel at home, so to speak, if you will undertake to bring him back again and land him at Tristan before you go on to the Cape."

"Oh!" exclaimed the skipper, giving expression to a long, low whistle from between his closed teeth. "Thet's the ticket, is it? Waall, I guess I don't mind doin' it to oblige you an' your brother, though it'll take me a main heap out o' my way coastin' up haar ag'in!"

"Thank you; oh, thank you, captain," said Eric, quite delighted with this promise; and he rushed back across the deck to tell the others the good news.

While the young Tristaner was explaining matters to his comrades in the boat—from which all the stores had now been removed that had been brought off from the island and a few extra articles put in, which Captain Brown had made them a present of, as "boot" to the bargain of barter—the wind began to spring up in gusts, causing the ship's sails to flap ominously against the masts.

"Guess you'd better be off," cried the skipper, coming to the side, where the two brothers and the young Tristaner who was going to accompany them stood leaning over, having a parting palaver with those in the boat below. "The breeze is risin', an' if you don't kinder care 'bout startin', I reckon we must. Shove off thaar!"

"All right," sang out one of the islanders, casting off the rope which attached them still to the ship. "Good-bye, and mind you bring our countryman back safe."

"You bet," shouted the skipper. "I'll take care o' him as if he wer my own kin. Now, Eric," he added, "you've got to tend your duties to the last aboard, you know; away aft with you an' see to the mizzen sheets. All hands make sail!"

The topsails were dropped at the same moment and sheeted home, while the jib was hoisted; and the ship, paying off, forged slowly up to her anchor.

"Now, men," sang out Captain Brown sharply. "Put your heart into thet windlass thaar, an' git the cable in! It's comin' on to blow hard, an' if you don't look smart we'll never git out of this durned bay in time!"

Clink, clank, went round the unwieldy machine, as the crew heaved with a will, their movements quickened by the urgency of getting under weigh without delay, and each man exerting the strength of two.

"Heave away, men!" chorussed the mate, standing over them and lending his voice to their harmonious chant. "Heave! Yo ho, heave!"

A few hearty and long pulls, and then the anchor showed its stock.

"Hook cat!" shouted the mate; whereupon, the fall being stretched along the deck, all hands laid hold.

"Hurrah, up with her now, altogether!" came the next cry; and then, the anchor was bowsed up to the cathead to the lively chorus that rang through the ship, the men walking away with the fall as if it had no weight attached to it. The yards were now braced round and the *Pilot's Bride* began to beat out of the bay against the head wind, which was now blowing right on to the shore.

"Guess we aren't a bit too soon," said the skipper, when the vessel, after her second tack to starboard, just cleared Herald Point. "If we'd stopped much longer, we'd been forced to stop altogether, I reckon!"

"Was there any danger?" asked Fritz innocently.

"Yes, mister; there's allers danger to a shep with a gale comin' on an' a nasty shore under her lee. There's nothin' like the open sea for safety! When you can't come to an anchor in a safe harbour, the best thing is to up cable an' cut and run, say!"

Inaccessible Island was only about eighteen miles distant from Tristan; but, as it lay to the south-west of that island and the wind blew strongly from almost the same quarter, the *Pilot's Bride* had to make a couple of long tacks before she could approach sufficiently near for Fritz to see the spot where he and his brother had elected to pass so many weary months of solitary exile.

As the ship beat to windward, passing the island twice on either tack, he was able to notice what a bare, inhospitable-looking place it was.

Its structure seemed pretty much the same as that of Tristan, with the exception that the snow-white cone projecting into the clouds, which was the most noticeable feature in the latter island, was here wanting; but, a wall of volcanic rocks, about the same height as the cliff of Tristan d'Acunha, entirely surrounded the desolate spot, falling for the most part sheer into the sea and only sloping, as far as could be seen from the distance the ship was off, sufficiently on one side to allow of any access to the top. Against this impenetrable, adamant barrier, on the west, the heavy

rolling sea that had travelled all the way from Cape Horn was breaking with a loud din, sending columns of spray flying over almost the highest peaks and making the scene grand but awesome at the same time.

"Well might it be called Inaccessible Island!" exclaimed Fritz, gazing intently at the threatening cliffs and cruel surge.

"Yes, sirree, it kinder skearts one to look at it, don't it now, hey?"

"I should think it more dangerous to approach than Tristan?" said Fritz presently.

"I rayther guess so, mister," replied the skipper. "I rec'lect readin', when I was a b'y, of the wreck of a big East Indyman here bound fur Bombay. She wer called the *Blenden Hall*, an' I ken call to mind, though it must be nigh fifty year ago, the hull yarn as to how she wer lost."

"Do you?" said Fritz. "I should like to hear about it."

"Waall, here goes, I reckon. You see as how there wer several ladies aboard, an' it wer the plight they wer put in that made me 'member it all. It wer in the month of July that it happen'd, an' the vessel, as I said afore, wer bound to Bombay. The weather bein' thick an' the master funky about his latitudes, findin' himself by observation near these islands, he detarmined to look for 'em, in order to get a sight of 'em an' correct his reck'nin'. I guess he hed too much of a sight soon; fur, a thick fog shortly shut out everythin' from gaze, an' lookin' over the side he found the vessel in the midst of a lot o' floatin' weed. The helm wer put down, but by reason of light winds and a heavy swell settin' in to the shore, the same as you just now saw at Tristan, the shep's head couldn't be got to come round. Breakers were now heard ahead, so the jolly-boat wer lowered with a tow-line to heave the bows round; but it wer of no use, as the wind hed failed entirely an' the swell was a-drivin' the shep on to the rocks. An anchor wer then let go, but the depth of water didn't allow it to take hold, so, they lowered the cutter to help tow the shep's head round, along with the jolly-boat, when all of a sudden she struck. The fog wer so thick by then, thet those on board couldn't see the boats alongside, much less the shore. Howsomedever, they cut away the masts, to ease the vessel an' stop her grindin' on the rocks. Soon arter this, the fog lifted when those on board were frit by seein' right over their heads apparently, those very terrific-lookin' cliffs you see in front, just thaar—only thet they wer close into 'em, not more nor half a cable's length off, an' the heavy seas, sich as you ken now see runnin' up the face of the rocky wall thaar, wer breaking boldly right over the shep—"

"And," interrupted Fritz, "what happened then?"

"What could you expect?" replied the skipper. "I guess she wer beaten into matchwood in five minutes; although, won'erful to say, the hull of the passengers, ladies an' all, wer got ashore safely, only one man bein' drowned—an' it sarved him right, as he was one of the crew who tried to escape when the shep first struck, an' leave all the rest to perish! They wer all got to land by a hawser rigged from a peak of projectin' rock to a bit of the wreck; an' the ladies, I read, mister, an' all o' them, lived from July to November on penguins an' seal flesh, which they cooked in part of an iron buoy that they sawed in half fur a kittle, shelterin' themselves from the cold in tents thet they made out of the vessel's sails. I reckon, mister, you'll be kinder better provided fur an' lodged, hey?"

"Yes, thanks to your kindness," said Fritz; "but the island seems completely encompassed by this rocky wall. I don't see where and how we're going to land and get our things on shore!"

"Don't you?" chuckled the skipper. "I guess you'll soon see how we'll fix it."

Presently, Fritz's doubts were solved.

When the *Pilot's Bride* had worked her way well to windward of the island, the captain fetched down towards the eastern side, where, on rounding a point, a narrow bay lay right before the ship, quite sheltered from the rough swell and wind that reigned paramount on the other side of the coast, storming and beating against the wall-like cliffs in blind fury!

Here, it was as calm as a mill pond; so, the ship was brought to an anchor right in front of a pretty little waterfall that leaped its way by a series of cascades from the cliff above to a level plateau at the base, where a narrow belt of low ground extended for about a mile in front of the bay, its seaweed face being bordered by a broad sandy beach of black sand.

"Oh, that is pretty!" exclaimed Fritz and Eric, almost together in one breath. "It is like the falls of the Staubbach at home in dear Germany."

"I don't know nary anythin' 'bout thet," said the skipper laconically, for the brothers spoke for the moment in their native tongue, carried away by old associations; "but I guess we'll hev to see 'bout gettin' your fixins ashore pretty sharp, fur the wind may change agin, an' then I'd hev to cut an' leave you."

"All right, captain, we're quite at your service," said Fritz; and, a boat being lowered, the various packages containing the brothers' personal belongings, as well as the supply of provisions furnished by the skipper from the ship's stores for their use, were put on board, after which the two then jumped in accompanied by Captain Brown and the young Tristaner, the little party being rowed ashore by four seamen whom the skipper had ordered to assist.

As soon as they landed, the things were carried up the beach; when, the seamen bearing a hand,—directed by Captain Brown, who seemed quite used to the sort of work,—all devoted their efforts towards building a rough sort of house, which would serve the adventurous brothers for a temporary habitation until they could make themselves more comfortable.

Young Glass selected the best site for the building; and the skipper having caused a lot of timber to be placed in the

boat, a makeshift cottage was hastily run up, the walls being of blocks of stone without and of wood inside. The islander then thatched this neatly with tussock-grass, which grew all up the face of the cliff, where, as he showed the brothers, it could be utilised as a sort of ladder to gain the plateau on top—on which, he also told Fritz and Eric, they would find droves of wild hogs and a flock of goats that would come in handy for food when their provisions failed.

The Tristaner had promised to remain with them as long as Captain Brown would stay with the *Pilot's Bride*, that is, for a week or so, if the weather was favourable. However, quite unexpectedly, towards afternoon on the next day—when the cottage was completed, it is true, but they had not as yet had time to explore the island in company with young Glass, in order to be familiarised as to the best spots for sealing, planting their potatoes and vegetable seeds, and so on—the wind shifted again round to the south-east; and no sooner was this change apparent than the skipper had to weigh anchor without a moment's delay, when of course the Tristaner had to embark, or else submit to share the young crusoes' exile.

Captain Brown had remained on shore with them all the time from their landing, and he appeared now very loth to leave them at the last. Really, as they went down with him to the whale-boat in which they had come ashore, there were tears in the old man's eyes, which he tried vainly to hide.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed, stamping his foot vigorously. "It's all them dratted 'skeaters or flies, or sunthin's got inter my durned old optics as I can't see! Hail the ship, Eric my lad, an' tell 'em to send a boat to take us off, will you, sonny?"

"But the whale-boat that we landed in is here, captain," said Eric, thinking the skipper had forgotten all about it.

"Nary you mind that, my lad," shouted the good-hearted old man; "I'm goin' to leave that with you fur a present, b'ys, in case you sh'u'd get tired an' want ter shift your quarters to Tristan some day. It's allers best to be purvided with the means of escape, you know, in case of the worst, for the *Pilot's Bride* might get wracked down 'mongst the islands Kerguelen way, an' no shep might ever call to take you off."

"Oh, captain, how can we thank you!" exclaimed Fritz, overcome with emotion at the skipper's thoughtfulness. "Still, you will come and look us up next year should all be well with you, eh?"

"You bet on that," replied the worthy old man. "I guess you'll see me next fall, if I'm in the land o' the livin'!"

"And you'll call to see if there are any letters for us at the Cape of Good Hope, won't you? I told our people at home to write there, on the chance of their communications being forwarded on."

"I'll bring 'em sure, if there's any," replied the skipper; and, by this time, a second boat having been sent off from the ship, in which the seamen who had pulled the first whale-boat ashore now took their places, along with the Tristan islander, it only remained for the kind old captain to embark—and then, the brothers would be crusoes indeed!

"Good-bye, an' God bless you, my b'ys," he said, wringing first the hand of Fritz and then that of Eric, in a grip that almost crushed every feeling in those respective members. "Good-bye, my lads; but keep a stiff upper lip an' you'll do! Trust in providence, too, an' look arter the seals, so as to be ready with a good cargo when I come back next fall!"

"Good-bye, good old friend," repeated Fritz, wringing his honest hand again on the old man stepping into the boat, the crew of which raised a parting cheer as it glided away to the ship, leaving the young crusoes behind on the beach!

They watched with eager eyes the sails being dropped and the anchor weighed, the *Pilot's Bride* soon after spreading her canvas and making way out of the little bay.

Then, when she got into the offing, the skipper, as a final adieu, backed the vessel's main-topsail and dipped her colours three times, firing the bow gun at the same time.

It was a nautical farewell from their whilom comrades: and then the brothers were left alone!

Chapter Twenty Three.

Taking an Inventory.

The westerly wind being, of course, fair for the *Pilot's Bride* in her run back to Tristan d'Acunha, she soon disappeared in the distance—the snow-capped cone of the larger island being presently the only object to be seen on the horizon, looking in the distance like a faint white cloud against the sky. The evening haze shut out everything else from their gaze: the lower outlines of the land they had so recently left: the vessel that had conveyed them to their solitary home.

Nothing was to be seen but the rolling tumid sea that stretched around them everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, heaving and swelling and with the breeze flecking off the tops of the billows into foam as its resistless impetus impelled them onwards, away, away!

"Well," exclaimed Eric, after a long pause, during which neither of the brothers had spoken, both being anxiously watching the *Pilot's Bride*—until, first, her hull and then her gleaming sails, lit up for awhile by the rays of the setting sun, had sunk out of sight—"well, here we are at last!"

"Yes, here we are," said Fritz, "and we've now got to make the best of our little kingdom with only our own companionship."

"We won't quarrel, at all events, brother," replied Eric, laughing in his old fashion at the possibility of such a thing. The lad was quite overwrought with emotion at parting with the old skipper as well as his late companions in the ship; and, tears and mirth being closely allied, he would have felt inclined to laugh at anything then—just because he couldn't cry!

"I don't suppose we will," said the other—"that is, not intentionally. But, brother, we will have to guard our tempers with a strong hand; for, when two persons are thrown together in such close association as we shall be during the next ensuing months—with no one else to speak to and no authority to control us, save our own consciences and the knowledge of the all-seeing Eye above, weighing and considering our actions—it will require a good deal of mutual forbearance and kindly feeling on the part of one towards the other to prevent us from falling out sometimes, if only for a short while. Even brothers like us, Eric, who love each other dearly, may possibly fall out under such trying circumstances!"

"Aye, but we mustn't," said Eric. "Instead of falling out, we'll fall into each other's arms whenever we agree to differ, as old nurse Lorischen would have said!" and he gave his brother an enthusiastic hug as he spoke, putting his words into action with a suddenness that almost threw Fritz off his feet.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the latter good-humouredly, smiling as he disengaged himself from Eric's bear-like embrace. "Gently lad. Your affectionate plan, I'm afraid, would sometimes interfere with the progress of our work; but talking of that, as the vessel has now disappeared, there's no use in our standing here any longer looking at the sea. Suppose we begin to make ourselves at home and arrange our things in the snug little cottage which our good friends have built for us?"

"Right you are!" responded Eric, starting off towards the cliff, under the lee of which the Tristaner had directed the hut to be built, so that it might be sheltered from the strong winds of the winter, which would soon have blown it down had it been erected in a more exposed situation.

Fritz followed more leisurely to the level plateau by the waterfall, where stood their cottage.

Here, arresting his footsteps, he remained a moment surveying the little domain before joining his brother, who had already rushed within the building.

That boy was all impulse: always eager to be doing something!

The territory of the young crusoes was of limited dimensions. Extending about a mile laterally, it was bounded on either side by lofty headlands that projected into the sea, enclosing the narrow strip of beach that lay between in their twin arms. The depth of the valley inwards was even more confined by a steep cliff, down whose abrupt face slipped and hopped through a gorge, or gully, a little rivulet. This stream, on its progress being arrested by a shelf in front of the rocky escarpment, tumbled over the obstacle in a sheet of cloud-like spray, being thus converted into a typical "waterfall" that resembled somewhat that of Staubbach, as the brothers had noticed when making their first observations from the ship. The rivulet, collecting its scattered fragments below, made its way to the beach in a meandering course, passing by in its passage the slight hollow in the plateau at the base of the furthest crag, close by where the cottage was situated.

The "location," as Captain Brown would have termed the sloping ground between the cliff and the sea, was certainly not an extensive one; for, in the event of their wishing to expand their little settlement, in the fashion of squatters out West, by "borrowing" land from adjacent lots, the inexorable wall of volcanic rock to the rear of the plateau and on its right and left flank forbade the carrying out of any such scheme; still, the place was big enough for their house, besides affording room for a tidy-sized garden—that is, when the two had time to dig up the soil and plant the potatoes and other seed which the skipper had provided them with, so that they might have a supply of vegetables anon.

At first sight, there did not appear to be any means of exit from this little valley; for, the steep cliffs that hedged in its sides and back lifted themselves skywards to the height of nearly a thousand feet, while their fronts were generally so smooth and perpendicular that it would have been impossible even for a monkey to have climbed them—much less human beings, albeit one was a sailor and pretty well accustomed to saltatory feats! But, on their inspecting the apparently insurmountable breastwork a little closer, Fritz noticed, as the young Tristaner had pointed out to them, that, by the side of the gorge through which the waterfall made its erratic descent to the lower level, the face of the cliff was more strongly indented; so that, by using the tussock-grass, which grew there in great abundance, as a sort of scaling ladder, and taking advantage of the niches in the rock to step upon where this failed, the summit could be thus easily gained. The top, however, was so far away from the beach and the foothold so insecure that the work of ascending the crag would be a most hazardous proceeding at the best of times, to the elder brother at all events.

While Fritz was thus cogitating, and diligently studying the features of the scene around, Eric was waiting for him impatiently at the door of the rough-looking hut which the sailors had built for them under the superintendence of Captain Brown and the Tristaner.

The young sailor was too restless to remain quiet very long.

"Do come along, brother!" he called out after a while. "What a time you are, to be sure; we'll never be able to unpack our things before it's dark, unless you look sharp!"

"All right, I'm coming," replied the other; and he was soon by the side of Eric, who had already begun to overhaul the various articles that had been brought up from the boat by the sailors and piled up in a corner of the hut.

"What a lot of things!" exclaimed the lad. "Why, there are ever so many more parcels than I thought there were!"

"Yes," said his brother; "it is all that good Captain Brown's doing, I suppose. When we were parting, he told me that he had left me a few 'notions,' besides our own traps."

"He has too, brother. Just look here at this barrel of beef; you didn't pay him for that, eh?"

"No," said Fritz; "I only bought some pork and ship's biscuits, besides flour and a few groceries."

"Then he has thought of much that we forgot," remarked Eric with considerable satisfaction. "I don't think our groceries included preserved peaches and tinned oysters, Fritz; yet, here they are!"

"You don't say so—the kind old fellow!" exclaimed Fritz; and then he, too, set to work examining the stores as eagerly as his brother.

Before leaving Providence, the two had purchased a couple of spades and shovels, an American axe, a pick, a rake, a wheelbarrow, and a hoe for agricultural purposes—the skipper having told them that the soil would be fertile enough in the summer at Inaccessible Island for them to plant most sorts of kitchen produce, which they would find of great help in eking out the salted provisions they took from the ship, besides being better for their health; while, to give emphasis to his advice, he presented them with a plentiful stock of potatoes to put into the ground, besides garden seed.

For cooking, the brothers were provided with a large kettle and frying pan, a couple of saucepans, several knives and forks, some crockery, and, in addition, a large iron cauldron for melting down seal blubber; for hunting purposes, to complete the list of their gear, they had two harpoons, a supply of fishing hooks and a grapnel, two Remington rifles—besides Fritz's needle-gun which he had used in the first part of the Franco-German war, before he became an officer and was entitled to carry a sword—a supply of cartridges, five pounds of loose powder, lead for making bullets, and a mould.

Among their weapons, also, was an old muzzle-loading fowling piece for which shot had been taken, Fritz thinking that it might come in handy for shooting birds—although, as he subsequently found out, all of the feathered tribe they saw were penguins, and these did not require any expenditure of powder and shot on their behalf, being easily knocked down with a stick.

Nor did they forget to bring with them three or four strong sheath knives, for skinning the seals and any other use for which they were applicable; and, to add to their stock of cutlery implements, the skipper had presented Fritz with a serviceable bowie knife, whose broad double-dagger-like blade was powerful enough to cut down a tree on an emergency or make mince-meat of an enemy!

Fritz had likewise purchased in Rhode Island a good stock of winter clothing for himself and Eric, a couple of thick blanket rugs, and two empty bed-tick covers—to be afterwards filled with the down they should procure from the sea birds. He bought, too, a strong lamp, with a supply of paraffin oil, and several dozen boxes of matches; so that he and Eric should not have to adopt the tinder and flint business, or be obliged to rub two pieces of dry stick together, in the primitive fashion of the Australian aborigines, when they wanted a light.

So much for their equipment.

For their internal use, Fritz had selected from the ship's stores a barrel of salt pork, two hundred-weight of rice, one hundred pounds of hard biscuit, two hundred-weight of flour, twenty pounds of tea and thirty of coffee, and a barrel of sugar; besides which, in the way of condiments and luxuries, their stores included three pounds of table salt, some pepper, a gallon of vinegar, a jar of pickles, a bottle of brandy and some Epsom salts in the view of possible medical contingencies. The skipper also advised their taking a barrel of coarse salt to cure their sealskins with, as well as empty casks to contain what oil they managed to boil down.

These were their own stores; but, imagine the surprise of Fritz and his brother, when they found that Captain Brown had added to their stock the welcome present of a barrel of salt beef and a couple of hams, a good-sized cheese, and some boxes of sardines, besides the preserved fruits and pickled oysters which Eric had already discovered.

Nor did the skipper's kindness stop here. He had packed up with their things a couple of extra blankets, which they subsequently found of great comfort in the cold weather, in addition to their rugs; a wide piece of tarpaulin to cover their hut with; a few short spars and spare timber; and, lastly, a clock—not to speak of the valuable whale-boat which he had thought of just as he was going away and had presented to them all standing, with oars, mast and sails in complete trim.

"I declare," said Fritz, "he has been better than a father to us all through. I never heard of such good nature in my life!"

"Nor I," responded Eric, equally full of gratitude. "Celia, too, before I left Providence, gave me a nice little housewife, wherewith I shall mend all our things when they want repairing, besides which, she made me a present of quite a little library of books."

"And I've brought all mine as well," said Fritz, unrolling a large package as he spoke.

"We'll not be hard up for reading, at any rate," remarked Eric, laughing joyously. "Food for the mind as well as food for the body, eh?"

"Yes," said Fritz; "plenty of both."

"But, how on earth shall we ever be able to get through all this lot of grub?"

"Ah, we won't find it a bit too much," said Fritz.

"What, for only us two, brother?" exclaimed Eric in astonishment.

"You forget it has got to last us more than a year, for certain; while, should the *Pilot's Bride* not visit us again next autumn, it will be all we may have to depend on for twice that length of time."

"Oh, I forgot that."

"If you could see the pile of rations which one regiment alone of men manages to consume in a week, the same as I have, Eric, you would not wonder so much at the amount of our supplies."

"But think, brother, a regiment is very different to two fellows like us!"

"Just calculate, laddie," answered the other, "the food so many men would require for only one day; and then for us two, say, for seven hundred days—where's the difference?"

"Ah, I see," said Eric, reflecting for a moment. "Perhaps there won't be too much, after all, eh?"

"Wait till this time next year, and see what we shall have left then, laddie!"

"But, remember the goats and pigs on the top of the mountain which the Tristaner spoke to us about. We'll have those for food as well, won't we?"

"Wait till we catch them," remarked Fritz dryly; adding shortly afterwards, "We'd better stop talking now, however, and see about getting our bed things ready for turning in for the night. Recollect, we'll have a busy day of it to-morrow."

"Ah, I shall go up and explore the mountain top, brother, the first thing in the morning," said Eric impulsively. "I'm dying to see what it's like!"

"We have more important things to do, before satisfying our curiosity," observed the other. "Don't you recollect the garden?"

"I declare I forgot it, brother, for the moment, although there's no need for us to hurry about that."

"The sooner we plant the seed, the sooner it will grow up," said Fritz gravely. "Remember, old fellow, it is late in the spring now here; and, unless the things are put into the ground without further delay, Captain Brown said we need not hope to have any return from them this year."

"All right, Fritz," replied Eric cheerfully, the name of the skipper having the talismanic effect of making him curb his own wishes anent the immediate exploration of the island, which he had planned out for the next day's programme. "We'll do the garden first, brother, if you like."

"I think that will be wisest," said Fritz. "But now let us arrange our bunks and have a bit of something to eat from the little basket the steward put up for us before coming ashore. After that, we must go to roost like the penguins outside, for it is nearly dark."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Eric, touching his cap with mock deference.

"You just do that again!" said Fritz, threatening him in a joking way.

"Or, what?" asked the other, jumping out of his reach in make-believe terror.

"I'll eat your share of this nice supper as well as mine."

"Oh, a truce then," cried Eric, laughing and coming back to his brother's side; when the two, sitting down in the hut, whose interior now looked very comfortable with the lamp lit, they proceeded to demolish the roast fowl and piece of salt pork which Captain Brown had directed the steward to put into a basket for them, so that they should be saved the trouble of cooking for themselves the first day of their sojourn on the island, as well as enjoy a savoury little repast in their early experience of solitude.

"I say," remarked Eric, with his mouth full. "This is jolly, ain't it!"

"Yes, pretty well for a first start at our new life," replied Fritz, eating away with equal gusto. "I only hope that we'll get on as favourably later on."

"I hope so, too, brother," responded the other. "There's no harm in wishing that, is there?"

"No," said Fritz. "But, remember, the garden to-morrow."

"I shan't forget again, old fellow, with you to jog my memory!"

"Ah, I'll not omit my part of it, then," retorted Fritz, joining in Eric's laughter. Then, the brothers, having finished their meal, turned out their lamp; and, throwing themselves down on a heap of rugs and blankets which they had piled together in a corner of the hut, they were soon asleep, completely tired out with all the fatigues and exertions of the eventful day.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Gardening under Difficulties.

If the brothers thought that they were going to hold undisputed sway over the island and be monarchs of all they surveyed, they were speedily undeceived next morning!

When they landed from the ship on the day before, in company with the captain and boat's crew, all had noticed the numbers of penguins and rock petrels proceeding to and from the sea—the point from whence they started and the goal they invariably arrived at being a tangled mass of brushwood and tussock-grass on the right of the bay, about a mile or so distant from the waterfall on the extreme left of the hut.

The birds had kept up an endless chatter, croaking, or rather barking, just like a number of dogs quarrelling, in all manner of keys, as they bustled in and out of the "rookery" they had established in the arm of the cliff; and Fritz and Eric had been much diverted by their movements, particularly when the feathered colonists came out of the water from their fishing excursions and proceeded towards their nests.

The penguins, especially, seemed to possess the diving capabilities of the piscine tribe, for they were able to remain so long under the surface that they approached the beach without giving any warning that they were in the neighbourhood. Looking out to sea, as the little party of observers watched them, not a penguin was to be seen. Really, it would have been supposed that all of them were on shore, particularly as those there made such a din that it sounded as if myriads were gathered together in their hidden retreat; but, all at once, the surface of the water, some hundred yards or so from the beach, would be seen disturbed, as if from a catspaw of a breeze, although what wind there was blew from the opposite quarter, and then, a ripple appeared moving in towards the land, a dark-red beak and sometimes a pair of owlish eyes showing for a second and then disappearing again. The ripple came onwards quickly, and the lookers-on could notice that it was wedge-shaped, in the same fashion as wild geese wing their way through the air. A moment later, a band of perhaps from three to four hundred penguins would scramble out on to the stones with great rapidity, at once exchanging the vigorous and graceful movements for which they were so remarkable while in the water for the most ludicrous and ungainly ones possible now that they were on terra firma; for, they tumbled about on the shingle and apparently with difficulty assumed the normal position which is their habit when on land—that of standing upright on their feet. These latter are set too far back for their bodies to hang horizontally; so, with their fin-like wings hanging down helplessly by their sides, they look ashore, as Fritz said to Eric, "just the very image of a parcel of rough recruits" going through their first drill in the "awkward squad!"

When the penguins got fairly out of the water, beyond reach of the surf—which broke with a monotonous motion on the beach in a sullen sort of way, as if it was curbed by a higher law for the present, but would revenge itself bye-and-bye when it had free play—they would stand together in a cluster, drying and dressing themselves, talking together the while in their gruff barking voice, as if congratulating each other on their safe landing; and then, again, all at once, as if by preconcerted order, they would start scrambling off in a body over the stony causeway that lay between the beach and their rookery in the scrub, many falling down by the way and picking themselves up again by their flappers, their bodies being apparently too weighty for their legs. The whole lot thus waddled and rolled along, like a number of old gentlemen with gouty feet, until they reached one particular road into the tussock-grass thicket, which their repeated passage had worn smooth; and, along this they passed in single file in the funniest fashion imaginable. The performance altogether more resembled a scene in a pantomime than anything else!

This was not all, either.

The onlookers had only seen half the play; for, no sooner had this party of excursionists returned home than another band of equal numbers appeared coming out of the rookery from a second path, almost parallel with the first but distinctly separated by a hedge of brushwood—so as to prevent the birds going to and from the sea from interfering with each other's movements.

These new-comers, when they got out of the grass on to the beach—which they reached in a similar sprawling way to that in which the others had before traversed the intervening space, "jest as if they were all drunk, every mother's son of 'em!" as the skipper had said—stopped, similarly, to have a chat, telling each other probably their various plans for fishing; and then, after three or four minutes of noisy conversation, in which they barked and growled as if quarrelling vehemently, they would scuttle down with one consent in a group over the stones into the water.

From this spot, once they had dived in, a long line of ripples, radiating outwards towards the open sea, like that caused by a pebble flung into a pond, was the only indication, as far as could be seen, that the penguins were below the surface, not a head or beak showing.

Such was the ordinary procedure of the penguins, according to what Fritz and the others noticed on the first day of the brothers' landing on the island.

A cursory glance was also given to the movements of the curious little rock hoppers and petrels. These made burrows in the ground under the basaltic débris at the foot of the cliffs, just like rabbits, popping in and out of their subterranean retreats in the same way as people travelling in the American backwoods have noticed the "prairie dogs" do; but, both the brothers, as well as the men from the *Pilot's Bride*, were too busy getting the hut finished while daylight lasted and carrying up the stores from the beach to the little building afterwards, to devote much time to anything else.

When, too, the captain and seamen returned on board and the ship sailed, leaving Fritz and Eric alone, they had quite enough to occupy all their time with unpacking their things and preparing for the night, without thinking of the penguins; although they could hear their confused barking noise in the distance, long after nightfall, above the singing of the wind overhead through the waterfall gully and the dull roar of the surf breaking against the western

side of the coast. The brothers, however, were too tired to keep awake long, soon sinking into a heavy sleep that was undisturbed till the early morning.

But, when day broke, the penguins would not allow their existence to be any longer forgotten, the brothers being soon made aware of their neighbourhood.

Eric, the sailor lad, accustomed to early calls at sea when on watch duty, was the first to awake.

"Himmel!" he exclaimed, stretching his arms out and giving a mighty kick out with his legs so as to thoroughly rouse himself. He fancied that he heard the mate's voice calling down the hatchway, while summoning the crew on deck with the customary cry for all hands. "What's all the row about—is the vessel taken aback, a mutiny broken loose, or what?"

"Eh?" said Fritz sleepily, opening his eyes with difficulty and staring round in a puzzled way, unable at first to make out where he was, the place seemed so strange.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" repeated Eric, springing up from amongst the rugs and blankets, which had made them a very comfortable bed. "I thought I was on board the *Pilot's Bride* still, instead of here! Listen to that noise going on outside, Fritz? It sounds as if there were a lot of people fighting—I wonder if there are any other people here beside ourselves?"

"Nonsense!" said his brother, turning out too, now thoroughly awake. "There's no chance of a ship coming in during the night; still, there certainly is a most awful row going on!—What can it be?"

"We'll soon see!" ejaculated Eric, unfastening a rude door, which they had made with some broken spars, so as to shut up the entrance to the hut, and rolling away the barrels that had been piled against it, to withstand any shock of the wind from without. The brothers did not fear any other intruder save some blustering south-easter bursting in upon them unexpectedly.

"Well!" sang out Fritz, as soon as the lad had peered without—"do you see anybody?"

"No," replied Eric, "not a soul! I don't notice, either anything moving about but some penguins down on the beach. They are waddling about there in droves."

"Ah, those are the noisy gentlemen you hear," responded the other, coming to the doorway and looking around. "Don't you catch the sound more fully now?"

"I would rather think I did," said Eric. "I would be deaf otherwise!"

There was no doubt of the noise the birds made being audible enough!

The barking, grunting, yelping cries came in a regular chorus from the brushwood thicket in the distance, sometimes fainter and then again with increased force, as if fresh voices joined in the discordant refrain.

The noise of the birds was exactly like that laughing sort of grating cry which a flock of geese make on being frightened, by some passer-by on a common, say, when they run screaming away with outstretched wings, standing on the tips of their webbed feet as if dancing—the appearance of the penguins rushing in and out of the tussock clump where their rookery was, bearing out the parallel.

"They are nice shipmates, that's all I can say!" remarked Eric presently, after gazing at the movements of the birds for some little time and listening to the deafening din they made. "They seem to be all at loggerheads."

"I dare say if we understood their language," said Fritz, "we would know that each of their different cries has a peculiar signification of its own. Perhaps, they are talking together sociably about all sorts of things."

"Just like a pack of gabbling old women, you mean!" exclaimed Eric. "I should like to wring all their necks for waking us up so early!"

"Not a bit too soon," observed Fritz. "See, the sun is just rising over the sea there; and, as we turned in early last night, there is all the better reason for our being up betimes this morning, considering all there is for us to do before we can settle down regularly to the business that brought us here. What a lovely sunrise!"

"Yes, pretty fairish to look at from the land," replied the other, giving but a half-assent to his brother's exclamation of admiration. "I've seen finer when I was with Captain Brown last voyage down below the Cape near Kerguelen. There, the sun used to light up all the icebergs. Himmel, Fritz, it was like fairyland!"

"That might have been so," responded the elder of the two, in his grave German way when his thoughts ran deep; "but, this is beautiful enough for me."

And so it might have been, as he said—beautiful enough for any one!

The moon had risen late on the previous night, and when Fritz and Eric turned out it was still shining brightly, with the stars peeping out here and there from the blue vault above; while, the wind having died away, all the shimmering expanse of sea that stretched away to the eastwards out of the bay shone like silver, appearing to be lazily wrapped in slumber, and only giving vent to an occasional long hum like a deeply drawn breath. But, all in a moment, the scene was changed—as if by the wave of an enchanter's wand.

First, a rosy tinge appeared, creeping up from below the horizon imperceptibly and spreading gradually over the

whole arc of sky, melting presently into a bright, glowing madder hue that changed to purple, which faded again into a greenish neutral tint that blended with the faint ultramarine blue of the zenith above. The bright moonlight now waning, was replaced for an instant or two only—the transition was so short—by a hazy, misty chiaro-oscuro, which, in another second, was dissolved by the ready effulgence of the solar rays, that darted here, there, and everywhere through it, piercing the curtain of mist to the core as it annihilated it.

Then, the sun rose.

But no, it did not rise in the ordinary sense of the expression; it literally jumped up at once from the sea, appearing several degrees above the horizon the same instant almost that Fritz and Eric caught sight of it and before they could realise its presence, albeit their eyes were intently fixed all the while on the point where it heralded its coming by the glowing vapours sent before.

“Ah!” exclaimed Fritz, drawing a deep breath when this transformation of nature was complete, the light touching up the projecting peaks of the cliff and making a glittering pathway right into the bay. “This sight is enough to inspire any one. It ought to make us set to our work with a good heart!”

“Right you are,” responded Eric, who was equally impressed with the magic scene—in spite of his disclaimer about having seen a better sunrise in antarctic seas. “As soon as we’ve had breakfast, for I confess I feel peckish again—it’s on account of going to bed so early, I suppose!—I’m ready to bear a hand as your assistant and help you with the garden. But, who shall be cook? One of the two of us had better take that office permanently, I think; eh, Fritz?”

“You can be, if you like,” said the other. “I fancy you have got a slight leaning that way, from what I recollect of you at home.”

“When I used to bother poor old Lorischen’s life out of her, by running into the kitchen, eh?”

“Yes, I remember it well.”

“Ah, that was when I was young,” said Eric, laughing. “I wouldn’t do it now, when I am grown up and know better!”

“Grown up, indeed! you’re a fine fellow to talk of being of age with your seventeen years, laddie!”

“Never mind that,” retorted Eric; “I mayn’t be as old as you are; but, at all events, I flatter myself I know better how to cook than a sub-lieutenant of the Hanoverian Tirailleurs!”

So saying, the lad proceeded to make a fire and put the kettle on in such a dexterous manner that it showed he was to the manner born, so to speak; Fritz helping to aid the progress of the breakfast by fetching water from a pool which the cascade had hollowed out for itself at the point where it finally leapt to level ground and betook itself to the sea in rivulet fashion.

The brothers only trenched on their stores to the extent of getting out some coffee and sugar, the remains of their supper being ample to provide them with their morning meal; and, after partaking of this, armed with their wheelbarrow and other agricultural implements, besides a bag of potatoes and some seed for planting, they sallied forth from the hut in the direction of the penguin colony.

Here, the Tristaner told them, they would find the best spot for a garden, the soil being not only richer and easier to cultivate but it was the only place that was free from rock, and not overrun by the luxuriant tussock-grass which spread over the rest of the land that was not thicket.

Proceeding to the right-hand side of the cliff under which their hut was built, they descended the somewhat sloping and broken ground that led in the direction of the penguin colony, the noise from which grew louder and louder as they advanced, until it culminated in a regular ear-deafening chorus.

When they had reached the distance of about a quarter of a mile, they came to a closely grown thicket, principally composed of a species of buckthorn tree that grew to the height of some thirty feet although of very slender trunk, underneath which was a mass of tangled grass and the same sort of debris from the cliff as that whereon their hut stood. The place was overgrown with moss and beautiful ferns, while several thrushes were to be seen amongst the branches of the trees just like those at home, although the brothers did not think they sang as sweetly: they whistled more in the way of the blackbird. The ground here, too, was quite honeycombed with the burrows of the little petrels, and into these their footsteps broke every moment. It was odd to hear the muffled chirp and feel the struggling birds beneath their feet as they stepped over the grass-grown soil. The ground had not the slightest appearance of being undermined by the mole-like petrels, its hollowness being only proved when it gave way to the tread; although, after the first surprise of the two young fellows at thus disturbing the tenants of the burrows, they walked as “gingerly” as they could, so as to avoid hurting the little creatures. The birds, however, seemed too busy with their domestic concerns to take any notice of them.

After passing through the strip of wood, which was not of very extensive dimensions, Fritz and Eric found the ground on the other side level and pretty free from vegetation. This open land was just at the angle between the cliffs, occupying a space of perhaps a couple of acres, exactly as the Tristaner had told them; so, here they began at once their operations for laying out their projected garden, which was to be the first task they had to accomplish before settling down, now that they had been saved the trouble of building a house to live in.

Eric, impetuous as usual, wanted to dig up and plant the entire lot; but Fritz was more practical, thinking it the wisest plan not to attempt too much at once.

“No,” said he, “we had better begin with a small portion at first; and then, when we have planted that, we can easily

take in more land. It won't be such easy work as you think, laddie!"

Accordingly, they marked out a space of about twenty yards square; and then, the brothers, taking off their coats, commenced digging at this with considerable energy for some length of time. But, Eric soon discovered that, easy as the thing looked, it was a much tougher job than he had expected, the ground being very hard from the fact of its never having had a spade put into it before; besides which, the exercise was one to which the lad was unaccustomed.

"Really, I must rest," he exclaimed after a bit, his hands being then blistered, while he was bathed in perspiration from head to foot. He did not wish to give in so long as he saw Fritz plodding on laboriously, especially as he had made light of the matter when they began; but now he really had to confess to being beaten. "I declare," he panted out, half-breathlessly—"my back feels broken, and I couldn't dig another spadeful to save my life!"

"You went at it too hard at first," said his brother. "Slow and sure is the best in the long run, you know! Why, I haven't tired myself half as much as you; and, see, I have turned over twice the distance of hard ground that you have."

"Ah, you are used to it," replied Eric. "I'm more accustomed to ploughing the sea than turning up land! But, I say, Fritz; while you go on digging—that is if you're not tired—I've just thought of something else I can do, so as not to be idle."

"What is that—look on at me working, eh?"

"No," said the lad, laughing at the other's somewhat ironical question; "I mean doing something really—something that will be helping you and be of service to the garden."

"Well, tell me," replied Fritz, industriously going on using his spade with the most praiseworthy assiduity, not pausing for a moment even while he was speaking; for, he was anxious to have the ground finished as soon as he could.

"I thought that some of the guano from the place where the penguins make their nests would be fine stuff to manure our garden with before we put in the seeds, eh?"

"The very thing," said Fritz. "It's a capital idea of yours; and I am glad you thought of it, as it never occurred to me. I recollect now, that the Tristaner said they used it for the little gardens we saw at their settlement. It will make our potatoes and cabbages grow finely."

"All right then; shall I get some?"

"By all means," responded Fritz; "and, while you are collecting it, I will go on preparing the ground ready for it; I've nearly done half now, so, by the time you get back with the guano I shall have dug up the whole plot."

"Here goes then!" cried Eric; and, away he went, trundling the wheelbarrow along, with a shovel inside it for scraping up the bird refuse and loading the little vehicle—disappearing soon from his brother's gaze behind the tussock-grass thicket that skirted the extreme end of the garden patch, close to the cliff on the right-hand side of the bay, and exactly opposite to the site of their cottage, this being the place where, as already mentioned, the penguins had established their breeding-place, or "rookery."

Prior to Eric's departure, the birds had been noisy enough, keeping up such a continual croaking and barking that the brothers could hardly hear each other's voice; but now, no sooner had the lad invaded what they seemed to look upon as their own particular domain, than the din proceeding from thence became terrific, causing Fritz to drop his spade for the first time since handling it and look up from his work, wondering what was happening in the distance.

He could, however, see nothing of Eric, the tussock-grass growing so high as to conceal his movements; so, he was just about resuming digging, fancying that his brother would shortly be back with his wheelbarrow full of guano manure and that then the uproar would be over, when, suddenly, he distinguished, above all the growling and barking of the penguins, the sound of the lad's voice calling to him for aid.

"Help, Fritz, help!" cried Eric, almost in a shriek, as if in great pain. "Help, Fritz, help!"

Chapter Twenty Five.

Eric's Cookery.

To throw down his spade a second time and rush off in the direction from whence his brother's cries for assistance proceeded was but the work of an instant for Fritz; and when he had succeeded in pushing his way through the tangled tussock-grass, which grew matted as thick as a cane-brake, he found the lad in a terrible plight.

At first, the strong ammoniacal smell of the guano was so overpowering, combined with the fearful noise the penguins made—all screaming and chattering together, as if the denizens of the monkey house at the Zoological Gardens, which Fritz had once visited when in London, had been suddenly let loose amongst the parrots in the same establishment—that his senses were too confused to distinguish anything, especially as the thicket was enveloped in semi-darkness from the overhanging stems of the long grass which shut out the sunlight; but, after a brief interval, Fritz was able to comprehend the situation and see his brother. Poor Eric was lying face downwards, half-suffocated amidst the mass of bird refuse, with the wheelbarrow, which had got turned over in some mysterious way or other, lying over him and preventing him from rising. Really, but for Fritz's speedy arrival, the lad might have lost his life in so strange a fashion, for he was quite speechless and his breath gone when his brother lifted him up.

Nor was this the worst either.

The penguins had made such a determined onslaught on Eric with their heavy beaks and flapping wings, and possibly too with their webbed feet when he was down struggling amongst them, that his clothes were all torn to rags; while his legs and body were bleeding profusely from the bites and scratches he had received. His face alone escaped injury, from the fact of its being buried in the guano débris.

Fritz took hold of him, after pulling away the wheelbarrow, and lugged him outside the penguin colony; when the lad, recovering presently, was able to tell the incidents of the adventure, laughing subsequently at its ridiculous aspect. It seemed funny, he explained, that he, a sailor who had battled with the storms of the ocean and feared nothing, should be ignominiously beaten back by a flock of birds that were more stupid than geese!

He had thought it easy enough to get the guano for the garden, he said, but he had overrated his ability or rather, underrated the obstacles in his way; for, no sooner had he left the level ground which they had selected for their little clearing, than he found that the tussock-grass, which appeared as light and graceful in the distance as waving corn, grew into a nearly-impenetrable jungle.

The root-clumps, or "tussocks" of the grass—whence its name—were two or three feet in width, and grew into a mound about a foot high, the spaces intervening between, which the penguins utilised for their nests, averaging about eighteen inches apart, as if the grass had been almost planted in mathematical order.

It would have been hard enough to wheel in the wheelbarrow between the clumps, Eric remarked, if all else had been plain sailing; but since, as he pointed out and as Fritz indeed could see for himself, the stems of the thick grass raised themselves up to the height of seven or eight feet from the roots, besides interweaving their blades with those of adjoining clumps, the difficulty of passing through the thicket was increased tenfold. He had, he said, to bend himself double in stooping so as to push along the wheelbarrow into the birds' breeding-place, which he did, thinking his path would become more open the farther he got in.

So, not to be daunted, Eric trundled along the little vehicle right into the heart of the birds' colony, beating down the grass as he advanced and crushing hundreds of eggs in his progress, as well as wheeling over those birds that could not, or stupidly would not, get out of his way; when, as he was beginning to load up the wheelbarrow with a mass of the finer sort of guano which he had scraped up, the penguins, which had been all the while grumbling terribly at the intruder who was thus desolating their domain—waiting to "get up steam," as the lad expressed it—made a concerted rush upon him all together, just in the same manner as they appeared always to enter and leave the water.

"In a moment," Eric said, "the wheelbarrow got bowsed over, when I managed, worse luck, to fall underneath; and then, finding I couldn't get up again, I hailed you, brother."

"I came at once," interposed Fritz, "the moment I heard you call out."

"Well, I suppose you did, old fellow," said Eric; "but whether you did or didn't, in another five minutes I believe it would have been all up with me, for I felt as if I were strangled, lying down there on my face in that beastly stuff. It seemed to have a sort of take-away-your-breath feeling, like smelling-salts; and, besides, the penguins kicked up such a hideous row all the while that I thought I would go mad. I never heard such a racket in my life anywhere before, I declare!"

"But they've bitten you, too, awfully," remarked Fritz sympathisingly. "Look, your poor legs are all bleeding."

"Oh, hang my legs, brother!" replied the other. "They'll soon come right, never fear, when they have had a good wash in salt water. It was the noise of the blessed birds that bothered me more than all their pecking; and, I can say truly of them, as of an old dog, that their bark is worse than their bite!"

So chuckling, the lad appeared to think no more of it; albeit he had not escaped scathless, and had been really in imminent peril a moment before. "The penguins do bark, don't they, Fritz?" he presently asked when he had stopped laughing.

"Yes," said his brother, "I don't think we can describe the sounds they make as anything else than barking. Talking of dogs, I wish I had my old Gelert here; he would soon have made a diversion in your favour and routed the penguins!"

"Would he?" exclaimed Eric in a doubting tone, still rather sore in his mind at having been forced to beat a retreat before his feathered assailants. "I fancy the best dog in the world would have been cowed by those vicious brutes; for, if he didn't turn tail, he would be pecked to death in a minute!"

Eric was not far wrong, as a fine setter, belonging to one of the officers of HMS *Challenger*, when that vessel was engaged in surveying the islands of the South Atlantic, during her scientific voyage in 1874, was torn to pieces by the penguins in the same way that Eric was assailed, before it could be rescued.

"Never mind," said Fritz, "I wish dear old Gelert were here all the same."

"So do I," chorussed Eric, jumping up on his legs and shaking himself, to see whether his bones might not have received some damage in the affray. "We should have rare fun setting him at the penguins and interrupting their triumphant marches up and down the beach!" And he raised his fist threateningly at his late foes.

"Do you know," observed Fritz, who had been cogitating awhile, "I think I see the reason for their methodical habit of going to and from the water."

"Indeed?" said Eric.

"Yes. Don't you recollect how an equal number seem always to come out from the rookery and proceed down the beach when the other batches land from the sea, just as if they took it in rotation to go fishing?"

"Of course. Why, Captain Brown specially pointed that out to us."

"Well," said Fritz, "the reason for that is, that the males and females mind the nests in turn, just as you sailors keep watch on board ship. First, let us say, the gentlemen penguins go off to the sea to have a swim, and see what they can catch; and then, at the expiration of a fixed time, these return to the shore and take charge of the nests, sitting on the eggs while their wives, whom they thus relieve for a spell, have a spell off, so as to get a mouthful of fresh air —"

"Water, you mean," interposed Eric, jokingly.

"All right, water then, and perhaps a fish or two as well; after which they come back to attend to their own legitimate department. Look now at that group there, just in front of us?"

Eric glanced towards the spot where his brother directed his attention, and noticed a party of penguins returning from the sea. These separated as soon as they approached the line of nests, different individuals sidling up to the sitting birds and giving their partners a peck with their beaks, by way of a hint, barking out some word of explanation at the same time. In another moment, the home-coming penguin had wedged itself into the place of the other, which struggling on to its feet then proceeded outside the thicket, where, being joined by others whose guard had been thus similarly relieved, the fresh group proceeded together, in a hurried, scrambling sort of run, to the beach, whence they shortly plunged into the sea, having, however, their usual gabbling colloquy first in concert before taking to the water.

"They're a funny lot," said Eric; "still, they're not going to get the better of me, for I intend to load the wheelbarrow with their guano, whether they like it or not!"

"I wouldn't disturb them again, if I were you," observed Fritz. "They seem to have quieted down, and do not mind our presence now."

"I won't trouble them, for I shall not go inside their rookery," said Eric. "I only intend to skirt round the place, and see what I can pick up outside."

"Very well then, I will go on digging the garden, which I have been neglecting all this time, if you will get the manure. I should like to plant some of our potatoes to-day, before knocking off work, if we can manage it."

"All right, fire away; I will soon come and join you," said Eric, and the brothers separated again—Fritz proceeding back to the ground he had been digging, which now began to look quite tidy; while the sailor lad, lifting up the handles of the wheelbarrow, trundled it off once more along the edge of the tussock-grass thicket, stopping every now and again to shovel up the guano, until he had collected a full load, when he wheeled his way back to where Fritz was working away still hard at the potato patch.

A piece of ground twenty yards long by the same in breadth is not easy to dig over in a day, even to the most industrious toiler, and so Fritz found it; for, in spite of the interruption his brother had suffered from on his first start after the manure from the bird colony, the lad managed to cover the whole of the plot they had marked out with the fertilising compound, which he wheeled up load after load, long before he had accomplished half his task, although he dug away earnestly.

Fritz had been a little more sanguine than he usually was. He thought he could have finished the job before the middle of the day; but, when it got late on in the afternoon and the sun gave notice as he sank behind the western cliff that the evening was drawing nigh, there was still much to finish; and so, much to the elder brother's chagrin, the task had to be abandoned for the day in an incomplete state.

"Never mind," he said to Eric—when, putting their spades and other tools into the wheelbarrow, they trundled it homeward in turn, like as their friends the penguins practised their domestic duties—"we'll get it done by to-morrow, if we only stick to it."

"I'm sure I will do my best, brother," responded Eric; "but, really, I do hate digging. The man who invented that horrible thing, a spade, ought to be keel-hauled; that's how I would serve him!"

"Is that anything like what the penguins did to you this morning?" asked Fritz with a chuckle.

"Pretty much the same," said Eric, grinning at the allusion. "I declare I had almost forgotten all about that! However, I'll now go and get a change of clothes, and have a bath in the sea before sitting down comfortably to our evening meal;" and, anxious to carry out this resolve at once, the lad set off running towards the hut with the wheelbarrow before him, he having the last turn of the little vehicle.

"There never was so impetuous a fellow as Eric," Fritz said to himself, seeing the lad start off in this fashion. "Himmel, he is a regular young scatter-brain, as old Lorischen used to call him!"

"Pray be quick about your bath," he called out after him. "I will get the coffee ready by the time you come back."

"Good!" shouted Eric in return. "Mind and make it strong too; for, I'm sure I shall want something to sustain me after all my exertions!"

The day terminated without any further incident; although the wind having calmed down, the young fellows heard the penguins much more plainly through the night than previously. Still, this did not much affect their rest; for in the

morning they turned out fresh and hearty for another day's experience of gardening.

But, again, they were unable to finish the plot of land properly on this second day, to Fritz's satisfaction, so as to begin planting their seeds. The ground was so hard and there were such numbers of roots and weeds to remove from the soil, that it took them up to the middle of the afternoon of the third day ere their little plot could be said to be clear of all extraneous matter. Then, however, it was really ready for the reception of their seedling potatoes and other vegetables, with the guano well dug in.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Fritz, as he and Eric began fixing a piece of line across the fresh mould, so as to be able to make the furrows straight for the potatoes, which they had ready cut in a basket, only pieces with an "eye" in them being selected, "now, we'll soon be finished at last! When we've put in the cabbage seed and onions, I think we'll have a holiday for the rest of the day."

"Right you are," said Eric, in high glee at the prospect of a little respite from the arduous toil they had been engaged in almost since they had landed. He would have struck work long before, had it not been for Fritz labouring on so steadily, which made him ashamed to remain idle. "I tell you what we'll do to celebrate the event, now the garden is done. We will have a feast there."

"I don't know where that's to come from," observed Fritz in his sober way, just then beginning to place carefully the pieces of potato in the drills prepared for them. "I don't think there's much chance of our having any feasting here."

"Oh, indeed," replied Eric; "am I not cook?"

"Well, laddie, I haven't noticed any great display of your skill yet since we landed," said Fritz dryly.

"Ah, we've been too busy; you just wait till I have time, like this afternoon. Then you shall see what you shall see!"

"No doubt," said Fritz, laughing at this sapient declaration. "However, I assure you, brother mine and most considerate of cooks, I'll not be sorry to have a change of diet from the cold salt pork and biscuit on which we have fared all the time we've been gardening."

"How could I cook anything else, when you wanted me here?" replied Eric indignantly, handing the last piece of potato to put in the sole remaining drill. "I couldn't be up at the hut with my saucepans and down here helping you at the same time, eh?"

"No," said Fritz, proceeding to give the plot a final rake over; after which he sowed some cabbage seed and onions in a separate patch, while Eric put in the peas and scarlet runners which the skipper had given him. "We'll consider the past a blank, laddie. See what you can do with your saucepans to-day; you've got the whole afternoon before you."

"All right," replied Eric. "Only, you must promise not to interfere with me, you know; mind that, old fellow!"

"What, I have the temerity to offer advice to such a grand cuisinier as the noble ex-midshipman? no, not if I know myself."

"Thanks, Herr Lieutenant," said Eric, with a deferential bow; "I will summon your lordship when the dinner is ready."

With this parting shot, the lad went off laughing towards the hut. Fritz proceeded down to the shore; and, in order that he might keep his promise to Eric of not disturbing him, he determined to devote his time to watching the penguins, so as to get up an appetite for the forthcoming banquet—although the hard work he had just gone through rendered any stimulus to eating hardly necessary. Indeed, Fritz would have been well enough satisfied to have sat down and demolished a fair quantity of the despised cold pork and biscuits long before Eric summoned him up to the hut, which he did presently, with a hail as loud as if he were calling "all hands" at sea, in a heavy squall.

"Ahoy, Herr Lieutenant!" shouted out the lad in his funny way. "Your gracious majesty is served!"—screeching out the words so distinctly that, though he was on the opposite side of the valley, the portentous announcement sounded to Fritz as if it had been bellowed in his ears.

"I'm coming," he answered; and, with no lagging footsteps, he quickly hastened towards the left cliff, where in front of the hut he could see Master Eric had made the most elaborate preparations in his power for the promised feast. The lad had even gone so far as to spread the piece of tarpaulin which the skipper had given them, on the ground in lieu of a tablecloth!

Everything looked charming.

Eric had arranged some plates and a couple of dishes round the tarpaulin with great artistic effect, and a carving knife and fork before the place where he motioned Fritz to seat himself. The lad's own position, as host, was in front of a large mess tin which was covered with a cloth. A most agreeable odour filled the air, albeit the faint smell as of burnt meat somewhat struck Fritz as Eric proceeded to take off the covering cloth with a flourish.

"Well, Monsieur Cuisinier, what is the bill of fare?" asked the elder brother with a gratified smile, the unaccustomed smell of a hot dinner almost making his mouth water before he knew what he was going to have.

"Roast beef to begin with," announced Master Eric pompously.

"Himmel!" exclaimed Fritz, "roast beef! How have you managed to provide that?" His heart sank within him as he asked the almost unnecessary question; for, quickly came the answer he feared.

"Oh," said Eric in an off-hand way, "I opened the cask Captain Brown gave us and roasted a piece over the fire."

"But, that was salt meat!" ejaculated Fritz in consternation.

"Well, what matter?" rejoined Eric; "I suppose it was as good to roast as any other. Besides, we didn't have any fresh."

Fritz heaved a sigh of despair.

"Let us try it, anyhow," he said in a melancholy tone, and Eric having, carved off with extreme difficulty a knob—it could be called nothing else—of the black mass in the mess tin he had before him, handed the plate containing it over to Fritz, who, sawing off a fragment, endeavoured to chew it unsuccessfully and then had finally to eject it from his mouth.

"Good heavens, Eric!" he exclaimed, "it's as hard as a brickbat, as salt as brine, and burnt up as thoroughly as a piece of coke. How could you even think of trying to roast a bit of salt junk? Why, your own experience of the article on board ship should have told you better!"

"Well, I know it is tough when boiled; but I fancied it might be better roasted for a change. I'm very sorry, old fellow, but, still, we haven't come to the end of our resources yet; I have got another dish to surprise you."

"I hope not in the same way!" said Fritz with a shudder. "What is the other string to your bow, eh, Mr Cook?"

"A stew," replied Eric laconically.

"Ho, that sounds better," said his brother, the complacent look which had stolen over his face on sitting down to the banquet now returning again in the expectation of having something savoury at last. "A stew, eh? Why, that used to be my favourite dish at home; don't you remember, laddie?"

"Yes, I remember," responded Eric, not quite so joyously as his brother evidently expected; "but," he added hesitatingly, "you'll find this a little different, because, ah, you know, ah, I hadn't got all the proper things. Still, it's very nice, very nice indeed!"

The amateur cook brought out the last words with great earnestness, as if wishing to impress Fritz with the fact that, although the dish might not be quite what he expected, yet it would be certainly "tasty"—that is, according to his notions!

It was; for, hardly had Fritz tasted a spoonful of it, than he spat it out again, making the most terrible faces.

"Why, this is worse than the other!" he cried rather angrily. "What on earth have you made it of. Eric?"

"Well, I put in some pork and the tinned oysters—"

"That mixture would be almost enough to settle one!" said Fritz, interrupting him. "Anything else?"

"Oh, yes. As there were only a few potatoes left from those we used for planting in the garden I put them in; and, as I had no other vegetables, I also shook in some preserved peaches, and—"

"There, that will do," shouted Fritz, quite put out at having his expected dinner treat spoilt in such a fashion,—“salt pork, pickled oysters, and preserved peaches,—good heavens! The stew only wanted some cheese to be added to make it perfect.”

"I did put some in," said Eric innocently.

This naïve acknowledgment quite restored Fritz's good humour, and he burst out laughing; his anger and disgust dispelled at once by the comical confession.

"If ever I let you cook for me again," he observed presently when he was able to speak again, "I'll—yes, I will eat a stewed penguin, there!"

Eric laughed, too, at this; although he remarked, wisely enough, "Perhaps you might have to eat worse than that, old fellow!"

"I don't know what could be," said Fritz.

"Nothing!" curtly replied Eric, the truism silencing his brother for the moment and setting him thinking; but he presently spoke again to the point at issue.

"Is there nothing left for us to eat?" he asked. "I'm famishing."

"There's the cheese and some raw ham if you can manage with those," said Eric sadly, quite disheartened at the failure of all his grand preparations for giving his brother a treat.

"Capitally," replied Fritz, "fetch them out, and let us make a good square meal. We can have some coffee afterwards. Next time, laddie," he added to cheer up Eric, "I dare say you'll do better."

The lad was somewhat relieved at his brother taking the matter so good-humouredly, and quickly brought out the cheese and ham, which with some biscuits served them very well in place of the rejected viands; and, soon, the two were chatting away together again in their old affectionate way as if no misunderstanding had come between them, talking of home and old familiar scenes and recollections of Lubeck.

While they were yet sitting in front of the hut, over their coffee, the setting sun cast the shadow of the cliff right before their feet; and, at the very edge of the craggy outline, they perceived the shadow of something else which was in motion.

This somewhat aroused their attention and made them look up towards the heights above the waterfall.

What was their astonishment, there, to see a large animal, which, in the strong light behind it from the descending orb, appeared almost of gigantic proportions.

The beast appeared to be right over their heads; and, as they looked up, it seemed as if about to jump down on them!

Chapter Twenty Six.

The Wild Goats.

“Ach, Himmel! What is it?” exclaimed Eric, getting closer to his brother, who also was at first a bit frightened.

“I sure I don’t know,” said Fritz, quite perplexed for the moment; but he was soon reassured, for the animal, which had hitherto presented itself end on towards them, so that its head and body were humped up together, now turning sideways, its change of position enabled him better to judge of its proportions. “Pshaw!” he cried out, “it’s only a goat, after all!”

“A goat?” repeated Eric, still surprised, not catching at once the meaning of the word.

“Yes; don’t you remember that young Glass said there was a flock of goats on the tableland above the cliff?”

“Oh, I recollect now,” said Eric, his mind quite relieved. For the moment, he really believed that some terrible monster inhabited the desert island besides themselves; and thought that this unknown animal might possibly sally forth as soon as the sun set and darkness reigned, in search of its prey, when he and Fritz would fall victims to its rapacity. “I did not understand you at first.”

“Well, it’s all right now, brother, so you need not be afraid. I cannot wonder at your alarm, however for I was startled, I must confess. Fancy, me, a soldier, to show such want of nerve! Why, I’m as bad as you were the other morning when the penguins attacked you!”

“Don’t say any more about that, please,” pleaded Eric, whose fright of the birds was still a standing joke with Fritz. “I’m sure when they rushed at me so fiercely they seemed quite as awful as the sight of that big brute up there on the cliff, who looked just as if he were going to leap down on us.”

“Very well, we’ll let the matter drop, then,” said the other, laughing. “I can’t afford to boast of my courage now! If all goes well, laddie, we will ascend the cliffs to-morrow and have a peep at my gentleman at closer quarters.”

“All right,” replied Eric, using his stock phrase for everything; and then, as it was getting dark, the brothers turned in for the night—the sailor lad taking particular care, by the way, to see that the door of the hut was carefully barricaded, a precaution which had been omitted since the first evening of their taking possession of the little dwelling.

The next morning was a bright and cheerful one, with no wind to speak of, save a pleasant breeze, while the sun was warm and cheerful—its light dancing on the curly little waves that rippled on the beach, causing the plumage of the penguins as they made their pilgrimages to and from the rookery to gleam with iridescent colours. This was especially the case when the birds emerged from the water, the light just then giving them the tints which the dolphin displays when first caught and before death has deadened its changing hues.

“A splendid day for our exploring trip!” sang out Eric, the early riser, waking up Fritz by rolling away the barrels from before their frail doorway and fussing about the hut. “Rouse up, brother. The old sun has been up for an hour or more, and it will be soon time for us to start.”

“Eh, what? oh, yes,” cried Fritz, rubbing his eyes and yawning; but, Eric, pulling away his blankets, soon made him bestir himself, when his brother jumped up with his usual alertness—first running down to the beach and imitating the penguins in having a dip in the sea, to wash the cobwebs out of his head, as he laughingly said on his return to their little domicile, when proceeding to dress.

For a sailor, Eric was, strangely enough, not half so fond of a daily bath; but, as he said in excuse to his brother, this was perhaps owing to his having so many impromptu and unexpected douches on board ship. Most seamen, especially those of foreign nationality, have seemingly a horror of water for ablutionary purposes, in contradistinction to landsmen.

However, there was one advantage in this, to Fritz at least; for, while he was performing his swim and making his subsequent toilet, Eric had lit a fire and was preparing coffee for their breakfast, to which, when ready, Fritz was able to sit down comfortably without any trouble or exertion on his part.

A cup of the steaming fluid apiece warmed the two, invigorating them for the business of the day; and, as soon as the matutinal meal was finished, they set about getting their traps ready.

“Of course, we’ll take our guns, eh?” asked Eric; although, as far as he was concerned, he had evidently already

come to a decision on the point, for he had carefully selected one of the Remington rifles from their armoury for his own especial weapon.

"Yes, I suppose we had better take something to shoot with," replied Fritz. "We need not pot our old friend the goat yet, however. Judging by his horns and beard, he must be the kaiser of the flock, and so may be a little tough; still, we may find some daintier morsel to shoot. I confess I should be glad of a little fresh meat for a change—a real roast this time, eh, Eric?"

"Oh, bother that roast salt beef; I suppose I'll never hear the end of it!" cried the lad pathetically, although he could not refrain from laughing at Fritz's allusion to the unsuccessful banquet. "You just get me something proper to cook, and I bet you'll not be disgusted with the way in which I dress it!"

"We'll see," replied Fritz, taking up the fowling piece and slinging a powder flask and shot case round his neck. "As you're going to carry a rifle for heavy game, laddie, I'll take this for the benefit of any likely-looking birds we may come across."

"All right," responded Eric; when the two, packing up some biscuit and cheese for their refreshment by the way and barricading the door of the hut from the outside—lest the penguins might chance to pay them a visit in their absence—set forth towards the base of the waterfall up the gorge. Here, the Tristaner had told them, they would be able to climb up by the aid of the tussock-grass should they wish to reach the summit of the cliff.

It was a tedious ascent, the top of the ridge being over a thousand feet above the little valley in which they lived.

As for Fritz, he was quite worn-out when they arrived at the head of the crags above the waterfall; but Eric found the climbing easier work from his practice in the rigging aboard the *Pilot's Bride*. This was just as well, for he had to pull his brother up nearly all the way.

However, once arrived at the summit, the two had the whole tableland exposed to their view. This sight alone well rewarded them for their trouble, for the plateau stretched like an undulating plain before them, occupying the entire extent of the island—with the exception of the three-cornered slice taken out of it by their valley, like a segment cut from a round cheese. There was, also, a slight depression on the western side, where there was a little cave, although this was not nearly so wide as the bay on the east fronting their valley.

Groups of stunted trees grew in the hollows, in which sprang up in great luxuriance the inevitable tussock-grass; while, amongst the little thickets that were sparsely scattered over the plain, were grazing large numbers of hogs, headed by a monster boar. This animal had tusks nearly a foot long; and he almost impaled Eric against a buckthorn tree, under the shelter of which he had been lying until surprised by the lad, when, after making a rush at him, he ran grunting away, followed by his numerous family.

As the brothers proceeded across the tableland, they also saw numbers of a small bird, about the size of a bantam, called by young Glass the "island hen." Its plumage was almost entirely black, and its wings were so short that they were useless for flight, the bird running in and out of the long grass and ferns with which the surface of the plateau was covered in the open, like the partridge does amongst the turnips in England. Fritz shot a couple of the little things, and the brothers plucked and roasted them over an extemporaneous fire which Eric lit with the box of matches he invariably "carried in his pocket—as a sort of badge of his culinary office," Fritz said. The birds were found to be very palatable for lunch, along with the biscuit and cheese which the brothers had brought with them.

The goats were the main object of the excursion; but Fritz could not see anything of them until they had nearly made the circuit of the plain.

When they had almost given up the animals as a myth, feeling inclined to believe that the old "billy" they had seen the evening before was the creature of their imagination, they suddenly came upon the flock. The goats were secreted in a thicket of buckthorn trees and tussock-grass, close to where the tableland sloped to the beach at its western extremity.

There were twenty-three in all, and must have been the produce of a pair which some whaling vessel had turned loose on the island; for, they were every one marked in the same way as the patriarchal-looking male,—evidently their progenitor. He was a stately old fellow, with a fine pair of curving horns that nearly reached to his tail; in addition to which, he could boast of a long silky beard that a Turkish pasha might have envied.

Seeing three kids amongst the number, Fritz told Eric to shoot one; and the lad, after a third attempt with the repeating rifle he carried, succeeded in making a successful shot. There was some excuse for Eric's not killing his kid at first; for, the old male was extremely wary, keeping at a very respectful distance from the two sportsmen and making the flock remain in his rear, while he fronted the intruders—continually retreating as they advanced, and dexterously shifting his position, by a flank movement every now and then, so as not to be driven over the cliffs.

"Master Billy can't be ignorant of men folk or firearms," said Eric, when he had missed his second shot, "otherwise, he would not remain so far off!"

"He was probably brought here originally from the Cape," replied Fritz, telling his brother to aim lower next time, his last bullet having only missed by too great an elevation. "So, like all animals that have once heard a gun go off, he knows what it means! Most likely, if I had not fired twice at those little birds, we might have got up quite close to the flock; but, the old gentleman must have heard the report and that has made him so cautious about letting us approach. Look out, Eric; now's your chance! Only aim low and steadily, and you will bring down that kid there to the right!"

Puff, bang! No sooner said than done.

"Hurrah!" shouted Eric, "I've got him this time, without fail!"

He had; for, although the flock of goats scampered off from the thicket they were at that moment occupying towards another woody clump on the opposite side of the plain, darting away with the rapidity of the wind, they left one of their number behind.

The unfortunate victim was a pretty little kid, about three months old; and it lay stretched out, bleeding, on the grass. Its body had been perforated by the bullet from Eric's rifle.

"That was a capital shot!" exclaimed Fritz, when the two came up to where the poor little kid lay. "The ball has passed right through its heart; so, you must have aimed, as I told you, behind the shoulder."

"I did," said Eric, alike proud of his powers and the compliment; "but, poor little thing, it seems a pity to have killed it!"

"Ah," remarked Fritz the practical, "still, roast mutton will taste nice after our living on salt meat for so many days, eh?"

"Yes," replied Eric, with much satisfaction, his sympathy for the slaughtered kid quickly disappearing at the thought of all that young Glass had told him as to the flavour of the animal when cooked. "It is better than the tenderest pork, they say."

"Very well, we'll try it for dinner to-morrow and see whether we agree with that verdict. It will be too late to cook it when we get home this evening."

"Dear me, I really did not think the time was going so fast! Why, it must be within a hour of sunset; don't you think so?"

"Not far off," said Fritz; "so, therefore, there's all the greater reason for our returning down the gully as soon as possible. If the darkness came on while we were descending, I should never be able to scramble down."

"Never fear, brother; I'll look after you," cried Eric.

On their approaching the eastern end of the cliff again, the sailor lad first lowered down the dead kid by a piece of rope he had taken with him, on to one of the niches in the gorge above the waterfall, and then prepared for the descent of Fritz and himself. "Never fear brother," he repeated. "Although you may be stronger than I, still my eye is steady and my hand sure!"

"Good!" said Fritz. "You had better then go down first, and direct me where to put my feet. After we've been up and down once or twice, of course, I shall not find it so difficult."

"All right," responded Eric, "here goes!" So saying, he swung himself over the top of the cliff, when, holding on firmly to the tussock-grass and half slipping down and half stepping on the projections in the face of the crag, he reached in a few minutes the first broad ledge over which the rivulet from above tossed its spray.

"Are you quite safe?" asked Fritz, before adventuring on the descent.

"Certainly," said the other. "Hold on to the grass stems the same as I did, and let yourself slide over at the corner—there! Now, feel with your foot for a projecting bit of stone just below where you are standing and about a yard to the right. Have you got it?"

"Yes," replied Fritz.

"All right, then, let yourself down on it and take a fresh grip of the tussock-grass, for you will have to bear more to the left this time. Hold on tight and take a long step down, now, and you'll be beside me; there you are, you see!"

Eric then proceeded down to the next step, or leap, of the waterfall in the same way, lowering the kid first, and then descending and directing his brother's steps; so that, in a much shorter time than they had ascended, they arrived once more in the valley—although, from the fact of the tableland being more open and exposed and the cliffs obscuring the light, the lads found it quite dark when they reached their hut, the sun having sunk below the western ocean while they were climbing down the crags.

"Thank goodness, we're here at last!" exclaimed Fritz, when, having got within their hut, he sank upon the bed in the corner. "I didn't tell you before, for fear of alarming you; but, as I came down the cliff, I sprained my ankle fearfully. Once, I thought I should never reach the bottom alive, laddie. Really, if we had but another step now to go, I'm certain I would not have been able to limp it."

"Himmel!" ejaculated Eric, "I couldn't see that you walked lame on account of its being dark; and, you wouldn't tell me, of course, or lean on my arm so as to let me help you!"

Eric spoke in quite an aggrieved tone, which struck his brother keenly, although he refrained from answering him; but, while expressing his sense of hurt feeling at Fritz not asking his aid, the lad was busily employed in lighting the lamp and examining the injured ankle, which, to his consternation, he found so badly dislocated that the bone protruded. The foot, too, was already swollen to more than twice its size!

"It looks awful," he said; "and, just think, if it had given way when we were descending the crag you might have tumbled down the precipice and made me brotherless! Why did you not tell me and ask my help?"

"Because," replied Fritz, with some reason, "my doing so might perhaps have frightened you, causing you to lose your nerve at a moment when the safety of both of us depended on your keeping cool and steady."

"That might have been so," said Eric; "but, still, I would have been able to help you more if I had known! However, 'everything that is, is for the best,' isn't that so, brother?"

With this consoling reflection, the sailor lad, under Fritz's directions, set about bandaging the wounded limb with a long handkerchief dipped in cold water and wrapped round it as tightly as possible.

This surgical operation accomplished, the two then went to bed, pretty well tired with the day's excursion.

They had had a long chase after the wild goats, in addition to first exploring the tableland above and the exertion of ascending and descending the cliff—which latter was quite an arduous enough enterprise in itself and sufficiently dangerous, as was amply proved by the fact of Fritz's accident, that might lay him up for some time.

However, the next day, the invalid thought roast kid ample payment for sprained ankle; and he was not sorry for the enforced rest he was obliged to take after the rough exercise he had undergone since landing on the island, having now an opportunity of reading and investigating the little library of books given by Celia Brown to Eric, which he had not yet had the chance of overhauling.

Indeed, Master Fritz had a nice easy time of it; for Eric not only waited on him, but saw to everything that had to be done until he was able to move about again.

"That old billy-goat was bound to do me an injury! I thought so when I first saw him that evening, standing out against the sunset sky over our heads," said the elder brother to Eric, when he was once more out of doors and felt again like his old self. "Aha, though, I've not done with the old rascal yet! Some day, I'll pay him out, never fear!"

"Right you are!" was Eric's answer, laughing the while.

The lad was really so overjoyed to see his brother on his legs again, that he went off into fits of laughter every now and then about nothing at all.

He could not contain himself!

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Sealing.

It was well on in the month of September—the spring of the year in South Atlantic latitudes—when the brothers commenced their crusoe-like life on Inaccessible Island; and, by the time that Fritz had recovered from the effects of his sprained ankle, so far as to be able to hobble about the place, it was nearly the end of October. This was the beginning of the early summer at Inaccessible Island; and, the season being but a short one, not an hour of it could be wasted if they wished to carry out to advantage the special purpose that had taken them away from the haunts of men.

The sealing season would soon begin; and, it behoved them to be ready for it, so that they should lose no chance of securing as many skins as they could get. The amount of oil they might procure from the boiled-down blubber was also a consideration, but only a secondary one in comparison with the pelts; for, owing to the market demand for sealskins and the wholesale extermination of the animal that supplies them that is now continually going on in arctic and antarctic seas alike, the pursuit is as valuable as it is more and more precarious each year—the breeding-grounds now being almost deserted to what they once were, even in the most out-of-the-way spots, the Esquimaux to the north and American whalers in the south having depopulated the whilom numerous herds.

The garden was the first point Fritz aimed for, when he found he could put his foot to the ground; and he proceeded thither slowly, with the aid of a stick to lean upon and with Eric "frisking round him," as he said, just like old Gelert would have done!

In the comparatively short space of time since Fritz had last seen the little plot, a wonderful transformation had been effected—thanks to the richness of the virgin soil, the productiveness of the climate, and, lastly, the super-stratum of guano which Eric had suggested being placed over the clearing.

The sailor lad, too, had not forgotten each morning to water the newly planted land, which was exposed all day to the sun's heat, with the exception of a brief period in the afternoon when the shade of the cliffs extended over it; so, now, the garden presented a smiling appearance, with the potatoes just sprouting above their ridges, and cabbages and radishes coming up in clusters, while rows of peas and scarlet runners were sprouting as thick as hedges—not to speak of the slender onion stems, like tiny spears, each bearing its own seed back above ground after it had performed its creative mission below the surface, leaving a root behind.

"This looks well," said Fritz, delighted at the result of their joint handiwork. "Bye-and-bye, we ought to reap a good return for all our labour. I'm glad we got the job done when we did; otherwise, we should not have such a charming prospect before us."

"I'm jolly glad we haven't got to do it now!" replied Eric, with a shrug of his shoulders and laughing as usual. "Himmel! I shall never forget that digging!"

"Nor the penguins either, I suppose, when you went to get the guano that day?" said Fritz slyly, with a meaning

glance.

“Ah, brother, ‘no more of that, an thou lovest me!’” quoted Eric. “Still, the guano, perhaps, has made the things come on so well, eh?”

“No doubt of that,” replied Fritz. “But, we’ll have to thin out those cabbage plants shortly, laddie; that will necessitate our digging up some more ground, so as to make a place ready for them.”

“Oh!” groaned the other in a lachrymose way, making a hideous grimace.

“However, we needn’t hurry about it,” continued Fritz, smiling at his grimace.

“Ah!” exclaimed Eric, much relieved. He knew that if the thing had to be done, he should have to accomplish it; for, in spite of all his disgust for spade work, he certainly would not have allowed Fritz to attempt gardening so soon with his invalidated foot.

“No, there’s no hurry,” went on Fritz, as if thinking aloud. “We’ll have to confine our attention to the seals now for the next two months or so, as that is our special business here. When we can capture no more of those gentry, we’ll have plenty of time to attend to the garden; although, probably, we shall get something out of it ere long, if only a few radishes—at all events we ought to have some new potatoes by Christmas, that is if they ripen as rapidly as they have jumped out of the ground!”

“Fancy, new potatoes at Christmas!” cried Eric. “I wonder what they would say to that at home in Lubeck?”

“Aye, what!” repeated Fritz; and, in a second, his thoughts were far away across the rolling Atlantic. His mental eyes could see—as plainly as if the scene was there before him, now, in that little valley between the cliffs of the desert isle where the two brothers were—the house in the Gulden Strasse, with the dear home faces belonging to it. Yes, there they were in a loving vision, the “little mother,” Lorisken, and Madaleine, not forgetting Gelert or Mouser even; while the old-fashioned town, with its antique gateway and pillared market platz, and quaint Dom Kirche and clock of the rolling eyes, seemed moving past in a mental panorama before him!

Eric recalled him presently to himself by a pertinent inquiry.

“We’ll have to see to our boat to hunt the seals in, won’t we?” he asked.

“Yes, certainly,” said Fritz, fixing his mind on present things with an effort. “I hope it’s all right!”

“You may make sure of that,” answered Eric. “I wasn’t going to let any harm happen to the boat which the good captain so kindly gave us! No. I have been down to look at and overhaul it every day—keeping water in it besides, that the seams should not open with the heat and make it leak.”

“Then it is quite seaworthy?”

“Oh, yes, without doubt.”

“Well, I tell you what we’ll do,” said Fritz. “As the exertion will not compel me to have any walking to speak of, nor interfere with the strengthening of my poor foot, I vote that we sail round the headland to the western beach on the other side of the island. We can then see whether there is any appearance yet of the seals coming to take up their summer residence here.”

“Won’t that be jolly!” shouted out Eric. “Why, it is the very thing I have been longing to do since we went up the cliffs and saw the beach there from the tableland! I would not speak to you about it, because I knew, of course, you could not move, and feared that talking of it might excite you.”

“That was very considerate of you, laddie,” replied Fritz; “so, now to reward you for your thoughtfulness, I vote that we proceed there as soon as we can get the boat ready and prepare for the excursion. Apart from its being in the nature of a little pleasure trip—my convalescent tour, as it were, for change of air—it is really necessary work for us to know when we can begin, if we are going to be seal hunters and trade in skins and oil!”

“Right you are,” said Eric, quite convinced by this argument that nothing could be more wise or sensible than a voyage round the island in the whale-boat, especially as the plan agreed with his own views of the matter to an iota; and, in his usually impulsive way, in spite of having already inspected the little craft that morning, he rushed off down to the beach, scaring multitudes of penguins on his way, to see whether she was as sound and seaworthy as he had said, and thoroughly fit for the cruise.

Everything was right, fortunately; so, early on the following day, they shoved off the whale-boat from the beach. This was a rather fatiguing operation, although it was greatly facilitated by some rollers which Eric sawed off a spare topgallant mast that was amongst the old spars the skipper gave them. The brothers then started on their trip round the island, the wind being fair from the south-east—the same point, indeed, from which it had blown almost entirely during their stay, with the exception of a short spell from the south-west just after their arrival.

The coast, after clearing the headland, was bold and precipitous, the wall of rock continuing round to the west side; although here it broke away, with a lower ridge of soft dolomite that had caves worn into its face from the action of the sea, and one or two creeks that the boat could run into. This was evidently the haunt of the seals, for numbers of fish bones were scattered about on the floor of the caves and on the fragments of volcanic rock that were scattered on the beach below, piled and heaped up in pyramid fashion.

Landing at one of the little caves, just under a tussock-grass-grown gully, like that close to their hut on the eastern

side, Eric ascended with his rifle to the ridge above. He soon gained the tableland, returning anon with a well-grown kid which Fritz had told him to shoot, so that they might take it home with them. The ascent to the plateau, the lad said, was much easier from this part of the coast than by the waterfall; but, of course, as it would necessitate a voyage almost round the island whenever they attempted it, the other way was more preferable, although dangerous by contrast.

One or two seals were seen sunning themselves on the rocks; but these quickly slid off into the sea when the boat approached. Their breeding-season had certainly not yet arrived, else they would not only have been more numerous, but have been too much engaged with their families to mind ordinary intruders. When separated from their fellows, as the brothers now saw them, however, they were naturally extremely timid animals.

Proceeding round the southern extremity of the island, the cliff that encircled the coast seemed the more precipitous the further they advanced, frowning down destruction on any ship that might approach it unawares in the darkness—should the wind blow on shore and the set of the sea prevent escape from its terrors!

Eric steered the boat out a bit here, so that they might tack further on inwards and so weather the eastern promontory, which stretched to the left of the bay outwards into the ocean. They were thus able to have a grand view of the whole island, getting back to their little home, not long before sundown. Nor did they return empty-handed, either; for, the kid furnished fresh meat for their dinner, to which their trip besides added a piquant relish.

What with making things more comfortable in their hut and attending to the garden, which bloomed out apace each day, the hours did not lag on their hands by any means during the next week or two. There was occupation enough, even in this interval, to pass the time pleasantly away; but, when the month of November was ushered in, the seals then coming to the island in shoals, they found plenty to do from morning till night.

There was work of all kinds to be done:— first, boating round the coast after their prey; secondly, hunting the animals into their caves and killing them, taking care to secure their bodies before they sank into deep water and were thus irrecoverably lost; thirdly, getting off the skins and salting them down to prevent their putrefying; and, lastly, boiling blubber—oh, yes, they had enough work to employ them, and no time to be idle!

Before this busy period, however, every morning, again at midday, and in the afternoon, Eric would go up and down the tussock-grass ladder by which he scaled the precipice on to the tableland above, whence he was able to reconnoitre the west coast, the favourite resort of the seals, according to the information of young Glass, the Tristaner who instructed them in the matter.

The lad did this daily as a matter of duty, “climbing the fore cross-trees for a look-out,” as he termed the scramble up the gorge; and, as regularly, three times every day, after his morning, midday, and afternoon observations, he would come back to Fritz with the same unsatisfactory tale—that no seals were in sight.

One afternoon, however, towards the end of the month, he reported more cheering news.

“Oh, there are such a lot of seals on the rocks!” he called out from the top of the cliff, without waiting to come down. “Why, there must be hundreds of them there, crawling in and out of the caves on their flappers, to and from the sea! Which will be the best way to tackle them, brother, we can reach them from here, you know?”

Fritz, who was below seated outside the hut, just preparing to mend some of his clothes that had long needed looking after, in a moment became equally excited, pitching the dilapidated garments back inside the hut and putting off the work of repairing to some future day.

“Come down sharp, Eric, and help me to get the boat out,” he cried. “We must attack them from seaward; for, if we went at them from the cliff, they would at once take to the water, and so escape us. Descend at once, while I am getting the guns and tackle ready!”

“Right you are!” shouted the sailor lad in answer. “I’ll be down with you in a brace of shakes!”

No sooner had he uttered the words than he was scrambling down by the tussock-grass through the waterfall gully; while, at the same time, Fritz below was proceeding hurriedly to collect the various articles required for the sealing expedition, which had been put away on one side so as to be handy for just such an emergency:— the loaded rifles, with spare cartridges; the two harpoons, to each of which a long coiled-up line was attached; the strong boat-hook to pull in the carcasses of their victims; and, other little etceteras.

The common seal, which is frequently seen on the north coast of Scotland amongst the Hebrides and Shetland Islands, and the sea bear of Cape Horn and the Magellan Straits, are both very similar in their general habits to the Greenland seal of the Esquimaux; and the animals usually herd together in flocks or droves of some thirty to a hundred, each male having a certain number of females under his charge—the males being some six to eight feet long and the females of less dimensions.

The seals invariably frequent the most desolate rocks and caverns, where they can have ready access to the sea, which is their proper element; and, in the north and extreme south, they live on the ice-peaks as a rule, getting the fish they require for their food by diving off and catching their prey in the same way that an otter does.

The wildest and stormiest seas appear to delight them most. In such they may be seen, sporting amidst the breakers and rough water, in the highest of spirits apparently, and escaping scatheless where other creatures would be dashed to pieces on the rocks that form their temporary homes. Although they do not assemble on shore in any numbers, except during the summer months of the latitudes in which they are found, they are never far-distant from their favourite haunts at any time, the reason for their not being seen, most probably, being that they only leave the water at night during the winter, or else because the stormy weather prevents those who go after them from

approaching their habitats and so noticing them.

By the time Eric descended the cliff, Fritz had the boat ready to shove off, with their hunting gear inside and all necessary weapons for the chase; so, the two were soon on their way round the headland, steering towards the seal-caves on the western side of the island.

"You never saw such a lot, brother," Eric went on to say, when they had embarked and were working round the coast. "There were hundreds of small ones, while some were big monsters that had long noses and seemed to be double the size of the others!"

"Ah, those were probably sea elephants," said Fritz. "I should like to catch one. The fur, they say, is not so good as that of the common seal, but they yield an immense lot of oil from their blubber—from eight to ten barrels, I have been told."

"Really?" observed Eric. "Why, one or two of those gentlemen would soon fill up our casks!"

"Yes, and I shouldn't regret it," said Fritz. "We should then have a good stock ready against the time Captain Brown returns to visit us with the *Pilot's Bride*!"

"Aye, I should like that," replied the other; and then, as both rowing and sailing—for the wind was light—the boat neared the rock caves of the western coast, the brothers grew too excited to talk any more.

Presently, they hove in sight of their hunting-ground; whereupon, they at once stopped the way of the boat in order to map out their campaign.

It did not take long for them to do this; and the gist of the plan could be seen in the arrangements they made for battle.

Fritz and Eric both put their rifles ready on the thwarts of the boat, and the harpoons were also placed handy in the bows along with the boat-hook; then, lowering the lugsail which the little craft carried, they muffled their oars with some rags they had prepared and pulled in steadily towards the beach.

As they got nearer, the seals could be seen swarming on the rocks, while the noise they made—something like the bleating of sheep mingled with a hoarse growling roar, not dissimilar to that of an angry bull in the distance—could be heard plainly while the brothers were yet more than a mile off.

Some of the seals were swimming about in the water, but the majority were basking on the huge slabs of rocks that had been broken off from the face of the cliff by the onslaught of the waves and which now lay on the beach at its base, partly in and partly out of the sea.

"Now, Eric, be ready!" called out Fritz in a hoarse whisper. "Do you see those two fellows on that boulder nearest us?"

"Yes," whispered Eric in return, almost breathless with excitement.

"Then, you take the right-hand one, and I will make sure of the one to the left. Aim low and steadily at the head, for that is the only vital part a ball will reach. Remember, if you only wound him, he'll slip into the water and dive out of our reach!"

"Right you are; I'm ready," was Eric's reply.

"Wait till I give the word, then," said Fritz.

There was a moment of suspense as the boat crept closer to the poor seals, who were playing away, thoughtless of danger, and then—

"Fire!" exclaimed Fritz.

The two murderous rifles, at the same instant, at once belched forth their contents; and, a moment after, the dropped heads of the animals aimed at showed that the respective bullets had accomplished their mission.

"Now, let us push in," cried Fritz, seizing his oar again, when, his brother following his example, they beached the boat in a few strokes.

Then, each taking up a harpoon, they attacked the cluster of animals, killing fifteen before the frightened creatures could escape into their native element, although they came off the rocks with a rush, looking most formidable as they opened their mouths and showed their fangs, emitting the while terrific roars; and, as they waddled in a crowd into the water, they rolled down the brothers with their impetus as if they had been ninepins.

"I don't mind the bruises," said Fritz, picking himself up again with a laugh. "Not when I have such a sound salve for them as the thought of the oil we'll get out of all the carcasses!"

"Nor I," chimed in Eric, rubbing his nose ruefully though all the same. "Think of fifteen—no, seventeen sealskins, counting in the two we shot first on the rocks! They ought to fetch something handsome when we send them to the States, eh?"

"Yes," said Fritz; "but now, out with your knife, laddie! Let us set to work, taking off the pelts while they are still warm."

"Right you are," replied Eric; and the two were soon at work, skinning the animals and taking off the layer of blubber which lay immediately beneath the inner lining of the skin—rolling up the greasy and reeking mass of skin and fat together in bundles and placing them in the boat as soon as each seal had his toilet thus attended to.

It was very dirty work and neither was sorry when all the blubber and skins were stowed in the whale-boat; their last care being to roll the poor bodies of the seals now bereft of those coveted coats which had caused their destruction, into the sea. This was done in order that the remains might not scare away others of the herd from such inhospitable shores. The task was soon accomplished, for the rocks shelved down abruptly into the water; and, when the place was made tidy again, the brothers set sail for home with their cargo, going back the contrary way they came, so as to have the advantage of the wind and save the labour of rowing.

Since their onslaught, not another live seal was to be seen in the vicinity, the first to make off before the boat was pulled into the beach after Fritz and Eric had fired being the couple of sea elephants which they had noticed amongst the mass of animals, clustered together on the rocks; and these, consequently, they were unable to secure.

However, they consoled themselves on their way back to the bay with the reflection that they had done a very good day's work. They were by no means dissatisfied with the result of their sport—seventeen seals at one haul were not to be despised!

For some time after reaching the hut they were busily engaged, cleaning the skins and salting them down for preservation. They had both been instructed how to do this on board the whaler; although Eric, having had previous practical experience with all the details of the operation, now acted as superintendent.

They had also to boil the blubber in the iron cauldron, which they had brought from the States for the purpose of "trying out the oil," as whaling men technically term the procedure; and they found when they had finished that the result realised some ten barrels full.

This was a splendid start for them and it made them so contented that it was upwards of a fortnight before they undertook another expedition to the west beach.

But, apart, from the satisfactory results of their first venture, they thought it best to let the seals have a little interlude of calm before attacking them again. Besides this, Eric's reports from his look-out station on the tableland were most unfavourable, as, for some days after their last foray, hardly a seal was to be seen in the neighbourhood of the scene of the fray.

However, one fine morning in December, Eric reported the arrival of a fresh batch of the fur-bearing animals on the west rocks; so, making their boat ready, the brothers soon sailed round thither once more.

They had turned the last projecting point of the headland, before opening the beach frequented by the seals, and Fritz had brought up the boat's head to the wind, preparatory to their lowering the sail and taking to their oars to pull into shore, when Eric, who had been looking out over the bows, arrested his brother's intention.

"Hullo, Fritz!" he exclaimed, "there's some one there before us. I can see a boat, with a lot of men in it, close to the beach!"

"Indeed!" said Fritz, quite as much astonished. "I wonder who they are?"

He felt almost as indignant as a landlord on finding that a party of poachers had invaded his choicest preserves and were ruthlessly appropriating his pet pheasants!

"Himmel!" he repeated, "I wonder who the fellows can be?"

Just then, the discharge of several rifles all together, as if practising platoon firing, struck on his ear; and, as Fritz sniffed the smell of the burnt gunpowder floating by him in the air to seaward, driven off from shore by the wind, the saltpetrous scent did not tend to restore his equanimity!

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Some Visitors.

"What donkeys we are!" exclaimed Eric presently, a moment or so after the discharge of the firearms. "We are real stupid to be astonished at all!"

"How, in what way?" asked Fritz. "Why, the strange boat must have come from Tristan d'Acunha. Don't you recollect, we were told that a party always came sealing here, as well as at Nightingale Island, during the summer?"

"Oh yes; I forgot," said Fritz. "I wonder, though, you didn't see their boat pass your look-out station—you, with your fine observant eyes!"

"Ah, they must have come round to leeward of the promontory, close under the land," replied Eric to this taunt:—"that is how they escaped my notice. But, what shall we do now—go on, or return home?"

"It strikes me we had better go home, for we shall have uncommon little sport to-day, since they have been first in the field!" said Fritz dryly. "Still, I suppose we'd better be friendly with them. Let us go on to shore first before leaving, and have a chat. No doubt, they'll be as much surprised to see us as we were just now at their unexpected appearance here."

"Well, I don't know about that," observed Eric. "I should think young Glass would have told them about our having settled here."

"But, I asked him not to mention it," replied Fritz, "and, as he seemed a very decent sort of young fellow, I dare say he has obeyed my wish—especially as he was your friend, you know."

"It's all right then," said Eric; "my Tristaner would be certain to keep his word if he promised it. Let us proceed now and astonish them with our presence, which must therefore, as you say, be quite unexpected."

"Pull away then, brother."

"Right you are!" said Eric in response; and the two, putting their backs into the oars, the boat was soon speeding to the point where the islanders were gathered in a group on the shore—far too busy with the seals they had shot to notice their approach.

"Now," cried Fritz, when they were close to the others, although still unobserved, "let us give them a call."

"Shout away!" said Eric; when, he and his brother joining their voices, they gave utterance to a ringing hail that must have frightened all the fish near.

"Boat ahoy!"

The party on shore, who had their backs turned seawards, jumped round at this as if they had been shot; but soon, an answering hail assured them that some one amongst the islanders had recognised them.

"Hillo, whar be you sprung from?" inquired a voice with a strong nasal twang.

It was that of Nat Slater, the "deck hand" of the Rhode Island steamboat!

Fritz was perfectly astounded to find him now amongst the Tristaners. How came he there? What could possibly have become of the *Pilot's Bride* and Captain Brown?

These were the anxious thoughts that at once flashed through the mind of the young German, and his brother shared his anxiety to an equal extent.

Nat Slater however did not keep them long in suspense.

"I guess," he said—as soon as they reached the beach and accosted the islanders, who received them very coldly they could perceive, as if looking upon them now as rivals in the same pursuit—"me and the old man couldn't drive the same team long. We had a muss together, soon as you parted company, an' I asked him to put me ashore at Tristan, thinking to ship in another whaling craft; but, I'm blest if ary a one's called thar since the *Pilot's Bride* sailed, so I've ben forced to chum in with these islanders!"

"Did you get on a spree, or what, to make Captain Brown leave you behind?" asked Fritz, judging by what the skipper had told him of Mr Nathaniel Slater's character that the real facts of the case might put quite another complexion on his plausible statement, that the skipper had quarrelled with him.

"Waall, I reckon, I did go on a bit of a bender aboard," said the whilom deck hand in a drawling way. "I managed to stow away a couple o' bottles of Bourbon whisky I got to Providence after I left hum, an' I thought I would have a lick-up arter we parted with you an' your brother, mister, I felt so kinder lonesome."

"And I suppose you got so drunk that Captain Brown kicked you out of the ship?" exclaimed the young German indignantly. "Why, you knew his particular orders about never allowing any spirituous liquors on board his vessel when at sea!"

"I guess he wern't boss of everybody," said the American coolly. "An' so I told him, too! But, say, mister, I've a kinder hankering to jine you and your brother haar; will you let a poor coon chum in?"

"No, I confess I would rather not," was the instant reply that came from Fritz—a decision which, from his quick look of satisfaction, Eric most cordially shared in. "We did not appear to get on together very well before, and I certainly do not care to associate with any one who does not keep his word!"

"I guess this here island don't belong to you, mister?" said Nat Slater sneeringly, on purpose apparently to make Fritz angry; but the young German remained perfectly cool and collected.

"I never said it did," he answered. "Of course, you have every right to settle here if you like; but I and my brother decline having any association with you."

"Oh, jist as you like, mister," replied the American, now showing himself in his true colours, having evidently nourished a spite against the two brothers on account of Captain Brown's friendship for them. "I'm durned if I kinder kear now to hang out along with you, as I sed at first; I'd rayther a durned sight stick to these good chaps haar, as hev more friendly feelins than a pair o' blessed foreign coons that don't know how to treat a free-born American citizen like a man! I guess, though, I'll spile your sealing for you, if I hev any influence with the islanders."

"You are welcome to do your worst," said Fritz; and then, as young Glass was not amongst the Tristaners—who now seemed, either from the deck hand's threat or on account of some other reason, to look upon them in rather a hostile manner—he and Eric withdrew from the party. Retiring at once to their boat, they returned to their own little settlement in the eastern bay, with the resolve of not coming out after the seals again until after the islanders had

left the coast, so as not to risk any further altercation with them.

"It's a great nuisance, though," grumbled Eric, who was especially annoyed by the fact of their going back to the hut with an empty boat instead of the full cargo | he expected, similar to their first day's experience of sealing. "I should like to pay out that mean Yankee for his spite. He's not like a true sailor, for he wasn't worth his salt aboard the *Pilot's Bride*; and I've heard the skipper say that he only took him out of good nature and nothing else!"

"Yes, I know he only allowed him to come in order to save him from ruin at home," Fritz said. "But, he might just as well have left him at Providence, for all the good the voyage has done him!"

"Well, he has spoilt our sealing, as he said he would," observed Eric after a bit, when they were rounding the western promontory of their own little bay, and their cottage home was just in sight.

"Only to-day, or, at the worst, for but a short time longer," replied Fritz. "The islanders will not stay for any period after they've filled their boat; and, of course, he will return with them to Tristan. He's too lazy to stop here and shift for himself, although he would have been glad to sponge upon us."

"Joy go with him when he leaves!" cried Eric heartily on the keel of their whale-boat touching the beach, when they then proceeded to draw her up on the shingle and take all their traps and gear out of her. They did this in case their American friend might persuade the islanders to come round to the bay and make a raid on their property, so as to prevent them from interfering with their sealing—that being the only grievance which they could possibly have against them.

However, as next morning, the whale-boat lay intact where they had left her, their suspicions of the Tristaners' bad faith proved to be quite unfounded.

Still, the brothers were glad to find, from Eric's observations on the tableland, whence he kept a constant watch on the visitors' movements, that, after a ten days' stay they left the little island once more to them alone; although, as they also discovered to their grief a short time after their departure, the Tristaners took away with them the greater number of the goats on the plateau, or else killed them for their sustenance whilst they remained.

This was a sad discovery. The islanders were quite welcome to the pigs, thought the brother crusoes; but the flesh of the goats was so delicate and needful besides, as a change of diet to their ordinary salt provision, that any diminution of their numbers was a serious loss to them.

It was not until a week at least after the Tristaners had left, that Eric reported the presence of seals again on the west beach, where, probably, the fact of the islanders camping on the spot had quite as much to do with scaring away the timid creatures from the coast as the warfare waged upon them. Fortunately, however, the poor animals had an affection for the place; for, having now observed, no doubt from some of their number sent out as scouts, that their enemies had departed, they once more returned to the rock caverns they had before frequented.

"There are some of those 'elephants,' as you call them, amongst them, too," said Eric when he came down the cliff with the news to Fritz. "There are a great many more than I saw last time."

"Ah, we must try and catch some of the gentlemen this trip," remarked Fritz. "Perhaps it will be the last chance we may have of capturing sea elephants!"

"Right you are," replied the lad. "I'll do my best to kill them; but really, brother, they look awfully formidable fellows!"

"Oh, they're not half so dangerous as they look," said Fritz. "They're like your friends the penguins; their bark is worse than their bite!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Eric good-temperedly; "you will continue to chaff me about those wretched birds I suppose! Never mind, though, I've got the joke about the billy-goat frightening you as a set-off, eh, brother?"

"That's nothing—nothing!" said Fritz in an off-hand way. "We'd better see about starting round after the seals, I think."

"Ah, it's all very well your trying to get out of it like that!" retorted Eric, going off, laughing, to haul the whale-boat down into the bay; when, as soon as she was afloat and all their preparations made, they set off again round the headland for the sealing ground.

They noticed, as they approached, that the animals were much more wary now than at the time of their first visit, many plunging into the water from off the outlying rocks on the boat nearing the shore; consequently, they had to use their rifles at once to secure any seals at all, without trusting to their harpoons.

Fritz fired six shots rapidly from the Remington he carried, Eric, who was not so handy in the use of the weapon, managing about half the number; and then, seeing that some of the animals which were only wounded were endeavouring to wriggle down the beach into the sea, the two dashed in at them with the harpoons and boat-hook—Master Eric selecting the latter weapon from his being more accustomed to its use.

They had a great scrimmage amongst the struggling seals, which roared and bellowed like so many bull calves, looking when they opened their mouths as if they would swallow up the brothers at one gulp; but, it was all bravado, for the poor things had not an ounce of fight in them. They suffered themselves to be knocked on the head without the slightest resistance, only bleating piteously when they received their death-blow and dropping down in their tracks at once.

One enormous sea elephant Fritz made for, just as he was on the point of sliding off into the sea from a little rocky

jetty where he had ensconced himself.

The animal reared itself on its fore flappers and seemed to tower over the young German; but, on Fritz pluckily piercing it with his harpoon right through the chest, the warm blood gushed over him in a torrent and the portentous sea elephant sank down lifeless.

The creature was upwards of eighteen feet long, from the point of his queer-looking nose or snout, which was elongated like an elephant's trunk—hence its name of "sea elephant"—to the hind flappers; while it must have been pretty nearly ten feet in girth.

"Ah, here are eight barrels of oil at least!" shouted Fritz when he had given the monster his death-blow. "Fancy all that quantity from one sea elephant!"

"You don't say you've caught one of those fellows?" cried Eric, who was kneeling down and trying to detach a little cub seal from its dead mother. "I wish I had killed him, instead of my victim here. I wonder what this poor little baby thing will do without its parent?"

"You'd better knock it on the head," said Fritz. "It is safe to pine away, if left alone to take care of itself, now that its mother is dead."

"I'm sure I can't do that," replied the lad, turning away from the pitiful sight. "It would seem to me exactly like committing a murder in cold blood!"

"You are too tender-hearted for a sealer," said Fritz in his matter-of-fact way; and then, with one tap from the butt end of his harpoon on its nose, he settled the fate of the poor little beast.

The result of this day's sport was, some thirteen sealskins, in addition to that of the sea elephant, which, although much larger of course than the others, did not appear to be of the same quality of fur. From the number of animals they bagged, it was apparent that the bullets from their rifles must have penetrated more than one seal at a time, passing through the one aimed at and hitting some of those behind. This would be quite feasible if the leaden messenger of death did not come in contact with the bone, for the bodies of the mammals were very soft and yielding from the amount of adipose tissue they contained.

These sealskins, with those which they had previously obtained, made up their quota to thirty. The oil, likewise, extracted from the blubber filled up their remaining empty casks, so that they had now no receptacle wherein to stow any more should they succeed in killing more seals. But, the brothers need not have troubled themselves on this account, for their last onslaught on the breeding-ground had the effect of the final straw on the camel's back, not one of the cat-faced animals—as Eric called them, from their fancied resemblance to old Mouser—being to be seen in the neighbourhood of the coast for months afterwards, albeit the young crusoes were constantly on the watch for them!

Boiling down the blubber was, certainly, a tedious operation.

The brothers had made a rocky bed for their cauldron, near the hut, with an ingeniously constructed fireplace beneath it which had a cross-cut trench for creating a draught, in the way Fritz noticed that the soldiers made their camp fires during the war—the whole affair when finished looking like one of those "coppers" placed in back kitchens for washing days. Over this laboratory, the two were busy enough for some days, making themselves so black with smoke and begrimed with oil that they resembled a couple of chimney sweepers, or engine fitters for the nonce!

Eric, who superintended the details by reason of the superior knowledge which his whaling experience gave him, first cut up the blubber into long thin strips, which Fritz again subdivided into smaller portions with the aid of his sheath knife. These strips of blubber were then heaped into the pot, under which a roaring fire was kept up, the operation being continued until the cauldron was full; when, as it came to the boil, the refuse matter and pieces of flesh adhering to the fat were skimmed off from the top, and the melted oil allowed to cool gradually, after which it was emptied into the casks kept ready by the side of the hut.

The brothers were very glad when the job was ended, for the blubber smelt terribly fishy and almost suffocated them with its fumes as the pot came to the boiling point; but, they persevered with their task until their casks were all full and headed up, when they proceeded to dress their sealskins roughly and salt them down in a large puncheon which they had reserved especially for their storage.

Next, they had a grand clean up, putting the hut and place in order, the blubber boiling having covered everything with a deposit of oily soot; and, the morning after they had made things comfortable again, they proceeded down to the garden to see how matters were progressing there, not having visited the spot since the day they had started on their last sealing excursion.

"I say, brother," observed Eric, as they directed their steps towards the little wood beyond the waterfall, where they could hear the thrushes chirping and whistling as they came near; for, the penguins were not so noisy now, having hatched their eggs and abandoned the nests they used to make such a fuss over. "I say, brother, how are the days going—it must be nearly the end of December now, eh?"

Fritz thought for a moment.

He was the methodical member of the family and had always been looked up to as having the best memory for dates at home.

"Himmel!" he exclaimed. "What day do you think it is?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine," replied Eric. "All the days go alike here; why, it seems more than a year already since

good Captain Brown left us, although I know it's only a few months."

"Only, think, Eric, it is—"

"No, never!" said the lad, interrupting his brother and guessing that the answer he was going to give would confirm his own conjecture. "It cannot be, really, eh?"

While saying this, Eric stopped abruptly as they were entering the little grove of buckthorn trees, where the thrushes and finches were hopping about amongst their branches as merry as grigs in the sunshine; for, the weather was as warm as our June, although it was then December—the seasons in southern latitudes being the reverse of what we are accustomed to in Europe.

"Yes, you've guessed right, laddie," replied Fritz, looking into his face with a smile. "It is, without doubt, Christmas Day!"

"What, to-day?" said Eric, incredulous in spite of himself.

"Yes, to-day," repeated his brother.

"Well, that is wonderful!" exclaimed Eric; adding a moment afterwards, however, in a tone of the greatest dismay, "only think, though, we haven't prepared a Christmas tree, or anything!"

"Never mind," said Fritz consolingly. "Those sort of arrangements for the festival would be a little out of place here."

"Would they?" cried Eric. "Ah, we'll see about that!"

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Fritz goes Hunting.

After his last remark, Eric, silent for a little while, as if buried in deep thought, followed behind his brother to the garden patch, which was found in the most flourishing state.

The potatoes were all in full flower and the haulms of sturdy growth promised well for the crop of tubers beneath, some indeed being already half withered, as if fit for digging; while pods were thick on the two rows of peas planted, and the scarlet runners were a mass of bloom and brilliancy.

At such a glorious sight, Eric could remain silent no longer.

"This is capital," he exclaimed in high delight; "why, we've got a regular harvest, brother!"

"Yes, the great Mother Earth has rewarded our exertions," said Fritz thoughtfully. "It is wonderful how she yields to those who cultivate her properly! I can see that we'll have bushels of potatoes—enough to last us through the winter."

"Aye, and peas and beans, too," chorussed Eric. "Look, here, at this lot, Fritz! I believe we can have a dish of them to-day."

"What, to keep up the festival with?" said his brother, smiling. "I see you are still thinking of that; but, methinks, green peas at Christmas will be rather an anachronism!"

"Hang the what-do-you-call-it—oh, anachronism!" cried the lad impulsively. "When we're at Rome we must do as Rome does."

"I don't remember, though, that the citizens of 'The city on the seven hills' ate peas in December, as far as my reading of the classics go," remarked Fritz ironically.

He liked to "pick up" his brother sometimes in fun.

"Ah, that was because they were pagans, and didn't keep up our Christmas ceremonies!" cried Eric triumphantly. "Still, Romans or no Romans, I declare we'll have a rare banquet to-day, brother, eh!"

"No roast beef, I hope!"

"Oh no, bother it—something better than that! You just let me alone and you'll see bye-and-bye!"

"All right, laddie, I don't mind leaving the cooking in your hands, now," said Fritz kindly, wishing to blot out the recollection of his last remark. "You have had experience since your first memorable attempt, which I must say was perhaps excusable under the circumstances."

"You are a brick, old fellow," responded Eric, much pleased at this speech. "Only trust matters to my hands and, I promise you I'll not let you have any opportunity to find fault with me a second time!"

"Very good; that's agreed," said Fritz; and, after thus settling matters, the two then went about the garden, gathering its produce—the elder digging up some new potatoes for trial, while Eric picked all the early peas that seemed fit, quite filling a good-sized basket which he had brought with him; although Fritz, who had not been so thoughtful, had to put his potatoes in a handkerchief.

On their way home, the brothers passed through the deserted penguin rookery, with never a bark or a grumble from the whilom excited birds as they tramped the well-worn paths which they had made from the thicket to the beach.

The inhabitants of the feathered colony were now educating their little ones in the art of fishing; and, the scene in front of the bay was quite enlivening as the birds swam about gracefully in curves, losing in the sea that ungainliness and ugly, awkward appearance which seemed inseparable from them on land, and prosecuting their task, without any of the noise that had distinguished them while breeding.

Birds were darting about—here, there, and everywhere in the water; some, swimming after each other as if in a race, like a shoal of fish; others, again, chasing one another on the surface, on which they seemed to run, using the ends of their wings, or flappers, to propel them like oars, for they dipped in the tips of their pinions and scattered the spray in their progress. To add to the charm, the calm expanse of sea reflected the pure ultramarine blue of the sky above, being illumined at the same time by the bright sunlight, which brought out in strong relief the twin headlands embracing the little bay with their outstretching arms.

Nothing, indeed, could be more unlike the crusoes' old associations of Christmas and Christmas-tide than this prospect presented, nothing less suggestive of: home; and yet, standing there, on the shore of their lonely sea-girt and cliff-embattled island home, gazing across the ocean that spanned the horizon, the thoughts of both strayed away to their little native town on the Baltic—where, probably, the housetops were then covered with snow and the waters bound in chains of ice; but where, also, troops of children were singing Christmas hymns and Christmas bells were ringing, while prayers were no doubt being offered up for them, so distant and yet so near in spirit!

Eric, however, was not long pensive. The day was too bright and fine for him to be sorrowful or reflective for any length of time; so, after staying by the side of Fritz for a short while on the shore, sharing his thoughts about the dear ones far away—although neither uttered a word on the subject the one to the other—his impulsive nature quickly asserted itself, as usual.

"I'm off, old fellow," said the young sailor, slinging the basket of freshly picked peas on his arm and leaving the bundle of potatoes for Fritz to carry. "It is getting near the noonday hour, and time for me to be thinking of preparing dinner!"

"All right, laddie, go on and I will follow you soon," replied the other, but, still, without making any move from his seat on the shingle.

"Mind, and don't forget the potatoes," cried Eric, who was already half-way towards their hut. "I shall want them soon!"

"All right," replied the other, but the mention of the potatoes, which had been an anxious consideration with Fritz all along, seemed to have the effect of banishing his sad reflections; for, in another minute, he, with his bundle on arm, followed Eric up the incline that led to the cottage.

Considering all things, the two had a capital Christmas dinner. Indeed, Eric, the cook, so greatly distinguished himself on this occasion that he blotted out all recollection of his previous mishaps when undertaking a similar rôle.

What say you to a splendid ham, one of those given them by Captain Brown; green peas, fresh and tender and dressed to perfection; and, new potatoes?

Many a person might have a worse meal on a warm summer day, like it was this anniversary of the festival on Inaccessible Island!

Nor was this all; for, after the more substantial portion of the feast, Eric introduced a wonderfully savoury compound in the confectionery line, which he had manufactured with some care. This consisted of flour and sugar made into a thick paste, with some of those very preserved peaches which had figured so prominently in the despised stew that had been Eric's first essay in cooking, placed within the envelope, the compound being then boiled in a saucepan until thoroughly done.

During the early months of the new year, the brothers had little to do save attending to their garden, digging up the remaining potatoes when ripe, and then storing them in a corner of their hut. They also cleared some more land and planted out the little seedling cabbages in long rows, so that in time they had a fine show of this vegetable, which was especially valuable as an antiscorbutic to the continuous use of salt meat,—now their main nutriment with the exception of a few birds which Fritz brought down occasionally with his fowling piece.

Once or twice they went round the promontory in their boat, in pursuit of stray single seals; but, the animals were so shy that only a long shot could be had at them. This made it a risky and almost needless task to waste gunpowder in their pursuit; for, in the event of the animals being merely wounded and not killed right out at once, they invariably slipped off the rocks, disappearing in deep water before the brothers had time to row up to them and haul them into the boat.

Under these circumstances, therefore, although they expended a considerable number of bullets, they had only two more sealskins to show in return to add to their great hauls at the commencement of the season; so, after a third unsuccessful expedition early in the new year, they made up their minds to leave the animals alone until the following summer. Then, they determined to begin their campaign before the Tristaners should forestall them, hoping to secure a large number by a newly-organised system of capture—Eric assailing them from the shore by way of the descent from the tableland on the western coast, while Fritz attacked them by sea in the boat.

"Talking of expeditions," said Eric, while the two were thus planning together their future seal campaign—"we haven't been up on the cliffs for a long time now; suppose we ascend the plateau and see how the pigs and goats are

getting on, eh?"

"That's a very good idea," replied his brother. "The garden is in good order now, needing nothing further to be done to it for some time; while, as for reading, I'm sure I have devoured every book in our little library, including Shakespeare, which I know by heart—so, there's nothing to occupy my mind with."

"I'm in the same position precisely," said Eric. "You therefore agree to our hunting expedition, eh?"

"Yes; the more especially as I wish to try and pot that old billy-goat. He is such an artful old fellow that he always keeps just out of range of my weapon, as if he knows the distance it carries. He will thus offer good sport. That other kid too, that we saw, must be grown up by now."

"He shall be my prey," cried Eric, proceeding immediately to polish his rifle, so as to be ready for the excursion.

A day or two afterwards, the two ascended the cliff by the now familiar tussock-grass ladder; but, although Eric could almost have gone up blindfold this time, the ascent was quite as difficult as it had been at first to Fritz, who had never climbed it once since the day he sprained his ankle in coming down, having left the look-out department entirely to the sailor lad, on account, as he said, of its "being more in his line!"

As he had not, therefore, seen it for so long, Fritz noticed a considerable change on going up.

The grass had grown very much taller, while the trees appeared more bushy; but, besides these alterations, the inhabitants of the plateau had become changed and more varied.

The droves of wild hogs had increased considerably; while the goats, headed by the old billy, who looked as lively and venerable as ever, had diminished—of course, through the ravages of the Tristaners, as mentioned before.

Still, not even the loss of these latter animals specially attracted his attention; what he particularly observed was, that the prairie tableland had a fresh class of visitors, which must have arrived with the new year, for they had not been there when he had previously ascended the cliff.

Eric was too much taken up with looking for seals to notice them, for he certainly never mentioned them on his return below to the hut; and, so, Fritz was doubly surprised now at seeing them.

These newcomers were the wandering albatross—the "*Diomedea exulans*," as naturalists term it—which sailors believe to float constantly in the upper air, never alighting on land or sea, but living perpetually on the wing!

Eric was firmly convinced of this from what he had been told when on board the *Pilot's Bride*; but Fritz, of course, expressed doubts of the bird having any such fabulous existence when it was pointed out to him while illustrating "flight without motion," as its graceful movement through the air might be described. Now, he had ocular demonstration of the fact that the albatross not only rests its weary feet on solid earth sometimes, but that it also builds a nest, and, marvellous to relate, actually lays eggs!

No sooner had Fritz set foot on the plateau, after a weary climb up the toilsome staircase which the tussock-grass and irregularities of the cliff afforded, than he startled one of these birds. It was straddling on the ground in a funny fashion over a little heap of rubbish, as the pile appeared to him. The albatross was quite in the open part of the tableland, and the reason why it selected such a spot for its resting-place, instead of amid the brushwood and tussock-grass thickets that spread over the plateau, was apparent at once when the bird was disturbed; for, it had to take a short run along the bare ground before it could get its pinions thoroughly inflated and rise in the air. Had it been amidst the trees or long grass, Fritz would have been able to approach it and knock it over before it could have sought safety in flight, on account of its long wings requiring a wide space for their expansion.

On proceeding to the little heap of rubbish, as Fritz thought it, from which the albatross had risen, he found it to be a nest. This was built, like that of an ostrich, about a foot high from the surface of the ground, on the exterior side, and three feet or so in diameter; while the interior was constructed of grass and pieces of stick woven together with clay. There was one large egg in the centre of this nest, a little bigger than that of a swan and quite white, with the exception of a band of small bright red spots which encircled the larger end.

In addition to the albatross, several nests of which were scattered about the open ground on the plateau to the number of a hundred or more, there were lots of mollymawks and terns, or "sea swallows." These latter were beautifully plumaged, Fritz thought, the wings and body being delicately harmonised in white and pale grey, while tiny black heads and red beaks and feet, further improved their dainty appearance.

After noticing these new arrivals carefully, although he would not fire at any of them, thinking it needless destruction to kill any creatures but such as were required for food or other purposes, such as the seals, Fritz made after the goats. These, he soon discovered, had removed themselves, under the leadership of "Kaiser Billy"—as his brother had christened the big old male which had frightened them both by his shadow on the cliff—to the further side of the tableland, placing the width of the plateau between the brothers and themselves.

"Artful old brute!" said Fritz on noticing this.

"Ah, he doesn't intend you to come near him to-day," observed Eric. "He's too wise to put himself within reach of your rifle."

"Is he?" replied the other, beginning to get vexed, as the goat dexterously managed to preserve the same distance between them by shifting round in a sidling fashion as he and Eric advanced. "I tell you what, laddie, you go round one way, and I shall take the reverse direction. By that means we will circumvent the cunning old gentleman."

These tactics were adopted; but, by some keen intuitive instinct which warned him which of the brothers was most to be feared, "Kaiser Billy," while allowing Eric many a time to get within range, still carefully kept out of Fritz's reach!

It was most provoking.

"Hang the old fellow!" cried the elder between his clenched teeth. "I'll have him yet;" and, thinking to deceive the animal's wariness by pretending to give up the chase, he sat down in one of the nests of the albatross, whence he could command a good view around of the several thickets of grass and brushwood, asking Eric to continue driving the goats towards him while he lay here concealed.

This Eric did, after first shooting the plumpest-looking of the females, which had the effect of scaring the rest and making them run in the direction where Fritz was lying in ambush.

The goats, however, went faster than either of the brothers expected; so Fritz, seeing them coming out of a clump of brushwood in the distance just after Eric had brought down his selected victim, immediately crouched down in his retreat. Hearing soon afterwards, however, the sound of the animals' hoofs, he was afraid of raising his head to make an observation as to their whereabouts until they should come closer, thinking that his sudden appearance might cause them race off again in another direction and lose him the chance of a shot.

He had not to wait long, for the goats came closer and closer—too close, indeed, to be pleasant!

"Look out, Fritz! look out, brother! they're right on top of you," shouted out Eric from the distance, away behind the flock, now coming up at a gallop, and still headed by the venerable "Kaiser Billy."

Fritz at once scrambled to his feet, rifle in hand, cocking the weapon as he rose up; but, at the same instant that he stood on his legs, a blow like a battering ram struck him in the small of the back, sending him down flying to the ground again on his face and pitching the cocked rifle out of his hands.

This was not the end of it, either; for, the weapon went off with a loud bang as it fell beside him, the bullet penetrating his leg just below the knee in an upward direction and narrowly escaping his head. As for "Kaiser Billy," who had butted him as he rose up, and thus did the damage, he galloped off with a loud "baa" of triumph, as if shouting a paean of victory.

"Himmel! are you hurt, Fritz?" called out Eric, hastening up on hearing the report of the rifle. He was alarmed at seeing his brother lying motionless on the ground.

But, there was no answer; nor did Fritz even move at the sound of his voice!

Chapter Thirty.

Another Mishap.

In another minute Eric arrived where his brother was lying; when, throwing himself on his knees, he bent over him anxiously. "Oh, Fritz, are you badly hurt?" he cried: and, still receiving no answer, he burst into a passion of sobs. "He's dead, he's dead!" he wailed in a broken voice—"dead, never to speak to me more!"

"No, laddie, not quite dead yet," whispered Fritz faintly. The sudden blow in the back from the goat's horns, striking him as it did at the base of the spine, had rendered him for the moment unconscious; the unexpected attack had injured him terribly—more so, indeed, than the bullet wound through his leg. Besides, he was lying face downwards, and so was unable to turn over, which fact prevented him from speaking more plainly when he recovered his senses.

"Not dead? Oh, I am so glad!" shouted out Eric joyously, in sudden revulsion of feeling. "I was afraid that you were killed!"

"I feel pretty near it," said Fritz, although he spoke now in a stronger tone, Eric having partly raised him up, by putting his arm under his neck. "Gently, laddie, gently," he called out, however, as his brother lifted him, "my poor back hurts fearfully!"

"I thought it was your leg, Fritz, for it is bleeding awfully. Your trousers are wet with blood!"

"That's nothing, laddie—nothing to speak of," said Fritz.

"Oh, isn't it?" cried the other, who had been busily cutting away the trouser leg and stocking with his sheath knife. "Why, the bullet has gone through the fleshy part of your calf."

"I wish it had gone through the horny part of that horrid old goat," said Fritz grimly, smiling at his own joke, which made Eric laugh.

"The old brute! But, you would go after him, you know."

"Yes; still, I am suffering now, and perhaps justly, for not leaving the poor animal alone. He never harmed me before I tried to harm him, so it only serves me right! It's a bad job, Eric; I'm afraid I shan't be able to get down to the hut again. You will have to rig me up some sort of shelter here."

"Oh, no, that won't be necessary," said Eric, glad that his brother seemed to be getting more like his old calm self and able to look matters in the face.

"Why, how can I move? Do you think I shall be able to climb down that abominable tussock-grass ladder in this condition, especially when I was hardly able to manage it while sound in wind and limb—which I can't say is the case at present?"

"I didn't think of your getting down that way, old fellow," said the lad, after a moment's reflection. "I've got another plan in my noddle—a better one than yours I think."

"And what is that?" asked Fritz.

"Why, you know where you are now, don't you?"

"Yes, I should think I did; I haven't quite lost my consciousness yet!"

"You are close to the western side of the coast, just near where the plateau slopes down to the sea by our sealing ground."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, don't you see through my plan yet, brother? Can I not pull the whale-boat round from our bay, and then manage to lift you down the incline here into it—thus getting you back home easily in that way?"

"Himmel, Eric, you're a grand fellow," exclaimed Fritz, in honest admiration of the proposal. "I declare I never thought of such a simple thing as that. Of course it can be done. What a stupid I was, not to think of it! That old goat must have knocked all my seven senses out of my head; for, I declare I never recollected that there was any other way of getting down from here save by the waterfall gully!"

"Ah, well, there is another way," said Eric, laughing joyously. "But, really we must now see about using it, for I don't want you to remain up here all night when you may be so much more comfortable in the hut. I will scramble down and fetch round the boat at once, if there is nothing more I can do for you before I go—is there anything you wish?"

"No, nothing, now that you've raised my head and propped it up so nicely with your coat. I should be glad, though, if you will bring a can of water with you when you come back with the boat."

"Stay, I'll get some for you now!" cried the lad; and, flying across the plateau, he was soon half-way down a niche in the gully whence he could reach the cascade. In a few minutes more, he was up again on the tableland and by the side of Fritz, with his cap full of the welcome water, which tasted to the sufferer, already feverish from the bullet wound—which Eric had bandaged up to stop the bleeding—more delicious than nectar, more strengthening than wine. It at once brought the colour back to his cheek and the fire to his eye.

"Ha!" Fritz exclaimed, "that draught has made a new man of me, laddie. You may be off as soon as you please, now, to fetch the boat; while I will wait patiently here until you can bring it round the headland. How's the wind?"

"South-east and by south," cried the young sailor promptly.

"That will be all in your favour, then. Go now, laddie, and don't be longer than you can help."

"You may depend on that," cried Eric, pressing his brother's hand softly; and, in another moment, he was racing again across the plateau to the point where the two had ascended from the gully by the waterfall.

Ere long, Eric had brought round the whale-boat to the haunt of the seals on the west beach; when, after a good deal of labour, in which he could not help hurting Fritz somewhat, he succeeded in getting the sufferer down the sloping rocks. Thence, he lifted him bodily into the stern-sheets of the boat, where he had prepared a comfortable couch by piling up on the bottom grating all the blankets and rugs from the hut.

Eric had a hard pull back against the wind and tide round the headland, there being none to help him with an oar; but, naturally indomitable, he bravely accomplished the task at last, arriving back at the bay before sunset with his almost unconscious burden, who was now unable to move or assist him in the least.

Fortunately, the most arduous part of the transportation was now accomplished, the remainder being "all plain sailing," as Eric said.

The lad certainly had a most inventive mind; for, as soon as they reached their own little bay, he once more astonished Fritz—who was glad enough to get so far, but puzzled as to how he would ever arrive at the hut, knowing that the lad would never be able to carry him there.

"Now, brother," cried Eric, "you just stop quietly where you are a minute or two while I get the carriage ready."

"The carriage?" cried Fritz, more puzzled than ever. "What do you mean, laddie?"

"The wheelbarrow, of course," answered Eric, laughing. "See, I have put the door of our hut across it; and, with the bedding on top of this, I shall be able to wheel you, without the slightest jolting, right up to the cottage."

"Donnerwetter!" exclaimed Fritz—"you're a wonderful lad; you seem to think of everything."

"Nonsense! Silence, now—you mustn't talk; it might bring on fever perhaps!" exclaimed Eric, to stop his brother's grateful expressions. Then, lifting him out carefully from the boat, he placed the invalid on the novel ambulance wagon he had so ingeniously improvised; and, rolling the wheelbarrow along the little pathway up the incline that led to the hut, he proceeded carefully to transport him home. Arrived here, Eric at once put Fritz to bed, so that he might

be able to examine his injuries more closely and apply proper bandages to the wounded leg and back, in place of the temporary appliances he had made shift with when first attending to the wounded hero, who was now able to direct him what to do and how to do it.

Eric could not help thinking what an unlucky fellow that elder brother of his was!

The cliff seemed fatal to him; for, the first time he ascended it, he sprained his ankle, which laid him up for three weeks; and now he had hurt himself even worse. Really, the sailor lad wished there were no crags at all; but, should that devout consummation not be feasible, then he wished there were no means of getting to the summit, for then Fritz would never incur any danger through climbing there.

Little did Eric think, as these hasty reflections passed through his mind, that, in a very short while, his last wish would be gratified—and that in a way, too, which would seriously affect them both!

The very next morning, indeed, he was glad enough to go up the cliff by the tussock-grass ladder, in order to fetch the young goat he had shot the day before, which, in the excitement of Fritz's accident, had been left behind on the plateau; and, as he was coming down the gully again, he saw the old goat "Kaiser Billy," and shook his fist at him.

"You old rascal!" he cried—"had it not been for you and your nasty horns, poor Fritz would be now all right."

He then fired a shot at the animal in the distance; but, the knowing fellow, who must have noticed the lad's deadly aim the previous afternoon—when he had slain one of his family while she was galloping along beside him—now kept carefully out of the range of Eric's rifle, so that the bullet did not fall any way near him, so the lad had to descend the tussock-grass ladder in a somewhat disappointed frame of mind.

He had not wished actually to hurt the old goat, but merely to give him a sort of mild lesson anent his impudent treatment of Fritz. However, the astute animal declined learning even from so gentle an instructor as Eric, despite the possibility of the lad having his welfare at heart!

This was the last time the sailor lad ever had the chance to climb up or down the face of the cliff by means of the much-abused ladder-way; for, within the next few days, a sudden mishap happened that cleared the tangled masses of grass away in a jiffy, leaving the precipitous pass through the gorge bare—the grim rocks thenceforth disclosing themselves in all their naked ruggedness, for, there were no friendly tendrils hanging down whereby to escalate the heights.

The accident occurred in this wise.

When clearing the land for the garden, a large amount of brushwood and weeds had to be removed from its surface. These, when cut down and dug up, made a large heap of rubbish, which, for the sake of neatness and being out of the way, was piled up at the bottom of the gorge adjoining the waterfall—the embrasure of the gully making a capital dust-hole, as Eric had suggested.

From the effects of the hot sun, this rubbish was now as dry as straw; so, one afternoon, when Fritz had so far recovered from his injuries as to be able to crawl out of the hut and sit on a bench outside, which the two had constructed under a rude sort of porch, Eric determined to signalise his brother's convalescence by having a bonfire in honour of the event.

To the impulsive lad it was all one to think of such a thing and to carry out the idea. In a moment, rushing from Fritz's side, he had drawn his inseparable box of matches from his pocket, struck a light, and ignited the pile of rubbish.

"Doesn't it flare up splendidly?" he cried with glee as he watched the tongue-like flames darting upwards, the whole body of dry material being soon in a red fiery glow, so hot and scorching that the lad had to move away from the vicinity; and, returning to the front of the hut he stood for a time by the side of Fritz, gazing with great admiration at the blaze, which, mounting higher and higher, quickly enveloped the gorge with clouds of that light, pungent smoke which wood fires always give out.

"Yes, it burns well enough," said the calm, methodical Fritz; "but, perhaps, laddie, it will spread farther than you intend. I fear it will burn up the little wood to the right of our garden, with all the poor thrushes and other birds in it. It is easy enough to start a fire, you know: the difficulty is to limit its action and put it out when you wish!"

"Oh, there's no fear about that," replied Eric with great nonchalance. "The wind is blowing from the north-east and will only carry the flames against the cliff, where there is nothing to harm."

Was there not?

Higher and higher rose the smoke, ascending pyramidically up the chimney-like gorge; and, the quick-darting tongues of flame could be seen spreading through the hazy veil, while the crackle and roar of the fire sounded fiercer and fiercer. Presently, growing bolder in its strength, the fire advanced outwards from the cleft in the rock where it was first kindled, spreading to the right and left of the gully. Next, it began to clamber up the face of the cliff, burning away gaily even right under the waterfall, which seemed powerless to stay its rapid progress.

"Look, Eric," cried Fritz, "it has caught the tussock grass now close to our ladder. I told you it would do mischief!"

"Bother it all, so it has!" exclaimed the lad, darting off with the vain intention of trying to stop the conflagration.

He might just as well have attempted to arrest the flow of the sea in the little bay below by the aid of his much-detested spade!

Crackle, crackle—puff—whish; and, in another few moments, the whole cliff seemed on fire, the flames licking every particle of herbage off the face of the rock.

The heat soon made the solid stone glow like molten iron; while the columns of white smoke, as they rose up, were swept by the wind over the tableland, frightening away several of the albatross, which hovered over the scene of devastation on poised wing, wondering apparently what all the fuss was about!

The fire gradually burnt itself out when there was nothing more to consume, only an angry pile of smouldering embers remaining below the waterfall, which still danced and tumbled itself over the blackened edges of the crags, no longer festooned with the tussock-grass and shrubs which had previously given the brothers handhold and foothold when climbing to the summit of the cliff.

The ladder up to Eric's look-out station being now irremediably destroyed, henceforth the sphere of action of the brother crusoes would be limited to the confined valley in which they had landed and built their home; for, there was now no means of reaching the tableland, save by the pass on the western side near their sealing station, to reach which they would have to use the whale-boat and venture out to sea, round the eastern or western headland.

They were now really shut completely within their little valley, without a chance of escaping in any sudden emergency, except by taking to the water!

The destruction of the ladder-way was a sad calamity; but, that was not the worst of the damage done by Eric's bonfire!

It was late in the afternoon when the lad first lit up the pile of rubbish and night came ere the fire had died out, its blazing light, reflected back by the glistening surface of the cliff, shining out to sea from the bay, like a beacon welcoming the passing mariner to friendly shores—instead of which, the cruel crags that encircled the island only grinned through the surf, like the pointed teeth of a pack of snarling wolves, waiting to rend and tear any hapless craft that should make for them!

In addition to this, there was yet another peril to any ship in the vicinity; for, the wind from the north-east had risen to a gale as the evening set in, bringing with it a heavy, rolling swell that thundered in upon the beach with a harsh, grating roar, throwing up columns of spray over the projecting peaks of the headlands on either hand.

"I hope no vessel will mistake your bonfire for a beacon," said Fritz, as the darkness increased. "If so, and they should chance to approach the land, God help them, with this wind and sea on!"

"I trust not," replied Eric sadly, already regretting his handiwork; "it would be a bad look-out for them!"

But, as he spoke the words, the sound of a cannon could be heard coming from seaward over the water; and the lad shuddered with apprehension.

Chapter Thirty One.

The Wreck of the Brig.

"Himmel!" exclaimed Fritz, rising up from the bench on which he was sitting and clutching on to the side of the hut for support, being still very feeble and hardly able to stand upright. "There must be a ship out there approaching the island. If she should get too close inshore, she is doomed!"

But, Eric did not answer him. The lad had already rushed down to the beach; and, climbing on to a projecting boulder, was peering into the offing, endeavouring to make out the vessel whose signal gun had been heard in the distance.

The darkness, however, was too great. The heavens were overcast with thick, drifting clouds, while the sea below was as black as ink—except where the breakers at the base of the cliffs broke in masses of foam that gave out a sort of phosphorescent light for the moment, lighting up the outlines of the headlands during the brief interval, only for them to be swallowed up the next instant in the sombre gloom that enwrapped the bay and surrounding scene. Eric, consequently, could see nothing beyond the wall of heaving water which the rollers presented as they thundered on the shingle, dragging back the pebbles in their back-wash with a rattling noise, as if the spirits of the deep were playing with dice in the depths below under the waves!

At his back, the lad could see the bonfire still blazing, casting the foreground in all the deeper shadow from its flickering light; and, never did he regret anything more in his life than the sudden impulse which had led him into so dangerous a freak, as that of lighting the bonfire.

Who knew what further terrible peril that treacherous fire might not lead to, besides the mischief it had already done?

Bye-and-bye, there came the sound of another gun from the sea. The report sounded nearer this time; still, Eric could see nothing in sight on the horizon when some break in the clouds allowed him a momentary glimpse of the angry ocean—nothing but the huge billows chasing each other in towards the land and the seething foam at the base of the crags, on which they broke themselves in impotent fury when they found their further course arrested by the rocky ramparts of the island.

Nor could the lad hear anything beyond the crash of the breakers and splash of the eddying water, which sometimes washed up to his feet, as he stood on the boulder gazing out vainly to sea, the sound of the breaking billows being mingled with the shriek of the wind as it whistled by overhead.

Nothing but the tumult of the sea, stirred into frenzy by the storm-blast of angry Aeolus!

After a time, Eric suddenly recollected that his brother could not move far from the hut and must be wondering what had become of him; and, recognising as well the fact that he was powerless alone to do anything where he was, even if a ship should be in danger, he returned towards the cottage to rejoin Fritz, his path up the valley being lit up quite clearly by the expiring bonfire, which still flamed out every now and then, as the wind fanned it in its mad rush up the gorge, stirring out the embers into an occasional flash of brilliancy.

Fritz, usually so calm, was in a terribly anxious state when his brother reached him.

"Well, have you seen anything?" he asked impatiently.

"No," said Eric sorrowfully. "There's nothing to be seen."

"But *you* heard another cannon, did you not?"

"Oh yes, and it seemed closer in."

"So I thought, too," said the other, whom the sound of the heavy guns, from his old experience in war, appeared to affect like a stimulant. "Can't we do anything? It is terrible to stand idly here and allow our fellow-creatures to perish, without trying to save them!"

"What could we do?" asked Eric helplessly, all the buoyancy gone out of him. He seemed to be quite another lad.

"You couldn't launch the boat without me, eh?"

"No," answered Eric; "I couldn't move it off the beach with all my strength—I tried just now."

Fritz ground his teeth in rage at his invalid condition.

"It serves me right to be crippled in this fashion!" he cried. "It all results from my making such a fool of myself the other day, after that goat on the plateau. I ought to have known better."

"You need not vex yourself, brother, about that," said Eric. "If there were twenty of us to get the boat into the water, instead of two, she could not live in the heavy sea that is now running. She would be swamped by the first roller that came in upon us, for the wind is blowing dead on shore!"

"That may be," replied Fritz; "still, I should like to do something, even if I knew it would be useless!"

"So should I," said Eric, disconsolately.

In silence, the two continued to pace up and down the little platform they had levelled in front of their hut, trying to pierce the darkness that now entirely obscured the sea, the north-easter having brought up a thick fog in its train, perhaps from the far-distant African coast, which shut out everything on that side; although, the light of the bonfire still illumined the cliff encircling the valley where they had pitched their homestead, disclosing the inmost recesses of this, so that they could see from where they stood, the wood, which the conflagration had spared, as well as their garden and the tussock-grass rookery of the penguins beyond, not a feature of the landscape being hid.

Again came the booming, melancholy sound of the minute guns from sea, making the brothers more impatient than ever; and, at that moment, the fog suddenly lifted, being rapidly wafted away to leeward over the island, enabling the two anxious watchers to see a bit of bright sky overhead, with a twinkling star or two looking down on the raging ocean, now exposed to their gaze—all covered with rolling breakers and seething foam as far as the eye could reach, to the furthest confines of the horizon beyond the bay.

Still, they could perceive nothing of the ship that had been firing the signals of distress, till, all at once, another gun was heard; and the flash, which caught their glance at the same moment as the report reached them, now enabled them to notice her imminent peril. This, the people on board could only then have noticed for the first time, the fog having previously concealed their danger; for they distinctly heard, above the noise of the sea and wind, a hoarse shout of agonised, frantic alarm, wafted shorewards by the wind in one of its wild gusts.

The vessel was coming up under close-reefed topsails, bow on to the headland on the western side of the bay; and, almost at the very instant the brothers saw her, she struck with a crash on the rocks, the surf rushing up the steep face of the cliff and falling back on the deck of the ill-fated craft in sheets of spray like soapsuds.

Fritz and Eric clasped their hands in mute supplication to heaven; but, at the same moment, the spars of the vessel—she was a brig, they could see—fell over her side with a crash. There was a grinding and rending of timbers; and then, one enormous wave, as of three billows rolled into one, poured over her in a cataract.

One concentrated shriek of horror and agony came from the seething whirlpool of broken water, and, all was over; for, when the foam had washed away with the retreating wave, not a single vestige could be seen of the hapless craft!

She had sunk below the sea with those on board.

"Oh, brother, it is awful!" cried Eric.

Fritz could not answer. His throat was filled with a great gulping lump which prevented him from drawing his breath; while his eyes were suffused with tears that no unmanly feelings had called forth.

Eric was starting off again down to the beach, to see whether any one had escaped from the wreck and been swept into the bay, in which case he might have been of use in trying to drag them from the clutch of the cruel waves, when Fritz called him back.

“Don’t leave me behind, brother,” he cried out passionately. “Wheel me down, in the barrow, so that I may help, too!”

The lad stopped in a instant, comprehending his brother’s request; and, flying back, in and out of the hut as if he had been galvanised, he quickly placed the old door on top of the wheelbarrow as a sort of platform, with a mattress on top. He then lifted Fritz on the superstructure as if he were a child, the excitement having given him tenfold strength; and, wheeling the barrow down at a run, the two arrived on the beach almost sooner than a boat could have pulled ashore from the point where the catastrophe to the vessel had occurred.

But, although it was now light enough to scan the surface of the restless sea for some distance out, no struggling form could be seen battling with the waves; nor was there a single fragment of the wreck noticeable, tossing about on the billows that still rolled in thunderingly on the beach, marking out the contour of the bay with a line of white surf, which shone out in contrast to the glittering black sand that was ever and anon displayed as the back-wash of the waves swept out again in a downward curve preparatory to the billows hurling themselves in shore once more with renewed force.

“Poor chaps, they must all have gone down!” said Eric, half crying. He had made sure that some one would have escaped, if only for him to rescue at the last moment—perhaps just when the sinking swimmer might require a helping hand to drag him from the clutches of the grasping billows that sought to overwhelm him as he was getting beyond their reach!

“There’s no doubt of that,” echoed Fritz, who had got off his platform on the wheelbarrow with much more agility than he had been capable of a short time before. “The sea has swallowed up those who were not dashed to pieces on the headland! I hardly know which fate was the least preferable of the two?”

“I do hope that the bonfire did not lead to their misfortune,” said Eric presently. “If so, I should consider myself to be the cause of their death!”

“No, I don’t think it was, laddie,” replied Fritz, to cheer him, the lad being greatly distressed at the thought of having occasioned the catastrophe. “You see, the ship must have been coming from the other side of the headland, whose height would shut all view of our valley entirely from the sea.”

“Well, I only hope so,” replied Eric, only half consoled. “I’m afraid, however, the people on board took the flame of the burning grass to be some beacon to warn them.”

“In that case, they would have kept away from it, of course,” said Fritz decidedly; “so, no blame can be attached to you. The wind, you see, was blowing a gale from the north-east; and, probably, they were driving on before it, never thinking they were near Inaccessible Island, nor believing that there was such a place anywhere within miles of them, or land at all, for that matter, till they should reach the South American coast!”

“Perhaps so,” rejoined Eric, in a brighter tone; “but then, again, they might have thought the light to be a ship on fire, and, in going out of their way to lend assistance, they possibly met with their doom, eh?”

“Ah, that would be sad to believe,” said Fritz. “However, I don’t think we should worry ourselves over the dispensations of providence. Poor fellows, whoever they are, or whatever they were about at the time of the disaster, I’m sorry for them from the bottom of my heart!”

“And so am I,” chimed in his brother. “But now, old fellow,” added Eric, “it is time for you to be getting back indoors, with your poor back and wounded leg.”

“Yes, I shan’t be sorry to lie down now; for, I’ve exerted myself more than I should have done. Oh,” continued Fritz, as the lad helped him on to the wheelbarrow platform, again preparing to return to the hut, “I shall never forget the sight of that doomed vessel dashing against the rocks. I fancy I can now see the whole hideous panorama before my eyes again, just as we saw it when the mist cleared away, disclosing all the horrors of the scene!”

“I shan’t forget it either, brother,” said Eric, as he commenced to wheel back Fritz homeward, neither uttering another word on the way.

Both went to bed sadly enough; for, the calamity that had just occurred before their eyes made them more depressed than they had ever been before—aye, even in the solitude of their first night alone on the island.

Next morning, the gale had blown itself out, the wind having toned down to a gentle breeze; while the sea was smiling in the sunshine, so innocently that it seemed impossible it could have been lashed into the fury it exhibited the previous night. There it was, rippling and prattling away on the beach in the most light-hearted fashion, oblivious, apparently, of all thought of evil!

All trace of the wreck, too, had disappeared, nothing being subsequently cast ashore but one single plank, on which the hieroglyphic letters, “PF Bordeaux,” were carved rudely with a chisel; so, the mystery of the brig’s name and destination remained unsolved to the brothers, as it probably will continue a mystery, until that day when the ocean gives up its secrets and yields up its dead to life!

“News from Home.”

For some time after the wreck, the brothers seemed to experience a strange dreariness about the place which they never felt before.

They were now shut in entirely, being confined, as it were, to the little valley of the waterfall through the destruction of the tussock-grass ladder, which previously had opened the tableland on top of the crags to them, giving greater liberty of action; although the ascent had not been by any means an easy matter for Fritz.

Now, however, restricted to their scanty domain, bounded by the bare cliff at the back and encompassed by lofty headlands on either side, they were prevented from wandering beyond the limits of the bay, save by taking to their boat; and this, the strong winds which set in at the latter end of March rendered utterly impossible of achievement.

Consequently, they began to realise more fully their solitary condition, recognising the fact that they were crusoes indeed!

No event of any importance happened after the episode of the bonfire and the storm in which the crew of the brig perished, for some weeks, nothing occurring to break the monotony of the solitary life they were leading; until, one morning, without any warning, the penguins, which had been their constant companions from the commencement of their self-chosen exile up to now, suddenly left the island.

This was in the month of April.

Never was a migration more unexpected.

On the evening before, the birds, so long as daylight lasted, were seen still playing about in the bay and arranging themselves in lines along the rough escarpment of the headlands, where they were drawn up like soldiers on parade and apparently dressed in the old-fashioned uniform that is sometimes still seen on the stage. Really, their black and white plumage exactly resembled the white buckskin breeches and black three-cornered hats of the whilom mousquetaires; while their drooping flappers seemed like hands down their sides in the attitude of “attention!”—the upper portions of the wings, projecting in front, representing those horrible cross-belts that used to make the men look as if they wore stays.

The penguins seemed so much at home on the island that it looked as if they never intended leaving it, albeit the brothers noticed that the birds barked and grumbled more discordantly than they had done of late. No doubt there was something on hand, they thought; but they never dreamt that this grand pow-wow was their leave-taking of the rookery; but, lo and behold! when Eric came out of the hut next morning to pay his customary matutinal visit to the beach, there was not a single penguin to be seen anywhere in the vicinity, either out in the water or on land!

They had disappeared, as if by magic, in one single night. In the evening before, they were with them; when day dawned, they were gone!

Fritz and Eric had got so accustomed to the birds by this time, studying their habits and watching the progress of many of the adult penguins from the egg to representative birdom, as they passed through the various gradations of hatching and moulting, that they quite missed them for the first few days after their departure.

The cliffs, without their presence to enliven them, appeared never so stern and bleak and bare as now; the headlands never so forbidding and impassable; the valley never so prison-like, to the brothers, shut in as they were and confined to the bay!

However, the winter season coming on apace, the two soon had plenty to do in preparing for its advent. This served to distract their attention from becoming morbid and dwelling on their loneliness, which was all the more dismal now from the fact of their being debarred from their hunting-ground on the plateau—Fritz having got strong and well again after the wreck, and being now able to start on a second expedition in pursuit of “Kaiser Billy,” did he so wish, if the access to the tableland above the cliffs by way of the gully were only still open to them.

Goat-shooting, therefore, being denied them, the brothers busied themselves about other matters, as soon as the increasing coldness of the air and an occasional snow-storm warned them that winter would soon visit the shores of the island.

“I tell you what,” said Fritz, when the first few flakes of snow came fluttering down one afternoon as they were standing outside the hut, the sun having set early and darkness coming on. “We’re going to have some of the old weather we were accustomed to at Lubeck.”

“Ah; but, we can have no skating or slides here!” replied Eric, thinking of the canals and frozen surface of the sea near his northern home, when the frost asserted its sway, ruling with a sceptre of ice everywhere.

“No, and we don’t want them either,” rejoined the practical Fritz. “I am pondering over a much more serious matter; and that is, how we shall keep ourselves warm? My coat, unfortunately, is getting pretty nearly worn-out!”

“And so is mine,” cried Eric, exhibiting the elbows of his reefing jacket, in which a couple of large holes showed themselves. The rest of the garment, also, was so patched up with pieces of different coloured cloth that it more resembled an old-clothes-man’s sack than anything else!

“Well, what do you think of our paying our tailor a visit?” said Fritz all at once, after cogitating a while in a brown study.

Eric burst out into a loud fit of laughing; so hearty that he nearly doubled himself up in the paroxysms of his mirth.

“Ha, ha, ha, what a funny fellow you are, Fritz!” he exclaimed. “I wonder where we are going to find a tailor here?”

“Oh, I know one,” said his brother coolly, in such a matter-of-fact way that the lad was quite staggered with surprise.

“Do you?” he asked in astonishment. “Who is he?”

“Your humble servant,” said Fritz, with a low bow. “Can I have the pleasure of measuring you for a new suit, meinherr?”

Eric began laughing again.

“You can measure away to your heart’s content,” he replied; “but, I fancy it will puzzle even your lofty intellect to discover the wherewithal to make clothes with—that is, except sailcloth, which would be rather cold wear for winter, I think, eh, Master Schneider?”

“How about those two last sealskins we didn’t salt down, or pack up with the rest in the puncheon?” enquired Fritz with a smile.

“O-oh!” exclaimed Eric, opening his mouth wide with wonder.

“A-ah,” rejoined his brother. “I think they’ll do very well to make a couple of good coats for us; they’ll be warm and serviceable.”

“Of course they will,” said Eric, jumping at the idea. “And, they will be fashionable too! Why, sealskin jackets are all the rage in Berlin and Hanover; so, we’ll be regular dandies!”

“Dandies of the first water, oh yes,” replied Fritz quizzingly. “I wonder what they would think of us at, Lubeck if they could just see us now!”

“Never mind, brother, we’ll astonish them when we go back with our pockets full of money,” said Eric in his happy fashion; and then, without further delay, the two set to work making themselves winter garments, as Fritz had suggested, from the sealskins.

These had been dried, instead of being salted down with the rest, in the ordinary way whalers preserve them for the furriers; so, now, all that remained for the brothers to do was to make the skins limp and pliable.

This they managed to effect by rubbing grease over the inner surface of the skins with a hard piece of lava slab selected from the volcanic débris at the foot of the cliff, in the same way, as Eric explained, that sailors holystone the decks of a ship; and, after the pelts of the seals were subjected to this process, they underwent a species of tanning by being steeped in a decoction of tea leaves, keeping, however, the hair out of the liquor. Lastly, the outside portion of the skins was dressed by pulling off the long fibrous exterior hairs, concealing the soft fur below that resembled the down beneath a bird’s rough feathers.

The skins being now thoroughly prepared, all that remained to do was to cut out the coats, a feat the crusoes accomplished by using their old garments for patterns; and then, by the aid of the useful little housewife which Celia Brown had given Eric, after an immense amount of stitching, the brothers were able at last to clothe themselves in a couple of fur jackets. These, although they were perhaps roughly made, the good people at home could not have turned up their noses at, for the articles were certainly intrinsically worth more than the best-cut masterpiece of the best outfitter, even if not of so perfect a fit or style!

Fritz was the chief tailor in this operation; but, while he was busily engaged with needle and thread, Eric was employed in another way, equally for the good of both.

The hut had been found somewhat cold and damp in consequence of the sun’s power beginning to wane by reason of its shifting further north, through the periodic revolution of the earth; so it was determined to build a fireplace within the dwelling.

This had not been necessary before, all their cooking operations having been carried on without the hut at an open-air campaigner’s stove designed by soldier Fritz.

Now, however, Master Eric devoted himself to the task of improving their household economy, accomplishing the feat so well that, wonderful to relate, the place never smoked once after the fire had been lit in the new receptacle for it, excepting when the wind blew from the westward. Then, indeed, coming from over the top of the plateau above, it whirled down the gorge, roaring through the lad’s patent chimney like a cyclone.

From May, until the end of July—during which time the extreme severity of the winter lasted—the brothers did little, save stop indoors and read, or play dominoes.

Really, there was nothing else for them to occupy their minds with; for, it was impossible to cultivate the garden, while the weather was too rough for them to venture out in the whale-boat.

Early in August, however, the penguins returned.

The birds did this as suddenly as they had left; although they did not come all together, as at the period of their migrating from the island.

It need hardly be said that Fritz and Eric welcomed them joyfully as the early swallows of the coming summer; for, as the summer advanced, their life would be more varied, and there would be plenty for them to do.

Besides, the brothers had not forgotten Captain Brown's promise to return at this period and visit them with the *Pilot's Bride*, the arrival of which vessel might be expected in a couple of months or so.

The male penguins were the first to make their reappearance in the bay, Eric returning to the hut with the news of this fact one morning in August.

"I say, Fritz," he called out, when yet some distance off from their dwelling—"I've just seen two penguins down by the sea!"

"Have you?" exclaimed the other eagerly. "That's good news."

"Is it?" said Eric. "I didn't think you cared about them so much."

"Ah, I'm looking out for their eggs," replied Fritz.

"Why, you never seemed to fancy them last year, old fellow," said the sailor lad surprised. "What means this change of view on your part?"

"Well, you know, when we arrived here first, the birds were already sitting; and, I certainly confess I did not care about the eggs then, for they would probably have been half addled! Now, however, if we look out each day, we can get them quite fresh, when they'll be ever so much better. Young Glass told us, as you ought to remember, that they tasted very nice and not in the least fishy."

"Oh, yes, I recollect," said Eric. "I will keep a good look-out for them now you say they're worth looking after!"

And he did.

The two male birds, who first came, were succeeded on the following day by half a dozen more, a large number coming later on the same afternoon.

All these penguins were in their best plumage, and very fat and lazy, contenting themselves with lolling about the beach for a day or two, as if to recover from the fatigues of their journey.

Then, after a solemn conference together close to the rookery, the birds began to prepare their nests, so as to be ready for the reception of the females, which did not make their appearance for nearly a month after the first male penguins were seen.

A fortnight later, there was in almost each nest an egg of a pale blue colour, very round in shape and about the size of a turkey's—the sight of which much gratified Master Eric, who, fearless of consequences, made a point of investigating the tussock-grass colony every morning. He called the birds habitat his "poultry yard," seeming to be quite unmindful of his mishap there the previous year; although now, as the penguins had not begun regularly to sit yet, they were not so noisy or troublesome as when he then intruded on their domain. Besides, as the sailor lad argued, the eggs were uncommonly good eating, and well worth risk getting them.

September came; and the brother crusoes were all agog with excitement, watching for the expected coming of the old Yankee skipper.

"Do you know what to-day is?" asked Fritz one morning, as Eric woke him up in turning out.

"What a fellow you are for dates!" exclaimed the other. "You ought to go and live in the East, where they cultivate them, brother! No, I can't say I recollect what day it is. Tuesday, is it not?"

"I don't mean that," said Fritz petulantly. "I alluded to the sort of anniversary, that's all."

"Anniversary of what?"

"Our landing here last year," replied Fritz.

"Oh, I forgot that!" exclaimed Eric.

"It strikes me you forget a good many things," said his brother in his dry way. "Still, what I was thinking of was, that we might now really begin to look out for Captain Brown. What a pity it is that you can't ascend to your old signalling station on top of the gully."

"Yes, it was all on account of the grass burning that our ladder got spoilt and—"

"Of course you didn't set it on fire, eh?" interposed Fritz.

"Ah well, it's of no use our talking about that now; words will not mend matters," said Eric. "We'll have look out from here!"

The wind latterly had been from the east, blowing right into the bay. On account of this, the brothers could not venture out in the boat and thus get round the headland, so as to climb the plateau from the other side of the island and scan the offing from thence.

Still, no amount of looking out on their part—or lack of observation, whichever way the matter was put—seemed to

effect the arrival of the expected ship; for, the month passed away in daily counted days without a trace of a sail being seen on the horizon.

At last, just when the brothers had given up in despair all hope of hearing from home, Eric, one morning in October, reported that there was something in sight to windward of the bay; although, he said, he did not think she looked like the *Pilot's Bride*.

Hastily jumping into his clothes—for Fritz, sad to relate, could never practise early rising, in which good habit day after day Eric set him a praiseworthy example—the elder followed the younger lad again to the shore of the bay; from which point, well away out to sea, and her hull just rising from the rolling plane of water, could be seen a vessel. She was steering for the island apparently, with the wind well on her beam.

"It isn't Captain Brown's ship," said Eric now decisively, his sailor eye having distinguished while she was yet in the distance that the vessel was a fore-and-aft-rigged schooner, although Fritz could not then tell what sort of craft she was. "It is one of those small whalers that ply amongst the islands, such as I saw down at Kerguelen."

"What can have become of the skipper, then?" cried Fritz, quite disappointed. "I hope nothing has happened to him."

"We'll soon know," replied Eric. "If I mistake not this very schooner, which is evidently going to call here, is the *Jane*. I know her by that queer patch in her jib; and, if that's the case, she is one of the consorts of the *Pilot's Bride* and will be bound to be able to tell us something about her."

"I sincerely hope so," said Fritz.

The two then remained silent for some time, watching the approaching vessel; but they took the precaution to run down their whale-boat to the beach, so as to be ready to put off as soon as the visitor should come near enough for them to board her.

In a short time, bowling up before a good breeze, although it seemed hours to them, they were so anxious, the schooner lay-to off the bay, hoisting her flag as a signal that she wished to communicate. But, long before the bunting had been run up to the masthead, the brothers had launched their boat and were pulling out towards the vessel, which did not anchor, for there was a heavy ground swell on—this latter, indeed, cost them, too, some trouble in getting their little craft out to sea, the rolling surge first lifting her up and then plunging her down so that everything was hidden from them for the moment by a wall of water on either side.

However, they managed to get through the waves somehow; and, presently, they were alongside the schooner,—pulling in under her stern, whence a rope was hove them to get on board by.

An active-looking, slim, seamanlike young fellow advanced to them as they scrambled on the schooner's deck; and Eric appeared to recognise him.

"Hullo, Captain Fuller," he said, "where's the *Pilot's Bride* and the old skipper?"

"I'm sorry you won't see him this trip," replied the other. "The barque got damaged in a gale off the African coast a month ago: so, she had to put into the Cape of Good Hope for repairs, which'll take such a time that Captain Brown couldn't manage to come along here and see you as he promised. Howsomever, the old skipper has sent me in his stead, to bring you some letters and take home any cargo you might have ready in sealskins and oil. He told me, likewise, to let you have any provisions you may want; but, I'm sorry to say, while coming here I helped an American ship that was short, and now I only have a little flour left to spare."

"Thank you, all the same," said Fritz, who had been waiting patiently while the master of the schooner gave this explanation. "I'm very sorry at not seeing Captain Brown; however, I suppose he'll come for us next year, as he said, won't he?"

"Oh yes," answered the other cordially. "I'm sure he will, for it seemed a great disappointment to him not to be able to do so now. He told me to be certain to say that, 'blow great guns and small arms or not, he'll be at Inaccessible Island next year!' But, you must be anxious about your letters. Here they are," and the nice-looking young fellow, whom Fritz had quite taken a fancy to, handed a little packet to him, adding, "I am afraid I'll have to hurry you up about your return messages, as the wind is getting up from the eastwards and I shan't be able to remain here long."

Fritz at once broke the seal of a thick letter, which Captain Brown had enclosed in one of his own. This he saw came from Lubeck, although it had the Capetown post mark on it, and he glanced hurriedly over the front page and then at the end.

"All right at home, thank God!" he said aloud for Eric's benefit, the lad staring at his brother with eager eyes. "And now, Captain Fuller, I'm ready to attend to you. I shall be glad of a barrel of flour if you can spare it, but our other provisions can hold out. Will you let a man or two come ashore to help get our freight aboard?"

"How much have you got to ship?" asked the other.

"Thirty sealskins and twenty barrels of oil," replied Fritz at once; he and Eric had counted over their little store too often for him not to have their tally at his fingers' ends!

"Come now," said Captain Fuller encouragingly. "That's not bad work for a couple of novices as their first take here! Next year, you'll be able to fill up the *Pilot's Bride*, 'I reckon,' as the old skipper would say."

"Not quite that," replied Fritz, while he and Eric joined in the other's laugh; "still, I've no doubt we'll do better than this, for we'll take care to be beforehand with some folks!"

The commander of the schooner looking puzzled by the latter part of this speech, Fritz proceeded to tell the young seaman all about Nat Slater and the Tristaners, anent which he became very indignant.

"I'll take care to call at the island and spoil the mean fellow's game for him, so that you shan't be troubled in the same way again!" cried their new friend, with much heartiness; "but, do, please, let these men go ashore with you now and fetch your produce at once, or else we'll have to be off without it! Here, Harris and Betkins," he sang out to two of the schooner's men, "go along with these gentlemen in their boat and bring off some cargo they'll point out to you!"

"I don't think we can stow all in one boat," said Eric.

"Then, we must make two or three trips till we do," answered the other, equal to the occasion; and this procedure was adopted until all the brothers' sealskins and barrels of oils were shipped in the schooner. The goods were consigned to Captain Brown, who had undertaken to dispose of all the produce of their expedition; and, when the freight was all shipped, the schooner, filling her sails, bore away from the island on her return trip to the Cape—not without a hearty farewell to Fritz and Eric from those on board.

This visit of the little craft cheered them up wonderfully, reconciling them cheerfully to another year's sojourn in their island home; for, had not the schooner brought them comfort and hope, and, above all else, what was to their longing hearts like manna to the Israelites in the wilderness, water to a dry ground, warmth to those shivering with cold—in other words, "good news from home?"

Aye, that she had!

Chapter Thirty Three.

A Dire Peril.

Oh, those dear letters from home!

Did not Fritz pore over them, when he and Eric got back to their little hut, glad to sit down and be quiet again, all to themselves after the excitement of the schooner's visit and the fatigue of shipping the produce of their labours during the past?

Madame Dort's missive was a long, voluminous epistle of ever so many pages, written in their dear mother's clear hand, without a blot or a scratch out, or any tedious crossing of the pages to make the writing indistinct. She had been a teacher, and able to write well, if only because she had formerly to instruct others? The letter was public property for both, being addressed to Eric as well as Fritz, and it contained much loving news—news that caused the elder brother frequently to pause in his reading and Eric to dash away the quick tears from his bright eyes; while, anon, it made them both laugh by some funny allusion to household arrangements as they recalled the well-remembered little home scene in the old-fashioned house in which the two had been brought up, in the Gulden Strasse at Lubeck.

The communication was so lengthy that it was almost a journal, Madame Dort recounting all the haps and mishaps of the family since Fritz had gone away, taking it for granted that he would have informed Eric of all that had transpired during the lad's previous absence.

The letter mentioned, too, that the neighbours were all interested in the brothers' adventures and called frequently to ask her about them. Herr Grosschnapper, she also related, had especially told her that he had never employed so accurate a book-keeper as Fritz; for, the new clerk had, like a new broom, swept so clean that he had swept himself out of favour, the old merchant longing to have the widow's son back in his counting-house again.

"I don't wonder at that," exclaimed Eric, interrupting the reading here. "He should have known when he was well off and kept your place open for you until your return from the war!"

"So he did, brother, he waited as long as he could," said Fritz, taking the part of the absent, although the matter was still a sore subject with him; and, then, he continued reading out his mother's letter, which went on to detail Lorischen's many dreams about the children of her nursing—how she prophesied that Eric would be such a big strapping fellow that the house would not be able to contain him, and how Mouser had developed such an affection for Gelert, that he even followed the dog, when the latter went out to take his walks abroad, in the most fearless manner possible, trusting evidently to the kindness of his canine protector to prevent other obnoxious animals like Burgher Jans terrier from molesting him! Oh, and while mentioning the little fat man's dog, Madame Dort said she had such a wonderful story to relate. What would they think of Lorischen—

"I said it would turn out so!" cried Eric, interrupting his brother a second time. "I always said it would turn out so, in spite of all our old nurse's cruel treatment of the little Burgher."

"What did you say, Mr Prophet?" asked Fritz good-humouredly.

"That he and Lorischen would make a match of it yet," replied Eric, clapping his hands in high glee. "What fun that would be! Is it not so, brother?"

"You might be further out in your guessing than that," said Fritz, going on to the denouement of the story told in his mother's letter. Yes, Madame Dort wrote, the little fat man had really, one day when Lorischen had received him more affably than usual and invited him to partake of some nice cheese-cakes she had just made, asked her to marry him! And, more wonderful still, in spite of all their old nurse used to say about the Burgher, and how she pretended to

detest him, as they must remember well, Lorischen had finally agreed to an engagement with him, promising to unite her fate with his when Herr Fritz and Master Eric came home. "So now, dear boys both, you know how much depends on your return," concluded their mother in her quaint way, for she had a keen appreciation of humour. "If only to hasten the happiness of old Lorischen and her well-beloved little fat man, pray do not delay your coming back as soon as ever you can conveniently manage it. I say nothing about myself or of Madaleine, my new daughter; for, you must be able to imagine without the aid of any words of mine, how we are both longing and praying to see you again!"

"And now for sister Madaleine's letter," cried Eric, when he had kissed the signature to that of his mother's which Fritz handed over to him as soon as he had done reading it aloud. "It seems almost as big a one as mutterchen's and I dare say there'll be lots more news in it!"

"Ah, I think I'll read this first to myself," said Fritz dryly; adding a moment after when he noticed Eric's look of intense disgust: "you see, she only writes to me, you know."

"Oh yes, that's very fine!" exclaimed the other, in a highly aggrieved tone. "Never mind, though, I can pay you out sooner than you think, Master Fritz! See this little note here!"

"No—yes—what is it?" said Fritz, looking up in an absent way from the second of the home letters, which now lay open on his knee.

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know, Mr Selfish-keep-his-letters-to-himself sort of a brother, eh? Well, then, this note here contains some of the dearest words you ever saw penned! It was enclosed by Miss Celia Brown in a letter of her father's to you—which you've taken such little account of that you chucked it down on the floor in your ridiculous hurry to read that letter which you won't tell me about. Now, I did intend, Master Fritz, to give you this delightful little note, which I would not part with for the world, for you to read it your own self; but, now, I shan't let you once cast your eyes over it, there! It is only a little tiny note; still, I think much more of it than all your big letters from that Madaleine Vogelstein, who I don't believe is half as handsome as Celia!"

"All right then, we're both satisfied if such is the case," rejoined Fritz, in no way put out by this outburst, or alarmed at the terrible reprisals threatened by Eric, and then, the elder brother bowed his head again over the unfolded sheets of scented paper lying on his knee that came from his sweetheart across the sea.

The letter was all that the fondest lover could wish; and, with the omission of a few endearing terms, Fritz subsequently read it to Eric, who thereupon relented from his previous resolution and showed him Miss Celia Brown's note. This, however, contained nothing very remarkable, after all; unless a postscript, saying that the writer "expected to have a good time" when the sailor lad returned to Providence, deserves to be described in Eric's extravagant language.

The schooner's visit having settled their minds, so to speak, the brother crusoes were able after her departure to devote themselves anew, with all the greater zest, to what they now considered their regular work.

As in the previous year, before adventuring beyond their own special domain, the garden was dug up and replanted; the labour this time, of course, being far less than on the first occasion, for they had no longer virgin soil to tackle with as then.

A much larger lot of potatoes were put into the ground, the brothers having learnt by experience that, after once planting, these useful "apples of the earth" necessitated little further trouble, one good hoeing up when the sprouts had appeared above the surface and an occasional rake over to keep down the weeds being quite sufficient to make the plot look neat; while, should they have more than they required for themselves when harvest time came, they could easily store them up for the use of the *Pilot's Bride* crew, as a slight return for all Captain Brown's kindness.

A good crop of cabbages and onions was also provided for; while Eric did not forget his favourite peas and beans for their next Christmas banquet.

This task done and things tidied up about the hut, so as to make their immediate surroundings snug and comfortable, the brothers determined, the weather being now settled and fair, to have a cruise round the coast again. They were anxious to find out whether the seals were about yet, besides wishing to pay another visit to the tableland, which they had been debarred from exploring since the bonfire had burnt up their ladder at the beginning of the winter season.

They would, naturally, have made this expedition long before, had the wind and sea not been so boisterous—very unlike, indeed, the genial spell they had experienced in the previous year; but, really, from the month of August, a succession of gales had set in from different points of the compass and the navigation was so dangerous that it would not have been safe to have ventured out beyond the bay. Indeed, as it was, the whale-boat got so much knocked about by a heavy sea, which came rolling in on the beach one night when they had not drawn her up far enough, that she was now far too cranky for them to trust their lives in her in bad weather.

However, one fine day, late in November, with all their shooting and hunting gear, in addition to a supply of provisions for a week or ten days, they set sail from the bay bound westward round the headland, intending to have a regular outing.

Seals they found plentiful enough, the animals having returned to their breeding haunts much earlier than the year before. They seemed, besides, so tame that the new-comers must either have been quite a fresh family of the mammals, or else the brothers had stolen a march on the Tristaners and would therefore have the advantage of the first assault on the seals.

There was nothing like taking time by the forelock, and so, without frightening the animals by any display of hostility, the brothers quietly landed their traps in a little creek some distance away from the principal cove they frequented; and then, the two organised a regular campaign against their unsuspecting prey.

Eric with a rifle and harpoon got round the seals by way of the land; while Fritz, equally well provided with weapons, assailed them from the sea in the boat, both making a rush together by a preconcerted signal.

Their strategy was triumphant this time; for, after a very one-sided battle between the intrepid seal killers on the one hand and the terrified, helpless creatures on the other, eighty-five victims were counted on the field of battle—six of the animals being sea elephants, and five sea bears, or “lions,” a species having a curious sort of curly mane round their necks, while the remainder of the slain consisted of specimens of the common seal of commerce.

“Why, brother, this is grand!” exclaimed Eric, as he and Fritz counted over the spoil. “But, how shall we get the blubber and skins round to the bay? Our boat will never carry them all in her leaky state.”

“Well, laddie, I thought you were the inventive genius of the family,” said the other. “Can’t you think of an easier plan than lugging them round the headland all that way by sea?”

“I’m sure I can’t,” Eric replied, with a hopeless stare.

“Then, I’ll tell you,” said Fritz. “What think you of our just taking them up to the top of the plateau; and, after a short walk across the tableland, pitching our bundle of spoil down right in front of our hut—without first loading up the boat and then unloading her again, besides having the trouble of toiling all the way from the beach to the cottage afterwards?”

“Why, that’s a splendid plan!” cried Eric; “almost good enough for me to have thought of it.”

“I like your impudence!” said Fritz, laughing. “Certainly, a young sailor of my acquaintance has a very good opinion of himself!”

“Right you are,” rejoined Eric, with his time-honoured phrase; and then the two, as usual, had a hearty laugh.

Skinning the seals and packing up the layers of blubber within the pelts was then the order of the day with them for some hours, Fritz pointing out, that, if they removed all the traces of the combat before nightfall, the seals would return to their old haunt the next day, the evening tide being sufficient to wash away the traces of blood on the rocks as well as bear to the bottom the bodies of the slain victims; otherwise, the sad sight of the carcasses of their slain comrades still lying about the scene of battle would prevent the scared and timid animals from coming back.

Consequently, the brothers worked hard; and, practice having made them proficient in the knack of ripping off the coats of the seals with one or two dexterous slashes with a keen knife along the stomach and down the legs of the animals, they stripped off the skins in much less time than might be imagined.

Then, the pelts and layers of blubber were rolled up together in handy bundles and conveyed up to the plateau. This was a very tedious job, necessitating, first, a weary tramp to and from the beach to where the path led up to the summit of the tableland; and, secondly, a scramble up the rocky and wearisome ascent of the plateau, this latter part of their labour being rendered all the more difficult and disagreeable by the bundles of blubber and skins, which they had to carry up on their heads in the same fashion as negroes always convey their loads—a thing apparently easy enough to the blacks by reason of their strong craniums, but terribly “headachy” for Europeans unaccustomed to such burdens!

Fritz and Eric did not hurry over this job, however, deferring its completion till the morning. They camped out on the plateau so as to be out of the way of the seals, glad enough to rest after their day’s labour, without going hunting after the goats, as they had intended at first doing, the same afternoon.

Next morning, seeing no seals about—the animals probably not having recovered from their fright yet—they continued carrying up the skins and blubber, until they had quite a respectable pile on the plateau; when, the next question arose about its transportation across the tableland to the eastern side, immediately over the gully by which they used to climb up, near their hut.

“I wish we had brought your carriage, Fritz,” said Eric, alluding to the wheelbarrow, which had been so styled by the sailor lad after he had utilised it as an ambulance waggon.

“It’s too late to wish that now,” replied the other.

“I could soon go round in the boat and fetch it, brother,” cried Eric, looking as if he were going to start off at the moment.

“No, stop, laddie; we could not spare the boat,” said Fritz, laying his hand on his arm. “It would be more than likely that, the moment you were out of sight the seals would land again on the rocks, when we should miss the chance of taking them! I don’t believe we shall have more than one other chance of getting their skins; for the Tristaners will soon be here again on their annual excursion, with that fellow Slater in their company, and, I confess, I should not like us to be here when they came.”

“I wouldn’t mind a row at all!” cried Eric defiantly; “still, as you don’t want me to go for the wheelbarrow, how do you suggest that we should carry the skins across this dreary expanse here?”

“Let us make a stretcher with the oars,” said Fritz.

"Bravo, the very thing," replied Eric. "Why, you are the inventive genius this time!"

"Well, one must think of something sometimes," said Fritz, in his matter-of-fact way; and the two then proceeded to carry out the plan of the elder brother, which simplified their labour immensely. They only had to make some three journeys across the plateau with the skins, which, when the bundles were all transported to the eastern side of the tableland, were incontinently tumbled over to the foot of the cliff below, alighting quite close to the cauldron in which the blubber would be subsequently "tried out" into oil.

Then, and not till then, did they pick up their guns and think of the goats, which had hitherto led a charmed life as far as they were concerned.

They soon noticed, however, that, in lieu of the large number they had observed when they last saw them, the flock had been now reduced to five. The Tristaners must evidently have paid another visit to the west coast since they had met them there when going sealing the previous season; and, this second visit the brothers put down to the instigation of the whilom "deck hand," who had no doubt incited the islanders to do everything they could to annoy them.

Fritz only shot one goat, leaving "Kaiser Billy" and the other three, on the chance of their numbers being afterwards increased. He and Eric then went for a hunt after the wild pigs, killing a fine young porker, which they roasted on the plateau and made a feast of at their camp. The flesh, however, was very coarse, tasting fishy and rank, probably on account of the pigs feeding on the penguins, the young of which they could easily secure by going down to the beach by the same pathway that the brothers had climbed.

Fritz and Eric stayed ten days on the western shore; but during all the time they remained they only were able to capture eleven more seals, which made up their quota to ninety-six. Eric longed to run it up to the even hundred, but they did not see another single mammal, although they remained a day longer on the coast than they had intended.

This delay led to the most disastrous consequences; for, a gale sprang up right in their teeth when they were on their way back to the bay with the goat and the remaining sealskins, which they had not taken the trouble of transporting across the plateau, but took along with them in the boat.

It was something wonderful to notice the sea, which a short time previously had been so placid, presently running high with mighty rollers, that threatened each moment to engulf their little craft; and they had to allow her to run before the wind some little time for fear of getting her swamped.

This danger avoided, a worse one arose, which Fritz had not thought of, but which soon became apparent to the sailor lad, his intelligence heightened by his former painful experience when adrift in a boat at sea, out of sight of land.

"I say, Fritz," he cried; "we are leaving the land!"

"What?" asked the other, not understanding him.

"We are getting away too far from the island; and if we go on like this, we'll never get back."

"Good heavens, what shall we do?" said Fritz.

"I'm sure, I can't say," replied Eric despondently.

"Can't we put back?"

"No; we'd be upset in an instant, if we attempted it."

"Then, we're lost!" exclaimed Fritz. "The land is now growing quite faint in the distance and each moment it sinks lower and lower!"

This was not the worst, either.

The afternoon was drawing to a close; and, the sky being overcast, darkness threatened presently to creep over the water and shut out everything from their gaze.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Anxious Times.

The boat continued driving before the wind for some little time, until the mountain cliffs of Inaccessible Island gradually lost their contour. They had become but a mere haze in the distance, when Eric, who had been intently gazing upward at the sky since Fritz's last speech of alarm, and seemed buried in despondency, suddenly appeared to wake up into fresh life.

He had noticed the clouds being swept rapidly overhead in the same direction in which the boat was travelling; but, all at once, they now appeared to be stationary, or else, the waves must be bearing their frail little craft along faster than the wind's speed. What could this puzzling state of things mean? Eric reflected a moment and then astonished Fritz as they both sat in the stern-sheets, by convulsively grasping his hand.

"The wind has turned, brother!" he cried out in a paroxysm of joy.

Fritz thought he was going mad. "Why, my poor fellow, what's the matter?" he said soothingly.

"Matter, eh?" shouted out Eric boisterously, wringing | his brother's hand up and down. "I mean that the wind has changed! It is chopping round to the opposite | corner of the compass, like most gales in these latitudes, that's what's the matter! See those clouds there?"

Fritz looked up to where the other pointed in the sky—to a spot near the zenith.

"Well," continued the lad, "a moment ago those clouds there were whirling along the same course as ourselves. Then, when I first called out to you, they stopped, as if uncertain what to do; while now, as you can notice for yourself, they seem to be impelled in the very opposite direction. What do you think that means?"

Fritz was silent, only half convinced, for the send of the sea appeared to be rolling their unhappy boat further and further from the island, which, only a bare speck on the horizon, could be but very faintly seen astern, low down on the water.

"It means," said Eric, answering his own question, without waiting longer for his brother's reply, "that the same wind which bore us away from our dear little bay is about to waft us back again to it; still, we must look out sharply to help ourselves and not neglect a chance. Oars out, old fellow!"

"But, it is impossible to row amidst these waves," the other expostulated.

"Bah, nothing is impossible to brave men!" cried the sailor lad valiantly. "I only want to get her head round to sea. Perhaps, though, my old friend that served me in such good stead when the *Gustav Barentz* foundered may serve my turn better now; we'll try a floating anchor, brother, that's what we'll do, eh?"

"All right, you know best," replied Fritz, who, to tell the truth, had very little hopes of their ever seeing the island again. He thought that, no matter what Eric might attempt, all would be labour in vain.

The sailor lad, on the contrary, was of a different opinion. He was not the one to let a chance slip when there seemed a prospect of safety, however remote that prospect might be!

Rapidly attaching a rope round the bale of sealskins that were amidships, thinking these more adapted for his purpose than the oars, which he had first intended using, he hove the mass overboard, gently poising it on the side and letting it slip gradually into the water. He did this in order that he might not disturb the balance of the boat, which any sudden rash movement would have done, causing her probably to heel over—for the waves, when they raced by, came level with her gunwale, and an inch more either way would have swamped her.

In a few seconds after this impromptu anchor was tried, the effect on the whale-boat's buoyancy became marvellous.

Swinging round by degrees, Eric helping the operation by an occasional short paddle with one of the oars he had handy, the little craft presently rode head to sea, some little distance to leeward of the sealskins whose weight sunk them almost to the level of the water; and then, another unexpected thing happened.

The oil attached to the still reeking skins came floating out on the surface of the sea, so calming the waves in their vicinity that these did not break any longer, but glided under the keel of the boat with a heavy rolling undulation.

"This is more than I hoped!" exclaimed Eric joyfully. "Why, we'll be able to ride out the gale capitally now; and, as soon as the wind chops round—as it has already done in the upper currents of air, a sure sign that it will presently blow along the water from the same quarter—why, we can up anchor and away home!"

"How shall we ever know the proper direction in which to steer?" asked Fritz, who was still faint-hearted about the result of the adventure.

"We won't steer at all," said Eric. "There are no currents to speak of about here; and as we have run south-westwards before the north-easter, if we run back in an opposite direction before the south-wester, which is not far off now from setting in, why we must arrive pretty nearly at the same point from which we started."

"But we may then pass the island by a second time and be as badly off as we are now."

"What an old croaker you are!" cried Eric impatiently. "Won't I be on the look-out to see that such an accident as that shan't happen? We'll have to be very careful in turning the boat however—so as to bring the wind abeam when we get up abreast of the island, in order to beat into the bay—for the poor craft is so leaky and cranky now that she'll not stand much buffeting about."

"Can't I do anything?" asked Fritz, beginning to regain his courage and bestir himself, now that he reflected that their chances of getting back to the island were not so precarious and slight as he had at first imagined.

"Yes, you can bale out the boat, if you like," said Eric. "She's nearly half full of water now and continues leaking like a sieve. The seams strain and yawn awfully when she rides, even worse than when she was flying along at the mercy of the wind and waves. Still, we must try to keep her clear if possible, as the lighter and more buoyant she is, the better chance have we of getting out of this mess."

"I'll do the baling gladly," rejoined Fritz, really pleased at doing something, and beginning at once with the job, using a large tin pannikin that they had taken with them.

"Then, fire away," said Eric. "It will be as much as I can do to attend to the steering of the boat. Look sharp, old fellow, and get some of the light ballast out of her! I see a light scud creeping up from leeward, behind us, with the

waves fringing up into a curl before it. The wind has chopped round at last and we'll have to cut and run as soon as it reaches us."

Fritz baled away with the tin pannikin for dear life.

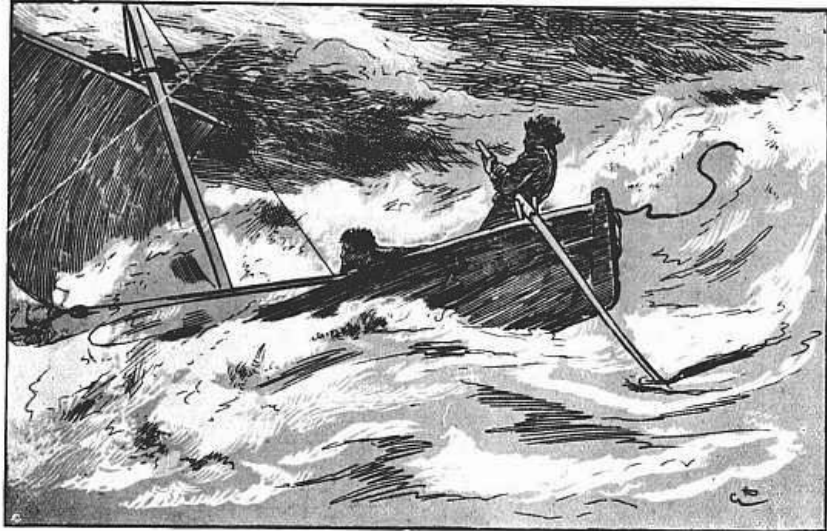
"Now, brother," cried Eric, a moment later, "get your knife ready, and go forwards into the bows. I want you, the instant I sing out, to give a slash across the painter holding us to our moorings."

"What, and lose our bundle of sealskins!" exclaimed the practical Fritz.

"Lose them? Of course! Do you think we'd have time to lug them into the boat before we'd be pooped! What are the blessed things worth in comparison with our lives?"

"I beg your pardon," said Fritz humbly, always ready to acknowledge when he was in the wrong. "I spoke unthinkingly; besides, if we lose these, we've got plenty more under the cliff by our hut."

"Aye, if we ever reach there!" replied Eric grimly. Although taking advantage of every possible device to reach the island again, as a sailor he was fully conscious of the dire peril they were in. "Now, Fritz," he called out presently, as a big white wave came up astern, "cut away the painter, and just give a hoist to the jib and belay the end of the



"Neck or Nothing!"

halliards, half-way up. There, that will do. Lie down for the present, old fellow. The wind has reached us at last; so, it's a case of neck or nothing now!"

Hardly had Eric uttered the last words, when a sudden rush of wind struck the boat's stern like a flail, seeming to get underneath and lift it out of the water. The next instant the little craft sank down again as if she were going to founder stern foremost; but, at the same moment, the wind, travelling on, caught the half-set jib, and blowing this out with a sound like the report of a cannon, the small sail soon began to drive the boat through the swelling waves at racing speed.

Onward speeded the boat, faster and yet faster. Fortunately, the mast was a strong spar, or otherwise it would have broken off like a carrot; as, even with the half-hoisted jib, it bent like a whip, thus yielding to the motion of the little craft as she rose from the trough of the sea and leaped from one wave crest to another. The boat appeared just to keep in advance of the following rollers that vainly endeavoured to overtake her, and only broke a yard or so behind her stern—which, on account of her being a whale-boat, was built exactly like her bows and thus offered a smaller target for the billows to practise on, as they sent their broken tops hurtling after her in a shower of thick foam.

Eric had an oar out to leeward steering, while Fritz crouched down amidships, with the belayed end of the jib halliards in his hand, ready to let them go by the run when his brother gave the word; and, as the boat tore on through the water like a mad thing, the darkness around grew thicker and thicker, until all they could distinguish ahead was the scrap of white sail in the bows and the occasional sparkle of surf as a roller broke near them.

Should they not be able to see where they were going, they might possibly be dashed right on to the island in the same way as they had seen the unfortunate brig destroyed. It was a terrible eventuality to consider!

Presently, however, the moon rose; and, although the wind did not abate its force one jot, nor did the sea subside, still, it was more consoling to see where they were going than to be hurled on destruction unawares.

Eric was peering out over the weather side of the boat, when, all of a sudden, on the starboard bow, he could plainly distinguish the island, looking like a large heavy flat mass lifting itself out of the sea.

"There it is!" he cried out to Fritz, who at once looked up, rising a little from the thwart on which he had been lying.

"Where?"

"To your right, old fellow; but, still ahead. Now, we must see whether we can make the boat go our way, instead of her own. Do you think you could manage to haul up the jib by yourself? Take a half-turn round one of the thwarts with the bight of the halliards, so that it shall not slip."

Fritz did what was requested; when Eric, keeping the boat's head off the wind, sang out to his brother to "hoist

away.”

The effect was instantaneous, for the boat quivered to her keel, as if she had scraped over a rock in the ocean, and then made a frantic plunge forwards that sent her bows under.

“Gently, boat, gently,” said Eric, bringing her head up again to the wind, upon which she heeled over till her gunwale was nearly submerged, but she now raced along more evenly. “Sit over to windward as much as you can,” he called out to Fritz, shifting his own position as he spoke.

Almost before they were aware of it, they were careering past the western headland of the bay, when Eric, by a sudden turn of his steering oar, brought the bows of the whale-boat to bear towards the beach. The little craft partly obeyed the impetus of his nervous arm, veering round in the wished-for direction, in spite of the broken water, which just at that point was in a terrible state of commotion from a cross current that set the tide against the wind.

But, it was not to be.

The doom of the boat was sealed in the very moment of its apparent victory over the elements!

A return wave—curling under from the base of the headland, against whose adamant wall it had hurled itself aloft, in the vain attempt to scale the cliff—falling back angrily in a whirling whish of foam, struck the frail craft fair on the quarter. The shock turned her over instantly, when she rolled bottom upwards over and over again. The sea then hurled her with the force of a catapult upon the rocks that jutted out below the headland; and Fritz and Eric were at once pitched out into the seething surf that eddied around, battling for their lives.

How they managed it, neither could afterwards tell; but they must have struck out so vigorously with their arms and legs at this perilous moment, in the agony of desperation, that, somehow or other, they succeeded in getting beyond the downward suction of the undertow immediately under the overhanging headland. Otherwise, they would have shared the fate of the boat, for their bodies would have been dashed to pieces against the cruel crags.

Providentially, however, the strength of the struggling strokes of both the young fellows just carried them, beyond the reach of the back-wash of the current, out amidst the rolling waves that swept into the bay from the open in regular succession; and so, first Eric and then Fritz found themselves washed up on the old familiar beach, which they had never expected to set foot on again alive.

Here, scrambling up on their hands and knees, they quickly gained the refuge of the shingle, where they were out of reach of the clutching billows that tried to pull them back.

As for the boat, it was smashed into matchwood on the jagged edges of the boulders, not a fragment of timber a foot long being to be seen.

The brothers had escaped by almost a miracle!

“That was a narrow squeak,” cried Eric, when he was able to speak and saw that Fritz was also safe.

“Yes, thank God for it!” replied the other. “I had utterly given up hope.”

“So had I; but still, here we are.”

“Aye, but only through the merciful interposition of a watchful Hand,” said Fritz; and then both silently made their way up the incline to their little hut by the waterfall, unspeakably grateful that they were allowed to behold it again.

Never had the cottage seemed to their tired eyes more homelike and welcome than now; and they were glad enough to throw themselves in bed and have some necessary rest:— they were completely worn-out with all they had gone through since the previous morning, for the anxious night had passed by and it was broad daylight again before they reached shore.

Not a particle of the boat or anything that had been in her was ever washed up by the sea; consequently, they had to deplore the loss, not only of the little craft itself, the sole means they had of ever leaving the bay, but also of the carcass of the goat they were conveying home to supply them with fresh meat, as a change from their generally salt diet. The sea, too, had taken from them their last haul of sealskins, which had cost them more pains to procure than the much larger lot they had pitched down from the plateau, and which fortunately were safe.

Nor was this the worst.

Their two rifles and the fowling piece—which Fritz had taken with him, as usual, in his last hunting expedition, for the benefit of the island hen and other small birds—as well as the harpoons, and many other articles, whose loss they would feel keenly, were irrevocably gone!

But, on the other side of the account, as the brother crusoes devoutly remembered, they had saved their lives—a set-off against far greater evils than the destruction of all their implements and weapons!

The first week or two of their return from this ill-fated expedition, Fritz and Eric had plenty to do in preparing the bundles of sealskins they had secured in their first foray, and which they found safe enough at the bottom of the gully where they had cast them down from above; although they little thought then of the peril they would subsequently undergo and the narrow chance of their ever wanting to make use of the pelts.

Still, there the skins were, and there being no reason why they should not now attend to them, they set to work in the old fashion of the previous year, scraping and drying and then salting them down in some fresh puncheons

Captain Fuller of the *Jane* had supplied them with, as well as a quantity of barrels to contain their oil, in exchange for the full ones he had taken on board.

After the skins were prepared, the blubber had to be “tried out” in the cauldron, with all the adjuncts of its oily smoke and fishy smell, spoiling everything within reach; and, when this was done, there was the garden to attend to, their early potatoes having to be dug up and vegetables gathered, besides the rest of the land having to be put in order.

They had no time to be idle!

Christmas with them passed quietly enough this time. The loss of the boat and the escape they had of their own lives just preceded the anniversary, so they felt in no great mood for rejoicing. In addition to that, the festival had too many painful memories of home, for which they now longed with an ardent desire that they had not felt in their first year on the island.

The fact was, that, now the whale-boat was destroyed, they were so irrevocably confined to the little valley where their hut was planted—shut in alike by land and sea, there being no chance of escape from it in any emergency that might arise, save through the unlikely contingency of some stray passing vessel happening to call in at the bay—that the sense of being thus imprisoned began to affect their spirits.

This was not all.

Their provisions lately had been diminishing in a very perceptible manner; so much so, indeed, that there was now no fear of their being troubled with that superabundance of food which Eric had commented on when they were taking the inventory of their stores!

But for some flour which Captain Fuller had supplied them with, they would have been entirely without any article in the farinaceous line beyond potatoes, their biscuits being all gone. The hams and other delicate cabin stores Captain Brown had originally given them were now also consumed; so that, with the exception of two or three pieces of salt pork still remaining and a cask of beef, they had nothing to depend on save the produce of their garden and some tea—all their other stores as well as their coffee and sugar having long since been “expended,” as sailors say.

The months passed by idly enough, with nothing to do, and they watched for the approach of winter with some satisfaction; for, when that had once set in, they might look for the return of the *Pilot's Bride* to rescue them from an exile of which they were becoming heartily weary.

The penguins departed in April, as before, leaving them entirely solitary and more *crusoe-like* than ever, when thus left alone themselves; and, then, came the winter, which was much sharper than previously, there being several heavy falls of snow, while the waterfall froze up down the gorge, hanging there like a huge icicle for weeks.

It was dreary enough, and they hardly needed the wintry scene to make their outlook worse; but, one bitter morning they made a discovery which filled them with fresh alarm.

They had finished eating all their salt pork, but had never once opened the cask of beef since Eric abstracted the piece he roasted the year before “for a treat”; and, now, on going to get out a good boiling piece, in order to cook it in a more legitimate fashion, they found to their grief that, whether through damp, or exposure to the air, or from some other cause, the cask of beef was completely putrid and unfit for human food!

This was very serious!

They had kept this beef as a last resource, trusting to it as a “stand-by” to last them through the winter months; but now it had to be thrown away, reducing them to dry potatoes for their diet—for, the penguins, which they might have eaten “on a pinch,” had departed and would not return to the island until August, and there was no other bird or animal to be seen in the valley!

Their plight was made all the more aggravating from the knowledge of the fact that, if they could only manage to ascend the plateau, they might live in clover on the wild pigs and goats there; so, here they were suffering from semi-starvation almost in sight of plenty!

Fritz and Eric, however, were not the sort of fellows to allow themselves to be conquered by circumstances. Both, therefore, put their thinking caps on, and, after much cogitation, they at last hit upon a plan for relieving their necessities.

Chapter Thirty Five.

A Long Swim.

This plan was nothing else than their attempting the feat of swimming round the headland, in order to reach the western shore, from whence, of course, they knew from past experience they could easily ascend to the tableland above—the happy hunting-ground for goats and pigs, their legitimate prey.

“Nonsense,” exclaimed Fritz, when Eric mooted the project; “the thing can never be done!”

“Never is a long day,” rejoined the sailor lad. “I’m sure I have covered over twice that distance in the water before now.”

“Ah, that might have been in a calm sea,” said Fritz; “but, just recollect the terrible rough breakers we had to

contend with that time in December when the whale-boat got smashed! Why, we might never get out of the reach of that current which you know runs like a mill-race under the eastern cliff."

"We won't go that way," persisted Eric. "Besides, the sea is not always rough; for, on some days the water, especially now since the frost has set in, is as calm as a lake."

"And terribly cold, too," cried his brother. "I dare say a fellow would get the cramp before he had well-nigh cleared the bay."

"Well, I never saw such a chap for throwing cold water on any suggestion one makes!" exclaimed Eric in an indignant tone. He was almost angry.

"It is cold water this time with a vengeance," retorted Fritz, laughing; whereupon Eric calmed down again, but only to argue the point more determinedly.

"Mind, I don't want you to go, brother," he pleaded. "I'm much the stronger of the two of us, although I am the youngest; so, I'll try the feat. It will be easy enough after rounding the headland, which will be the hardest part of the job; but when I have weathered that, it will be comparatively easy to reach the seal-caves. Once arrived there, I shall only have to climb up to the plateau and shoot some pigs and a goat and fling them down to you here, returning at my leisure; for, there'll be no hurry. As for the swim back, it will not be half so difficult a task as getting round there, for the wind and tide will both be in my favour."

But, Fritz would not hear of this for a moment.

"No," he said; "if anybody attempts the thing, it must be me, my impulsive laddie! Do you think I could remain here quietly while you were risking your life to get food for us both?"

"And how do you expect me to do so either?" was the prompt rejoinder.

"I am the eldest, and ought to decide."

"Ah, we are brothers in misfortune now, as well as in reality; so the accident of birth shall not permit you to assert a right of self-sacrifice over me!" cried Eric, using almost glowing language in his zealous wish to secure his brother's safety at the expense of his own.

"What fine words, laddie!" said Fritz, laughing again at the other's earnestness, as if to make light of it, although he well recognised the affection that called forth Eric's eloquence. "Why, you are speaking in as grand periods as little Burgher Jans!"

Eric laughed, too, at this; but, still, he was not going to be defeated by ridicule.

"Grand words or not, brother," he said, with a decision that the other could not bear down; "you shall not venture upon the swim while I stop here doing nothing!"

"Nor will I allow you to go and I remain behind," retorted Fritz.

"I tell you what, then," cried Eric; "as we're two obstinate fellows and have both made up our minds, suppose we attempt the feat together, eh?"

Fritz urged at first that it was unnecessary for both to run the risk; however, Eric's pleadings made him finally yield.

"You see," argued the sailor lad, "we can swim side by side, the same as we have done many a time in the old canal at Lubeck; and then, should either of us get the cramp, or feel 'played-out,' as the skipper used to say, why the other can lend a helping hand!"

And, so it was finally settled, that, on the first bright calm day when there should be but little wind, and while the tide was setting out of the bay in the direction favourable for them, which was generally at the full and change of the moon, they were to attempt the task of swimming round the headland to the west shore of the island. Thence they could ascend the plateau in search of that animal food which they so sadly required, the two having been restricted for some weeks to a diet of dry potatoes, without even a scrap of butter or grease to make them go down more palatably.

This being determined on, the two quickly made their preparations for the undertaking, which to them appeared almost as formidable as poor Captain Webb's feat of trying to go down the Falls of Niagara; although, it might be mentioned incidentally, that, at the time they attempted their natatory exploit, that reckless swimmer's name was unknown to fame.

Of course, they had to consider that, should they reach the beach on the other side all right and thus get up to the tableland, they would require some weapon to bring down the animals they were going in chase of; and, as both the Remington rifles as well as Fritz's shot gun had been lost with the whale-boat, the only firearm remaining was the needle-gun, which the elder brother had brought with him from Germany—more, indeed, as a reminiscence of the campaign in which he had been engaged than from any idea of its serviceableness.

However, for want of anything better, there it was; and, as Fritz had plenty of cartridges which would fit it, the weapon had a chance of now being employed for a more peaceful purpose than that for which it was originally intended. It would, certainly, still take life, it is true; but it would do so with the object of ultimately saving and not destroying humanity.

There was the weapon and the cartridges; but, how to get them round with them was the question?

The brothers could swim well enough without any encumbrance, still, they would be crippled in their efforts should they be foolish enough to load themselves with a heavy gun, as well as sundry other articles which they thought it necessary to take with them for the success of their expedition.

Why, such a procedure would be like handicapping themselves heavily for the race!

What was to be done?

Eric, the "inventive genius," very soon solved this difficulty.

"I tell you what we'll do, brother," he said; "let us put our blankets, with the kettle and rifle and the other things we require, in one of the oil casks. We can then push this before us as we swim along, the cask serving us for a life buoy to rest upon when we are tired, besides carrying our traps, eh?"

"Himmel, Eric, you're a genius!" exclaimed Fritz, clapping him on the back. "I never knew such a fellow for thinking of things like you, laddie; you beat Bismark and Von Moltke both rolled into one!"

"Ah, the idea only just flashed across my mind," said the other, somewhat shamefaced at his brother's eulogy and almost blushing. "It came just on the spur of the moment, you know!"

"But, how are we going to get the needle-gun into the barrel?" asked Fritz suddenly, taking up the weapon and seeing that its muzzle would project considerably beyond the mouth of the said article, even when the butt end was resting on the bottom.

"Why, by unscrewing the breech, of course," said Eric promptly.

Fritz gazed at him admiringly.

"The lad is never conquered by anything!" he cried out, as if speaking to a third person. "He's the wonder of Lubeck, that's what he is!"

"The 'wonder of Lubeck' then requests you'll lose no time in getting the gun ready," retorted Eric, in answer to this chaff. "While we're talking and thus wasting time, we may lose the very opportunity we wish for our swim out of the bay!"

This observation made Fritz set to work: and the two had shortly placed all their little property in one of the stoutest of the oil casks, which they then proceeded to cooper up firmly, binding their old bed tarpaulin round it as an additional precaution for keeping out the salt water when it should be immersed in the sea.

Rolling the cask down to the beach, they tried it, to see how it floated; and this it did admirably, although it was pretty well loaded with their blankets wrapped round the needle-gun and other things. It still rose, indeed, quite half out of the water.

Eric then plaited a rope round it, with beackets for them to hold on by; and so, everything being ready, they only waited for a calm day to make the venture.

Some three days afterwards, the south-east wind having lulled to a gentle breeze and the sea being as smooth as glass, only a tumid swell with an unbroken surface rolling into the bay, the brothers started, after having first stripped and anointed their bodies with seal oil—a plan for the prevention of cold which Eric had been told of by the whalers.

Until they reached the headland, they had easy work; but, there, a cross current carried them first one way and then another, so much interfering with their onward progress that it took them a good hour to round the point.

That achieved, however, as the sailor lad had pointed out when they were first considering the feasibility of the attempt, all the rest of the distance before them was "plain sailing"; so that, although they had to cover twice the length of water, if not more, another couple of hours carried them to the west beach. Here they arrived not the least exhausted with their long swim; for, by pushing the cask before them in turn and holding on to it by the beackets, they were enabled to have several rests and breathing spells by the way.

Arrived again on terra firma, they at once opened their novel portmanteau; and, taking out a spare suit of clothes for each, which they had taken the precaution to pack up with the rest of their gear, they proceeded to dress themselves. After this, they carried up their blankets and other things to a little sheltered spot on the plateau above, where they had camped on their previous expedition.

They did not find the tableland much altered, save that a considerable amount of snow was scattered about over its surface, accumulating in high drifts at some points where the wind had piled it in the hollows. The ground beneath the various little clumps of wood and brush, however, was partly bare; so, here, they expected to find their old friend "Kaiser Billy" and the remains of his flock.

But, high and low, everywhere, in the thickets and out on the open alike, they searched in vain for the goats. Not a trace of them was to be seen; so, Fritz and Eric had finally to come to the conclusion that the islanders—along with their enemy, as they now looked upon him, Nat Slater—had paid another secret visit to the plateau and destroyed the animals. They believed the Tristaners did this with the object of expediting their departure from Inaccessible Island, where there could be no doubt they must have spoiled their sealing, thus depriving them of a valuable article of barter.

"Never mind," said Eric the indomitable, when Fritz lamented the disappearance of the goats. "We've got the wild hogs left; and, for my part, I think roast pig better than dry potatoes!"

"Himmel, the idea is good!" replied Fritz, who had already screwed on the breech of the needle-gun, making it ready for action. "We must go pig-chasing, then."

And, so they did, shooting a lusty young porker ere they had travelled many steps further.

Eric's matches were then produced, the inevitable box of safety lights being in the pocket of the sealskin jacket he had headed up in the oil cask; when, a fire being lit, the game was prepared in a very impromptu fashion, the animal being roasted whole.

On previously tasting the flesh of these island hogs, they had thought the pork rather fishy; but now, after weeks of deprivation from any species of animal food, it seemed more delicious than anything they had ever eaten before.

"Why, Eric, it beats even your roast beef!" said Fritz jokingly.

The lad looked at him reproachfully; that was all he could do, for his mouth was full and this prevented him from speaking.

"I beg your pardon," interposed the other. "I shan't say so again; I forgot myself that time."

"I should think you did," rejoined Eric, now better able to express himself. "It's best to let bye-gones be bye-gones!"

"Yes," replied Fritz; and the two then went on eating in silence, so heartily that it seemed as if they would never stop. Indeed, they made such good knife-and-fork play, that they were quite weary with their exertions when they had finished, and were obliged to adjourn to their little camp in the sheltered hollow where, curling themselves up comfortably in their blankets, they went cosily to sleep.

The next day, they killed several of the younger hogs and threw their carcasses down to the bottom of the gully by the waterfall; for, besides planning out the manufacture of some hams out of the island porkers, they intended utilising the lard for frying their potatoes, in. This, in the event of their finding the pig's flesh too rank after a time, would then afford them an agreeable change of diet to the plain boiled tubers with which hitherto they had had only salt to eat for a relish.

On the third day, as the wind seemed about to change and ominous clouds were flying across the face of the sky, they determined to return home, having by that time consumed the last of their roast pig as well as all the potatoes they had brought with them in their floating cask.

They were taking a last walk over the plateau, which they thought they might never see again—for the swim round the headland was not a feat to be repeated often, even if the weather allowed it, the currents being so treacherous and the sea working itself up into commotion at a moment's notice—when, suddenly, Eric stopped right over the edge of the gully. He arrested his footsteps just at the spot where the tussock-grass ladder had formerly trailed down, enabling them to reach their valley, without all the bother of toiling round the coast as they had to do now.

"Don't you think this spot here has altered greatly?" said the sailor lad to Fritz.

"No, I can't say I do," returned the other. "The grass has only been burnt away; that, of course, makes it look bare."

"Well, I think differently," replied Eric, jumping down into the crevice. "This place wasn't half so wide before."

"Indeed?"

"No, it wasn't I couldn't have squeezed myself in here when I last came up the plateau."

"Why, that was all on account of the space the tussock-grass took up."

Eric did not reply to this; but, a moment after, he shouted out in a tone of great surprise, "Hullo, there's a cave here, with something glittering on the floor!"

"Really?"

"Yes, and it looks like gold!"

Chapter Thirty Six.

"Sail Ho!"

"Gold!" exclaimed Fritz in astonishment.

"Yes, gold," repeated the other, excitedly. "There are a lot of coins here each bigger than an eight-gulden piece."

"Nonsense?"

"Yes, there is, really. Come down here and see for yourself. There's plenty of room for both you and me."

Trembling with excitement, Fritz jumped down beside his brother, who, stooping down in the crevice of the gully, had

discovered a cavity in the rock further in the face of the cliff. This the fringe of the now destroyed tussock-grass had previously hidden from view as they ascended and descended the ladder-way; else they must have noticed the place the very first time they came up to the tableland from the valley below. It was exactly facing the ledge from whence they climbed on to the plateau; so, had it not been then covered over, they could not have failed to see it.

The cavity, which had been probably worn away by the water trickling down, was like a little grotto; and there, piled on the bare rock, were hundreds of coins!

These were quite bright, strange to say, although this circumstance was most likely owing to the action of the fire that had burnt the tussock-grass; for, some heavy iron clamps and hinges, that had evidently belonged to the box which contained the coins originally and had been consumed at the same time, lay on either side of the golden treasure. A number of the coins, too, if any further proof was needed, were fused together in a solid lump.

With eyes dilated with joy, the brothers gazed at the mine of wealth, hardly daring to believe that what they saw was real.

Then, Fritz put out his hands and touched the heap.

"It is there—I feel it!" he exclaimed. "We are not dreaming?"

"I'm sure I'm not," said Eric, laughing with delight. "Why, it is a regular fortune—it will beat all that we have earned by our sealing!"

Fritz took up one of the coins and examined it carefully. He had some knowledge of numismatics from his mercantile education in Herr Grosschnapper's office, that worthy merchant trading to all parts of the globe and having considerable dealings with foreign monies.

"It is a doubloon," he explained to his brother after studying it a bit. "The treasure consists of old Spanish coins that must have lain here for years."

"I wonder who put them in this little hole?" said Eric.

Fritz did not answer this query for the moment; but, almost at the same instant, there flashed across his recollection a curious story which an old man at Tristan d'Acunha had told him—at the time when he and Eric were inspecting the settlement on that island, before coming over to their own little colony—concerning an old pirate who had buried a lot of treasure either there or on Inaccessible Island.

After the brothers had gazed to their hearts' fill at the precious hoard which had so suddenly been, revealed to them, the next thought was how to remove it to their hut below.

"We'll roll up the lot in a blanket," said Eric, who as usual was always to the fore when anything had to be planned out. "Tie up the gold securely; and then chuck the bundle containing it down below, along with the poor pigs we have slaughtered! There's no fear of anybody making off with our doubloons before we accomplish the swim round the headland back home."

"Yes, that will be the wisest course," acquiesced Fritz; "but, talking of swimming round the headland, the sooner we're off the better. Those clouds look very threatening."

"Only rain, I think," replied Eric, looking up at the sky.

"Good, that will not make us very wet when we are in the water, with our bare skins," said Fritz quizzingly.

"No," replied Eric, laughing. "But, the sooner we are now off the better, as you say; for, even if the weather holds up, there are a lot of things for us to do when we get home. We have the pigs to skin, as well as cut up and salt; and, besides, there's all our money to count over."

"We can do that now, as we roll it up in the blanket," replied Fritz, proceeding to suit the action to the word.

To their high delight, they found that there were nearly two thousand separate gold coins, apart from the solid lump fused together, the whole being probably worth some three thousand pounds, or thereabouts.

"Why, it's a perfect fortune!" exclaimed Eric. "You and Madaleine will now be able to marry and settle down, and mother be comfortably provided for, and everything!"

"But, how about your share?" said Fritz, looking at the unselfish lad with glistening eyes. "Your share, indeed, why it's all yours!"

"Nonsense," replied Eric; "we are partners, are we not? Besides, I don't want any money. When we leave here, you know, I'm going to sea again with Captain Brown, in the *Pilot's Bride*; and a sailor, unlike you poor land folk, carries his home with him. He does not continually want cash for housekeeping expenses!"

"Very well, we'll see about that bye-and-bye," said Fritz, putting all the coins into the blanket, which Eric then tied up securely, lashing it round with a cord in seaman fashion. After that, they pitched the bundle down below, when the chink of the coins at the bottom of the gully sounded like pleasant music in their ears!

The barrel of the needle-gun was then unscrewed from the stock, Fritz having kept the weapon ready for use as long as they remained on the plateau, thinking that as Fortune had so strangely endowed them with the pirate's treasure, perhaps some outlandish bird might equally suddenly make its appearance for him to add to their spoil. However, as

nothing new in the feathered line came in sight, the albatross having taken their departure with the penguins, and not even an "island hen" being to be seen, the two now clambered down to the west beach once more.

Here, packing up their cask again with the various impedimenta they still had, they proceeded also to put in their clothing.

Then, fastening up the cask and lashing the tarpaulin round it again with the fastenings and becketts, which had been taken off in order the easier to unpack it, they entered the sea for their return swim round the headland—starting off in the best of spirits on their way back home once more.

This time, the swim back was far more fatiguing, the wind and a slight swell being against them; but, the good living they enjoyed while on the plateau had nerved them up to any amount of exertion, so the journey, if more wearying, was performed in almost the same time they had taken to go to the western coast.

Besides, as soon as they neared the headland, the currents there, which had been against them, were now all in their favour, the waves bearing them and their oil cask, once they had turned the point, buoyantly up to their own beach in the little bay, without the trouble almost of swimming a stroke!

It was now well on towards the latter end of July, in the second year of the island life; and, the next week or two, they were busy enough salting down their pigs and attending to their garden, some cabbages from which with their newly acquired pork making them many a good meal.

Then, came the return of the penguins to their breeding-place in August; so, there was now no further fear of their suffering from a scarcity of food, for, in case they tired of pork, they had plenty of fresh eggs for a change, as well as an occasional roast of one of the inhabitants of the rookery, whose fleshy breasts tasted somewhat, Eric said, like goose—albeit Fritz called him a goose for saying so!

September was ushered in by a strong north-easterly gale, similar to that in which the brig had been wrecked.

This alarmed the brothers, who began to fear, when the gale had lasted over the middle of the month, that the stormy weather might possibly prevent the *Pilot's Bride* from venturing near the island, Captain Brown having said that it would have been more than madness while the wind prevailed from that quarter for any vessel to approach the coast.

However, towards the third week in the month, the north-east wind shifting round, a gentle breeze sprang up from the south-west. A like change had very similarly occurred at the time of their own landing on the island; so, the brothers' hearts beat high with hope.

Everything was got ready for their instant departure; the consequence of which was that all their own personal little goods and chattels were packed up so soon that they had frequently to open the bundles again to take out some article they required for use!

The golden treasure was not forgotten either—that may be taken for granted.

The result of their sealing for the past year was also put up for shipment. This consisted of eighty-five sealskins and fifty barrels of oil—a result that said much for their industry during the period.

And so, the brother crusoes waited and looked out, day after day, with longing eyes for the anxiously expected vessel that was to terminate their exile on Inaccessible Island and bear them back to the loved ones at home!

Fritz of late had somewhat reformed his lazy habits, rising much earlier than he used to do, this reformation being caused by a natural desire to be up and stirring when the *Pilot's Bride* should arrive; but, still, Eric invariably forestalled him. The sailor lad was always down on the beach on the look-out, in default of being able to climb up to his former signalling station on the cliff, at the first break of day!

Morning after morning, he went down to the shore; morning after morning, he returned with a disconsolate face and the same sad report—

"Nothing in sight!"

This was the case every day.

There was never the vestige of a vessel on the horizon.

At last, one morning became a gladdened one in their calendar!

Eric had proceeded to the beach as usual; but, not returning so soon as was his general habit, Fritz had time to awaken and rouse up from bed.

Anxious at the lad's delay, he went to the door of the hut, peering out to seaward as the sun rose in the east, flooding the ocean with a radiance of light.

At the same instant, Fritz heard Eric hailing him in the distance.

It was the cheeriest shout, he thought, he had ever heard!

Only two words the lad called out.

"Sail ho!"

Chapter Thirty Seven.

In the Gulden Strasse again.

That was all.

“Sail ho!” shouted Eric in stentorian tones, his voice penetrating through the entire valley, and reaching probably the remotest extent of the island.

The shout was quite enough for Fritz; for, hardly taking time to dress, he at once rushed down to join his brother on the beach.

“Where is she?” he cried out anxiously, when yet some distance off. He panted out the question as he ran.

“Right off the bay!” sang out Eric, in quite as great a state of frenzied excitement. “She’s hull down to windward now; but she’s rising every moment on the horizon.”

“Where?” repeated Fritz, now alongside of the other. “I can’t see her.”

“There,” said Eric, pointing to a tiny white speck in the distance, which to Fritz’s eyes seemed more like the wing of a sea bird than anything else.

“How can you make her out to be the *Pilot’s Bride*?” was his next query. “I can barely discern a faint spec far away; and that might be anything!”

Eric smiled.

“Himmel!” he cried with an infinite superiority. “What bad sight you landsmen have, to be sure! Can’t you see that she is a barque and is steering straight for the bay. What other vessel, I should like to know, would be coming here of that description, save the old skipper’s ship!”

Fritz made no reply to this unanswerable logic; so, he asked another question instead.

“What time do you think she’ll be near enough to send a boat off, eh, brother? We can’t go out to meet her, now, you know.”

“No, worse luck!” said Eric. “However, I think, with this breeze, she’ll be close to us in a couple of hours’ time.”

“A couple of hours!” exclaimed Fritz with dismay, the interval, in his present excited state of feeling, appearing like an eternity!

“Yes; but, the time will soon pass in watching her,” replied the sailor lad. “Look how she rises! There, can’t you now see her hull above the waves?”

Fritz gazed till his eyes were almost blinded, the sun being right in his face when he looked in the direction of the advancing vessel; but, to his inexperienced eyes, she still seemed as far off as ever.

“I dare say you are right, Eric,” he said; “still, I cannot see her hull yet—nor anything indeed but the same little tiny speck I noticed at first! However,” he added, drawing a deep sigh, “if we only wait patiently, I suppose she’ll arrive in time.”

“Everything comes to him who knows how to wait,” replied his brother, rather grandiloquently; after which speech the two continued to look out over the shimmering expanse of water, now lit up by the rays of the steadily rising sun, without interchanging another word. Their thoughts were too full for speech.

Some two hours later, the *Pilot’s Bride*—for it was that vessel, Eric’s instinct not having misled him—backed her main-topsail and lay-to off the entrance to the little bay, the gaudy American flag being run up as she came to the wind, and a gun fired.

The brother crusoes were almost mad in their eagerness to get on board.

“What a pity we have no boat!” they both exclaimed together.

They looked as if they could have plunged into the sea, ready dressed as they were, so as to swim off to the welcome vessel!

Eric waved his handkerchief frantically to and fro.

“The skipper will soon know that something has prevented our coming off, and will send in a boat,” he said; and the two then waited impatiently for the next act of the stirring nautical drama in which they had so deep an interest.

In a few minutes, they could see a boat lowered from the side of the ship; and, presently, this was pulled towards the shore by four oarsmen, while another individual, whom Eric readily recognised in the distance as Captain Brown, sat in the stern-sheets, steering the little craft in whaling fashion with another oar.

“It’s the good old skipper!” exclaimed Eric, dancing about and waving his hat round his head so wildly that it seemed

as if he had taken leave of his senses. "I can see his jolly old face behind the rowers, as large as life!"

Two or three minutes more, and the boat's keel grated on the beach, when Fritz and Eric sprang into the water to greet their old friend.

"Waall, boys!" cried the skipper, "I guess I'm raal downright glad to see you both ag'in, thet I am—all thet, I reckon. It's a sight for sore eyes to see you lookin' so slick and hearty."

So saying, Captain Brown shook hands with the two in his old, thoroughgoing arm-wrenching fashion, their hands when released seeming to be almost reduced to pulp in the process, through the pressure of his brawny fist.

Of course, they then had a long talk together, the brothers recounting all that had happened to them in the past year, Captain Fuller of the schooner *Jane* having taken to the Cape an account of their doings during the preceding twelve months.

"Waal," exclaimed the skipper, when he was showed their little cargo of sealskins and oil, and told also of the treasure which they had found, "I guess you h'ain't made half so bad a job o' crusoeing, arter all! I reckon them skins an' He, along o' what you shipped afore, will fetch you more'n a couple o' thousan' dollars; an' what with them doubloons you mention, I guess you'll hev' made a pretty considerable pile fur the time you've been sealin'!"

There being no object to be gained by the vessel remaining any length of time at the island—which indeed was the reason that the skipper had not brought the *Pilot's Bride* to anchor, preferring to ply on and on in front of the bay, so as to be ready for an instant start—the little property of the brothers was, without further delay, taken on board; and then, crusoes now no longer, they bade adieu, a long adieu, to Inaccessible Island, their abiding place for the past two years.

As the *Pilot's Bride* filled her sails and cleared the headlands, which, stretching their giant arms across the entrance to the little bay, soon shut out all view of the valley from their gaze, the last thing they noticed was their hut, the home of so many long and weary months, blazing away in regular bonfire fashion. Master Eric had put a match to the thatch of the little edifice on crossing its threshold for the last time!

"There's no fear, however, of this bonfire doing as much mischief as the last, old fellow!" he said apologetically to Fritz as they gazed back over the ship's stern at the rapidly receding island.

"No," replied the other. "It won't do any particular harm, it is true; but still, I think it was a pity to burn down our little home. We have passed many pleasant as well as sad hours there, you know, during the last two years."

"That may be all very true, brother," replied Eric, "but do you know what was my real reason for setting fire to it?"

"No," said Fritz.

"Well then I'll tell you," continued the other. "I couldn't bear to think that those cheeky penguins should invade it and perhaps make their nests there after we were gone!"

"What?" exclaimed Fritz, beginning to laugh. "You don't mean to say you haven't forgiven the poor birds yet for—"

"Stop!" cried Eric, interrupting him. "You know what you agreed to, eh? Let bye-gones be bye-gones!"

"Good," said Fritz; and there ended the matter.

The return voyage of the *Pilot's Bride* back to America was uneventful, although full enough of incident to the brothers after their enforced exile; but when the vessel arrived again at her old home port of Providence in Rhode Island, of course the two had something more to excite them in the greeting they received from the cheery and kindly-hearted family of the good old skipper at the shanty on the bay.

The worthy dame, Mrs Brown, welcomed them like sons of her own; while, Miss Celia—declared that Eric had grown quite a man—adding, with a toss of her head, that she "guessed he'd lost nothing of his old impudence!"

However, in spite of all the kindness and hospitality of these good people, Fritz and Eric were both too anxious to get home to Lubeck to prolong their stay in the States any longer than was absolutely necessary; so, as soon as the worthy skipper had managed to convert their stock of sealskins and oil into hard cash—getting the weighty and old-fashioned doubloons exchanged for a valuable banker's draft, save one or two which they kept for curiosity's sake—the pair were off and away again on their way back to Europe by the next—starting North German steamer from New York.

Before setting out, however, Eric promised to return to Providence ere the following "fall," in time to resume his post of third mate of the *Pilot's Bride* before she started again on another whaling voyage to the southern seas.

One more scene, and the story of "The Brother Crusoes" will be "as a tale that is told!"

It is Christmas Eve again at Lubeck.

The streets as well as the roofs and exteriors of the houses are covered with snow, exhibiting without every appearance of a hard winter; while, within, the interiors are filled with bustling folk, busy with all the myriad and manifold preparations for the coming festival on the morrow.

Mirth, music, and merry-making are everywhere apparent.

In the little old-fashioned house in the Gulden Strasse, where Fritz and Eric were first introduced to the readers notice, these cheery signs of the festive season are even more prominently displayed than usual; for, are not the long-absent wanderers expected back beneath the old roof-tree once more, and is not their coming anticipated at every hour—nay, almost at any moment?

Aye!

Madame Dort is sitting in her accustomed corner of the stove. She is looking ever so much better in health and younger in appearance than she was at the time of that sad celebration of the Christmas anniversary three years ago, detailed in an early chapter of the story; and there is a smile of happiness and content beaming over her face.

The good lady of the house is pretending to be darning a pair of stockings, which she has taken up to keep her fingers busy; but every now and then, she lets the work drop from her hands on to her knees, and looks round the room, as if listening and waiting for some one who will soon be here.

Madaleine, prettier than ever, clad in a gala dress and with bright ribbons in her golden hair, while her rosebud lips are half parted and her blue eyes dancing with joy and excitement, is pacing up and down the room impatiently. She is too eager to sit still!

Mouser, our old friend the cat, is curled up in a round ball between Gelert's paws on the rug in front of the stove; while, as for Lorischn, she is bustling in and out of the room, placing things on the well-spread table and then immediately taking them away again, quite forgetful of what she is about in her absence of mind and anxiety of expectancy.

Burgher Jans, too, now and again, keeps popping his head through the doorway, to ask if "the high, well-born and noble Herren" have yet come—the little fat man then retiring, with an humble apology for intruding, only to intrude again the next instant!

Madame Dort had received, late that afternoon, a telegram from Fritz, stating that he had reached Bremerhaven; and that he and Eric were just going to take the train, hoping to be with them in Lubeck ere nightfall.

Cause enough, is there not, for all this excitement and expectancy in the household?

Presently, a party of singers pass down the street, singing a plaintive Volkslied, that sounds, oh so tender and touching in the frosty evening air; and then, suddenly, there is a sound of footsteps crunching the snow on the outside stairway.

Gelert, shaking off poor Mouser's fraternal embrace most unceremoniously, starts up with a growl, rushing the moment afterwards with a whine and yelp of joy to the rapidly thrown open door; and, here he jumps affectionately up upon a stalwart, bearded individual who enters, trying to lick his face in welcome.

"Fritz!" cries Madaleine.

"Eric!" echoes the mother, the same instant.

"Madaleine!" bursts forth from Fritz's lips; while Eric, close behind, cries out joyously, "Mother—mutterchen—dear little mother mine!"

The long-expected meeting is over, and the "Brother Crusoes" are safe at home again.

Little remains to be told.

Early in the new year, when winter had given place to spring and the earth was budding forth into fresh life, Fritz and Madaleine were married. The happy pair live on still with good Madame Dort in the little house of the Gulden Strasse as of yore; for, Fritz has settled down into the old groove he occupied before the war, having gone back to rejoin his former employer, Herr Grosschnapper—although, mind you, instead of being only a mere clerk and book-keeper, he is now a partner in the shipbroker's business:— the little capital which he and Eric gained in their sealing venture to Inaccessible Island, and which Fritz has invested in the concern in their joint names, is amply sufficient to make him a co-proprietor instead of occupying a subordinate position.

And Eric?

Well, the lad is doing well enough.

He went back to Providence at the end of the following summer, as he had promised; and, having joined the *Pilot's Bride*, and sailed in her since, he is now first officer of that staunch old ship—which the fates will that our old friend the Yankee skipper shall still command.

The last news from Rhode Island, however, records a rumour anent a "splice," to use the nautical phrase, between Master Eric and Miss Celia Brown; and report has it that when this matrimonial engagement is effected "the old man" has announced his intention of giving over his dearly beloved vessel to the entire charge of his son-in-law.

Still, this has not happened yet—Master Eric being yet too young for such honours.

Lorischn and Burgher Jans, strange to say, did not make a match of it after all, the fickle-minded old nurse backing out of the bargain instead of holding to her promise after the arrival of her young masters at home.

Gelert is yet to the fore, and as good and brave an old dog as ever, albeit time has robbed him of some of his teeth

and made him somewhat less active; but as for Mouser, he does not seem to have “turned a hair.” The highly intelligent animal still purrs and fizzes as vigorously as in his youth—occupying his leisure moments, when not after birds or mice, in basking in the sunshine on the window-ledge above the staircase in summer; while, in winter, he curls himself up between Gelert’s outstretched paws on the hearthrug, in front of the old-fashioned china stove.

The brothers must have the last word; and, here a little sermon must come in.

Do you know, if you should ask them their candid opinion, they would tell you that, although the idea of playing at Robinson Crusoe may seem pleasant enough to those whose only experience of life on a desert island is derived from what they have read about its romantic features in books, persons, like themselves, who know what the real thing is, could narrate a very different story concerning its haps and mishaps, its deadly monotony and dreary solitude, its hopes and its despair!

The End.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRITZ AND ERIC ***

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