Title: Shifting Winds: A Tough Yarn

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Release date: June 6, 2007 [eBook #21702]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

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"Shifting Winds"

Chapter One.

The Cottage and its Inmates.

The family board was spread; the family kettle—an unusually fat one—was singing on the fire, and the family chimney was roaring like a lion by reason of the wind, which blew a hurricane outside, and shook the family mansion, a small wooden hut, to its foundations.

The hour was midnight. This fact was indicated by the family clock—a Dutch one, with a face which had once been white, but was now become greenish yellow, probably from horror at the profanity of the artist who had painted a basket of unrecognisable fruit above it, an irate cockatoo below it, and a blue church with a pink steeple as near to the centre of it as the hands would admit of.

The family circle, consisting of a stout good-looking woman of thirty or thereabouts, and a little boy and girl, were of the fisher class, obviously so to the senses of sight and smell. They sat by the fire.

It was an unusual hour for supper, but then it was an unusually wild night, and the frequent glance cast by the woman at the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, showed clearly that the board was not spread for the family meal, but that they waited up for some absent one.

I have said that the family circle sat by the fire, but this is not strictly correct. One member of it, the little boy, stood in the middle of the room, howling!—howling so violently that his fat face had changed from its wonted bright red to deep purple. Looking at him—as he stood there arrayed in his uncle's red night-cap, his own night-shirt, which was also a day-shirt and much too small, and his father's pea-jacket, which was preposterously too large—one could not avoid the alarming surmise that there *might* be such a thing as juvenile apoplexy, and that that boy was on the point of becoming a living, if not a dead, example of the terrible disease.

Oh! it was a sweet child, a charming infant, altogether a delightful creature to look upon, that son of Stephen Gaff, as it stood there yelling like a hyena, stamping like a mad bull, washing its dirty hands in tears on its dirtier cheeks, cramming its little knuckles into its swollen eyes as if it sought to burst the organs of vision in their sockets, and presenting, generally, an appearance of rampant rage and woe that baffles all capacity of conception, and therefore defies all power of description.

This cherub's name was Billy,—Billy Gaff; more familiarly known amongst his friends as "The Bu'ster," owing to his tendency to explode into tears, or laughter, or mischief, or fun, as the case might be. He was about eleven years of age.

My own name, reader, is Bingley. Having retired on half-pay from the Royal Navy, I reside in a pleasant cottage in the suburbs of the well-known and important seaport town of Wreckumoft, situate on the east coast of England. My front windows command a magnificent view of the sea; my back windows command an equally magnificent view of landscape. I have a magnificent wife, and she commands the household, myself included. There was a time—I reflect on it with melancholy pride and subdued satisfaction—when I commanded a British seventy-four. I command nothing now but my temper. That, however, is a stronghold from which nothing terrestrial can drive me.

My friends style me "The Captain," but I am not the hero of this tale. No, by no means. I am altogether unheroic in my nature, commonplace in my character. If a novelist were to describe me, he would write me down a stout little old gentleman, with a bald head and a mild countenance; mentally weak in expression, active in habits, and addicted to pipes and loose clothing.

Do not imagine that this is my account of myself; no, it is an ideal resulting from the oft-repeated assurances of my

wife, who is a strong-minded woman, a few inches taller than myself, somewhat raw-boned and much more powerful, physically, though less rotund. In fact, if I were to attempt a brief comprehensive description of her, I would say, without the most distant feeling of disrespect of course, that she is square and skinny—singularly so!

Mrs Bingley's contempt for my intellect is excelled, I might almost say redeemed, by her love for myself. How she manages to separate between myself and my intellect I have never been able to understand; but then she *is* strong-minded, which perhaps accounts for her seeing farther into this millstone than I can. She tells me, not unfrequently, that I am weak-minded. She even goes the length at times of calling me imbecile; but she is a dear good affectionate woman, and I have no sympathy with the insolent remark I once overheard made by an acquaintance of mine, to the effect that it was a pity Mrs Bingley had not been born with a man's hat and trousers on—no, none whatever.

Before dismissing myself, descriptively at least, (for, being an honorary agent of the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Society, and an actor in some of the scenes which I am about to describe, I cannot conveniently dismiss myself altogether); before dismissing myself, I say, it may be as well to explain that my strong-minded wife, in concert with a number of variously-minded women, (all more or less strong), and a good many weak and otherwise minded men, have come to form their opinion of me in consequence of my holding rather strongly a few opinions of my own—to the effect that there are a good many wrong things in this world, (admittedly wrong things); a good many muddles; a good many glaring and outrageous abuses and shameful things the continuance of which reflects discredit on the nation, and the wiping out or putting right of which ought, by all means, to be set about earnestly and at once.

Now, curiously enough, it is the idea conveyed in the last two words—at once—which sticks in the throats of my strong-minded opponents! They agree with me as to the existence of the evils, they honestly deplore them, but they charge me with mental imbecility when I suggest that things should be put right *at once*. They counsel delay, and when the dispute reaches a certain stage they smile at me with contempt, or pity, or they storm, according to individual temperament, and usually wind up with a rasping reiteration of their original opinions, highly peppered and salted, and an assurance that I have been born at least a century before my time.

If the men of the next century are destined to do good, "as their hands find opportunity," without previous delay until thousands of opportunities are lost and gone for ever; if those who put their hands to a piece of work shall carry it out with vigour in their *own* lifetime; if those who counsel delay shall mean due time for full consideration by *themselves*, and shall *not* mean an extended procrastination which shall free themselves from worry, and leave their work to be handed down as a legacy to their children, who shall likewise hand it down to *their* children, and so on *ad infinitum* until "delay" shall become a synonym for death and destruction to tens of thousands of better men than themselves, —if this shall be the sentiment and practice of the men of next century, then I confess that my sympathies are with them, and I really suspect that I must have got into the wrong century by mistake. But as the position is irremediable now, I suppose I must, in an imbecile sort of fashion, go on my way rejoicing—if I can—sorrowing if I cannot rejoice.

Mrs Bingley having more than once threatened to scratch my face when I have ventured to express the last sentiment, it may be perhaps as well to change the subject and return to Billy Gaff, the charming child, *alias* the Bu'ster.

Billy deserves to be somewhat particularly introduced, because, besides being an actor in this tale, he was a boy of strong character. If I were to sum him up and reduce the total to a concentrated essence, the result would be a sentence to the following effect:— Billy Gaff had a will of his own! Perhaps I should say a very strong will of his own. For instance, he, on several different occasions, willed to screw off the spout of the family tea-pot, a pewter one, and, having willed to do it, he did it. Again he willed, more than once, to smash a pane of glass in the solitary window of the family mansion, and he *did* smash a pane of glass in that window; nay, more, in consequence of being heartily whacked for the deed, he immediately willed to smash, *and* smashed, a second pane, and was proceeding to will and smash a third when he was caught up by his mother, beaten almost into the condition of a mummy, and thrust under the clothes of the family bed, which immediately creaked as if with convulsions, and tossed its blankets about in apparent agony.

On the present occasion the Bu'ster had awakened out of a sound sleep to the conviction that he was hungry. Observing the loaf on the table, he immediately willed to have a second supper, and arising, donned his father's pea-jacket, in order to enjoy the meal more thoroughly.

It was the sudden removal of the said loaf by his mother to an unreachable shelf that induced the youthful Billy to stand in the middle of the room and howl, as already described.

He was still engaged in emulating the storm, and Mrs Gaff, utterly indifferent to him, had cast another glance at the horrified clock, and remarked to her little girl Tottie, that "Uncle John must have found work on the shore, for he was long of coming," when a heavy tread was heard in the little porch outside the door.

"Hold yer noise," said Mrs Gaff sternly.

Billy obeyed, not by any means in consequence of the command, but because he was curious to know who was about to enter, and meant to resume yelling immediately after his curiosity on this point should be satisfied.

The door opened, and a strong-built seaman stepped into the room, and looked at the family with a quiet smile on his sunburnt face. His hair and garments were dripping with water, as if he had just walked out of the sea.

On beholding him the family rose and stood for a moment speechless. Billy sat down on the floor in that prompt manner which is peculiar to young children when they lose their balance; simultaneously with the shock of being seated the word "faither" burst from his lips. Mrs Gaff uttered a suppressed cry, and ran into the wet man's arms. Tottie and the Bu'ster each ran at a leg, and hugging it violently, squeezed a cataract of salt water into their respective bosoms.

“Stephen, lad, is’t you?” said the wife, raising her head for a moment and looking up in the man’s face.

“Ay, dear lass, wrecked again; but safe home, thank God.”

Mrs Gaff was not wont to give way to the melting mood, but she could not restrain a few tears of joy. Tottie, observing this, cried from sympathy; and the Bu’ster, not to be outdone, willed, began, and carried into execution, a series of true British cheers, that could not have been surpassed, perhaps could not have been equalled, by any boy of his age in or out of the Royal Navy.

Chapter Two.

Wrecked, Rescued, and Resuscitated—Mrs Niven receives a Surprise, also the Gift of a Child.

On the same dark tempestuous night of which I write, a little ship was wrecked on the east coast of England.

She had sailed from the antipodes, had weathered many a gale, had crossed the great ocean in safety, had sighted the lights and the cliffs of “home,” and was dashed to pieces at last on the rocks within two hours’ sail of the port to which she was bound.

Hundreds of ships, great and small, were wrecked on the coasts of Britain during that memorable gale. The little ship to which I refer was one of the many in regard to which the newspapers said, “she was dashed to pieces, and all hands perished.”

But in this particular case all hands had not perished: two lives had been spared, unknown to journalists and coastguardsmen.

It was the dead of night when the vessel struck. The spot was lonely, at least a mile distant from human habitations. No anxious eyes on shore saw her quiver as each successive billow lifted her up and hurled her cruelly down; no sorrowing ear heard the shriek of despair that rose above the yelling storm, when, in little more than ten minutes, the vessel broke up, and left the crew and passengers to perish within sight of their native land.

There was one man among the number who did not shriek, who did not despair. He was not a hero of romance whose soul raised him above the fear of sudden death—no, he was only a true-hearted British tar, whose frame was very strong, whose nerves were tightly strung and used to danger. He had made up his mind to save his life if he could; if he should fail—what then? He never thought of “what then,” because, in regard to terrestrial matters, he had not been accustomed to cast his thoughts so far in advance of present exigencies.

Just before the ship broke up, this man was standing on the lee bulwark, holding by the shrouds of the mainmast, the lower part of which was still standing. A lady and gentleman clung to each other, and to the rigging close beside him. They were husband and wife. Both were comparatively young, and up to that night had been full of hope and high spirits. The husband with his right arm encircled his wife, and grasped the rigging; with his left, he pressed their little girl to his breast over which flowed the fair hair of the little one, drenched and dishevelled.

The father was a brave man and strong, but his face was very pale, for he felt that courage and strength could not avail to save both wife and child in such a raging sea. An occasional upward glance of his eye seemed to indicate that he sought comfort from God in his extremity.

“You’ll never manage ’em both, sir; let me have the child,” said the strong seaman, suddenly grasping the little girl, and attempting to unlock her arms which were tightly clasped round her father’s neck.

The father hesitated, but a terrific wave was rushing towards the doomed ship. Without even the comfort of a hurried kiss he resigned the child. The young mother stretched out her arms towards her, uttering a piteous cry. At that moment the ship rose on the billow’s crest as if it were no heavier than a flake of the driving foam—a crash followed—it was gone, and the crew were left struggling in the sea.

The struggle was short with most of them. Previous exposure and anxiety had already quite exhausted all but the strongest among the men, and even these were unable to withstand the influence of the ice-cold water more than a few seconds. Some were struck by portions of the wreck and killed at once. Others sank without an effort to save themselves. A few swam with unnatural vigour for a yard or two, and then went down with a gurgling cry; but in a very few minutes the work of death was complete. All were gone except the strong seaman, who clasped the little child in his left arm and buffeted the billows with his right.

Once and again were they overwhelmed; but as often did they rise above the foam to continue the battle. It was a terrible fight. A piece of wreck struck the man on his back and well-nigh broke it; then a wave arched high above them, fell with a crash, and drove them nearly to the bottom, so that the child was rendered insensible, and the strong man was nearly choked before he rose again to the surface to gasp the precious air. At last a wave broke behind them, caught them on its crest, and hurled them on a beach of sand. To cling to this while the water retired was the fiercest part of the conflict—the turning-point in the battle. The wave swept back and left the man on his hands and knees. He rose and staggered forward a few paces ere the next wave rushed upon him, compelling him to fall again on hands and knees and drive his bleeding fingers deep down into the shingle. When the water once more retired, he rose and stumbled on till he reached a point above high-water mark, where he fell down in a state of utter exhaustion, but still clasping the little one tightly to his breast.

For some time he lay there in a state of half-consciousness until his strength began to revive; then he arose, thanking God in an audible voice as he did so, and carried the child to a spot which was sheltered in some degree by a mass of

cliff from the blinding spray and furious gale. Here he laid her with her face downwards on a grassy place, and proceeded to warm his benumbed frame.

Vitality was strong in the sailor. It needed only a few seconds' working of the human machine to call it into full play. He squeezed the water out of his jacket and trousers, and then slapped his arms across his chest with extreme violence, stamping his feet the while, so that he was speedily in a sufficiently restored condition to devote his attention with effect to the child, which still lay motionless on the grass.

He wrung the water out of her clothes, and chafed her feet, hands, and limbs, rapidly yet tenderly, but without success. His anxiety while thus employed was very great; for he did not know the proper method to adopt in the circumstances, and he felt that if the child did not revive within a few minutes, all chance of her recovery would be gone. The energy of his action and the anxiety of his mind had warmed his own frame into a glow. It suddenly occurred to him that he might make use of this superabundant heat. Opening the little frock in front, he placed the child's breast against his own, and held it there, while with his right hand he continued to chafe her limbs.

In a few minutes he felt a flutter of the heart, then a gentle sigh escaped from the blue lips; the eyelids quivered, and finally the child revived.

"D'ye feel gettin' better, Emmie?" said the man, in a low, soft voice.

A faint "yes" was all the reply.

The seaman continued his efforts to instil warmth into the little frame. Presently the same question was repeated, and the child looking up, said—

"Is that 'oo, Gaff?"

"Ay, dear, 'tis me."

"Where am I—where's mamma?" inquired Emmie, looking round in some degree of alarm.

"Hush, dear; don't speak just now. I've just brought 'ee ashore fro' the wreck, an' am goin' to tak 'ee home. Try to sleep, dear."

Gaff wrapped his jacket round the child, and hurried away in search of the highroad. He knew the place well. He had been wrecked on a reef within two miles of his native hamlet, and within three of the town of Wreckumoft. He soon found the road, and broke from a fast walk into a run. The child lay quietly in his arms, either being too much exhausted to speak, or having fallen asleep.

The man muttered to himself as if in perplexity—

"It'll never do to tak 'er home wi' me. She'd remember us, and that would let the secret out. No, I'll tak 'er straight there."

Gaff reached his native village as he came to this resolve. It was all astir. Three ships had been cast on the rocks there within a hundred yards of each other. The lifeboat was out; the rocket apparatus had that moment arrived from the neighbouring town, and was being dragged on its waggon through the village to the scene of danger. All the men, and many of the women and children of the place, were on the beach, while eager groups of those who could not face the storm were collected in doorways and sheltered places, awaiting news from the shore. Many of these had anxious faces, for they knew their kinsmen, the fishermen of the place, to be bold, daring fellows, who would not hesitate to risk life and limb to save a fellow-creature from death.

Stopping a moment at the outskirts of the village, Gaff laid down his burden, and tied a large blue cotton kerchief round his neck, so as to cover his mouth and chin. By pulling his sou'wester cap well over his eyes, he concealed his face so effectually that little more than the point of his nose was visible. Not satisfied, however, with his disguise, he climbed a fence and struck into a bypath, which enabled him to avoid the village altogether.

Setting off at a quick pace, he soon regained the highroad beyond the village, and did not pause until he came to a large iron gate which opened into the shrubbery in front of a handsome villa. He went straight up to the front door and rang the bell.

Of course, at such an hour, the family had retired to rest, and it is probable that in ordinary circumstances Gaff would have had to wait a considerable time before an answer should have been given to his summons. But on this night, the only son and heir of the family, Kenneth by name, knowing that wrecks were likely to occur on the coast, and being of a bold, romantic, restless disposition, had mounted his horse and ridden away, accompanied by his groom, in search of adventure.

The housekeeper of the family, usually styled Mrs Niven, being devotedly attached to this son and heir, had resolved to sit up all night and await his return. Mrs Niven had prophesied confidently for the previous ten years, that "Master Kenneth was certain to be drownded sooner or later, if 'e didn't come to die before;" and being fully persuaded of the truth of her prophetic powers, she conscientiously waited for and expected the fulfilment of her own prophecy.

At the moment when Gaff rang the bell she was awaiting it in a chair in front of a good fire, with her feet on the fender and sound asleep. It would be more correct to say that Mrs Niven was in a state of mixed sleep and suffocation, for her head hung over the back of the chair, and, being very stout, there was only just sufficient opening in the wind-pipe to permit of her breath passing stertorously through her wide-open mouth.

The first summons passed unheard; the second caused Mrs Niven to open her eyes and shut her mouth, but she

could not rise by reason of a crick in her neck. An angry shout, however, of “why don’t you answer the bell?” from the master of the family, caused her to make a violent struggle, plunge her head into her lap, by way of counteracting the crick, rush up-stairs, and fling open the door.

“I know’d it,” exclaimed Mrs Niven wildly, on beholding a wet sailor with a bundle in his arms; “I always said he would be—goodness me! it’s only his trunk,” she added in horror, on observing that the bundle was a rough jacket without head or legs!

“Clap a stopper on your jaw, woman,” said Gaff impatiently. “Is this Seaside Villa—Mr Stuart’s?”

“It is,” replied Mrs Niven, trembling violently.

Gaff quickly removed the jacket, kissed the child’s pale cheek, and laid her in Mrs Niven’s ready arms.

“She ain’t dead surely, sir?” inquired the housekeeper.

“No, bin saved from a wreck an’ half drownded! She’ll come to in a bit—tak’ care of ’er.”

Gaff turned on his heel as he hastily uttered these words, ran down the garden walk and disappeared, leaving Mrs Niven standing at the open door in a state of speechless amazement, with the unconscious Emmie in her arms and pressed, by reason of an irresistible impulse of motherly sympathy, to her bosom.

Chapter Three.

The Cottage at Cove invaded—Dan Horsey speaks “Toorko” to Russians, and fails to enlighten them.

Retracing his steps hastily to the village of Cove, Stephen Gaff sought out his own humble cottage, which, during his absence on his frequent voyages, was left under the charge of his fisherman brother-in-law, John Furby. Presenting himself at the door, he created the family sensation which has been described at the end of the first chapter.

The first violent demonstrations of surprise and joy over, Mrs Gaff dragged her husband into a small closet, which was regarded by the household in the light of a spare room, and there compelled him to change his garments. While this change was being made the volatile Bu’ster, indignant at being bolted out, kicked the door with his heel until he became convinced that no good or evil could result from the process. Then his active mind reverted to the forbidden loaf, and he forthwith drew a chair below the shelf on which it lay. Upon the chair he placed a three-legged stool, and upon the stool an eight-inch block, which latter being an unstable foundation, caused Billy to lose his balance when he got upon it. The erection instantly gave way, and fell with a hideous crash. Tottie, who stood near, gazing at her brother’s misdeeds, as was her wont, in awe-stricken admiration, was overwhelmed in the débris.

Nothing daunted, the Bu’ster “returned to the charge,” and fell a second time,—with the loaf, however, in his arms.

“Hah!” exclaimed Mrs Gaff, issuing from the spare room, and rushing at her offspring with uplifted hand.

“Stop, lass,” said Stephen, arresting her, and catching up the boy, whom he placed on his knee as he sat down in a chair beside the fire. “How are ’ee, Billy, my lad?”

Billy, glaring defiance at his mother, who returned the glare with interest in the shape of a united shake of the fist and head, replied that he was “fuss’rate.”

Tottie having immediately claimed, and been put in possession of the other knee, divided her father’s attention, and while the goodwife busied herself in preparing the supper, which had been originally intended for “Uncle John,” a quick fire of question and reply of the most varied and unconnected sort was kept up by the trio at the fire, in tones, and accompanied by hugs and gestures, which proved beyond all doubt that Stephen Gaff was a father of the right kind, and that the little ones hailed him as an inestimable addition to their household joys.

It would be unjust to Mrs Gaff were I to permit the reader to suppose that she was a disagreeable contrast to the father. She was true-hearted and loving, but she had been born and bred in the midst of a class of people whose manners are as rough as their calling, and was by no means tender or considerate. A terrific scream, or a knock-down slap, from Mrs Gaff, was regarded both by giver and recipient in much the same light as is a mild reproof in more polite society.

“Wrecked again, Stephen,” said Mrs Gaff, pausing in her occupation, and recurring to the remark made by her husband when he first entered the room, “where have ’ee bin wrecked this time?”

“A’most at the door, lass, on the Black Rock.”

“Ay, an’ was all the rest saved?” inquired the wife.

“No, none of ’em. A’ lost save one, a little child.”

“A child, lad!” exclaimed the wife in surprise; “what have ’ee done wi’ it?”

“Took it to its friends.”

As he said this the sailor gave his wife a look which induced her to refrain from further questioning on that subject.

“An’ who saved ye, Stephen?”

“God saved me,” replied the man, earnestly.

“True, lad; but was there none o’ the boys there to lend a hand?”

“No, none. It puzzled me a bit,” said Stephen, “for the lads are wont to be on the look-out on a night like this.”

“It needn’t puzzle ye, then,” replied the wife, as she set a chair for her husband at the table, and poured out a cup of tea, “for there’s bin two sloops an’ a schooner on the rocks off the pier-head for three hours past, an’ a’ the lads are out at them,—Uncle John among the rest. They’ve made him coxswain o’ the new lifeboat since ye last went to sea.”

Stephen set down the cup, which he had just raised to his lips, untasted, and rose hastily.

“Wrecks at the pier-head, lass,” he exclaimed, “and you let me sit here idle!”

“Don’t go, Stephen,” entreated Mrs Gaff; “you’re not fit to do anything after sitch a night, an’ its o’er late.”

The man paid no attention to the remonstrance, but buttoned up his coat, and seized his cap.

Mrs Gaff promptly locked the door with an air of thorough determination, put the key in her bosom, and crossed her arms thereon tightly.

Stephen smiled slightly as he turned, raised the window, and leaped through it into the road, followed by a vociferous cheer from Billy, whose spirit was wildly stirred by the boldness and success of the movement, and mightily rejoiced at the discomfiture of his mother.

Mrs Gaff relieved her feelings by slapping the Bu’ster’s face, and was about to close the window when her husband quietly stepped through it again, saying—

“Open the door, lass, you’ve no need to fear; I’ll remain now.”

There was a trampling of many feet outside. The door had scarcely been unlocked when they were in the passage. Next moment four fishermen entered, bearing the figure of a man in their arms.

“He an’t drownded, lass, only swownded,” said one of the men to Mrs Gaff, with the view of relieving the good woman’s anxiety, as they laid a seaman on the bed. “Look alive now, old girl, an’ git hot blankets an’ bottles.”

While Mrs Gaff obeyed in silent haste, the room was filled with men, some of whom supported or half-carried others, whose drooping heads, torn garments, and haggard faces, showed that they had just been rescued from the angry sea. None of them were more than partially clothed; some were nearly naked. With excited haste the fishermen crowded the wrecked men round the fire, and spread blankets and sails, or whatever came first to hand, on the floor for those who were most exhausted to lie down upon, while Stephen Gaff poured hot tea and hot grog indiscriminately into cups, saucers, pannikins, and soup-plates, and urged them to drink with rough but kindly hospitality.

The wrecked men, (there were twelve of them), were Russians, and as a matter of course could not understand a word that was said to them, although some of the fishermen asked them, with as much earnestness as if their lives depended on the answer, “Who—they—wos—an’—whar’—they—com’d—fro’?”

Receiving for reply a stare and a shake of the head from such of the men as were able to attend, one of the fishermen tried them again with great precision and slowness of speech, and with much solemnity of manner, “What—part—o’ the arth—d’ye hail fro’,—lads?”

No answer, accompanied by a stare and a shake.

“Oh, it’s o’ no use,” cried one, “let the poor lads a-be.”

“Hallo! Dan,” cried another, as a man forced his way through the crowded room towards the fire, “you’ve bin in Toorkey, I believe; I say, try them fellers wi’ a screed o’ Toorko. P’raps they’ll make *that* out.”

The individual addressed was very different from the men amongst whom he stood. He was a thin, slightly-made, yet strong and active young man, in a very short grey coat, a very long striped vest, and very tight corduroy trousers—a sort of compound of footman and jockey. In truth, Daniel Horsey was both; being at once valet and groom to the romantic Kenneth, whose fate it was, (according to the infallible Mrs Niven), to be “drownded.”

Dan’s first inquiry was as to whether any one had seen his master, and the tones in which the question was put betokened him, beyond all doubt, a son of the Green Isle.

Being told that no one had seen his master, he was about to leave the hut in quest of him when he was collared by several stout men, and placed forcibly in front of a Russian with a huge red beard, who appeared to be the least exhausted of the party.

“Come now, Dan, say somethin’ to them Roosians.”

“Arrah! d’ye think I’ll spake a word av ye stick yer great ugly fists into my jooglar veins like that? Hands off,” he cried indignantly, “or niver a taste o’ spaitch ye’ll git from me, bad or good. Besides, what duv *I* know about Roosian?”

“Ye’ve bin in Toorkey, han’t ye?” inquired a fisherman.

“Troth I have, an’ what o’ that?” replied Dan, as his captors released their hold of his collar.

“Ye can speak Toorko, can’t ye?”

“Maybe I can,” he replied cautiously.

“Well, I’m told that Toorkey lies to the suthard o’ Roosia, just as England lies to the suthard o’ Scotland, an’ so, mayhap, they’ll understand a bit Toorko.”

“Faix, av they don’t understand Thoorko better nor the English understand Scotch, it’s little speed I’ll come wi’ them,” said Dan with a leer. “Howsomediver, I’ll give ’em a trial. I say, Mr Red-beard, hubba doorum bobble moti squorum howko joski tearum thaddi whak? Come, now, avic, let’s hear what ye’ve got to say to that. An’ mind what ye spake, ’cause we won’t stand no blarney here.”

Dan uttered this with immense volubility and assurance, and the fishermen regarded him with deepening respect, as they awaited the Russian’s answer. He replied by a stare and a shake of the head as before.

“Hookum daddy,” resumed Dan, stooping to gaze earnestly into the man’s face, and placing the thumb of his right hand into the palm of his left, by way of emphasising his remark, “Hookum daddy, saringo spolli-jaker tooraloo be japers bang falairo—och!” he added, turning away with a look of disgust, “he don’t understand a word. I would try him wi’ Frinch, but it’s clear as ditch wather that he’s half drownded still.”

Convinced that Dan Horsey’s “Toorko” was of no use, the fishermen at length allowed him to retire.

Chapter Four.

The Rescue.

While this scene was enacting in the cottage, I was hasting up from the beach, where the lifeboat men had rendered good service that night.

As the honorary agent for the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society, I had been summoned by a special messenger as soon as it was known that vessels were on the rocks off the entrance to our harbour. I was accompanied by my niece, Lizzie Gordon, who always joined me on such occasions, carrying with her a basket in which were a flask of brandy, another of port wine, a bottle of smelling salts, and several small articles which she fancied might be of use in cases of emergency. We had called at the Sailors’ Home in passing, to see that they were astir there, and ready to receive shipwrecked people. We afterwards remained on the beach, under the lee of a boathouse, while the lifeboat men saved the crews of the wrecked vessels.

The work was nobly done! John Furby, the coxswain, with a sturdy crew of volunteers—twelve in all—were ready for action, with cork life-belts and oilskin coats on, when the team of four stout horses came tearing along the sands dragging the lifeboat after them, assisted and cheered on by a large crowd of men and boys. No unnecessary delay occurred. Opposite the first wreck, the carriage was wheeled round, so that the bow of the boat pointed to the sea. The crew sprang into their seats, and, shipping the oars, sat ready and resolute.

Immense breakers thundered on the beach, and rushed inland in fields of gurgling foam that looked like phosphoric light in the darkness. Into this the carriage was thrust as far as it could be with safety by many strong and willing hands. Then the men in the surf seized the launching lines, by means of which the boat could be propelled off its carriage. A peculiar adaptation of the mechanism enabled them, by *pulling backward*, to force the boat *forward*. For a moment they stood inactive as a towering wave rolled in like a great black scroll coming out of the blacker background, where the sound of the raging storm could be heard, but where nothing could be seen, save the pale red light which proved that the wreck still held together.

The sea flew up, almost overwhelming the carriage. John Furby, standing at his post by the steering oar, with the light of the small boat-lamp shining up into his rugged face, gave the word in a clear, strong voice.

“Hurrah!” shouted the men on shore, as they ran up the beach with the ends of the launching ropes.

The boat sprang into the surf, the crew bent to their oars with all their might, and kept pace with the rush of the retreating billow, while the sea drew them out as if it were hungry to swallow them.

The lifeboat met the next breaker end-on; the men, pulling vigorously, cleft it, and, passing beyond, gained the deep water and disappeared from view.

The minutes that followed appeared like hours, but our patience was not long tried. The boat soon re-appeared, coming in on the crest of a towering wave, with six saved seamen in her. As she struck the beach she was seized by the crowd on shore, and dragged out of danger by main force.

Thus far all was well. But there was stern work still to be done. Having ascertained that the vessel was a collier, and that none of her crew were lost, I sent the six men with an escort to the Sailors’ Home, and followed the lifeboat, which was already on its way to the second wreck, not more than five hundred yards from the first.

Here they were equally successful, three men and a boy being rescued from the vessel, which also proved to be a small collier. Then the boat was conveyed to the third wreck, which turned out to be a brig, and was nearly a mile removed from the harbour, just opposite the fishing village of Cove.

The crew of the lifeboat being now much exhausted, were obliged to give up their oars and life-belts to fresh men, who volunteered for the service in scores. Nothing, however, would persuade John Furby to resign his position,

although he was nearly worn out with fatigue and exposure.

Once more the lifeboat dashed into the sea, and once again returned with a crew of rescued men, who were immediately led up to the nearest hut, which chanced to be that of Stephen Gaff. One of the saved men, being insensible, was carried up and laid in Stephen's bed, as I have already described.

There was still some uncertainty as to whether all those on board the wreck had been rescued, so the boat put off again, but soon returned, having found no one. As she struck the shore a larger wave than usual overwhelmed her, and washed the coxswain overboard. A loud cry burst from those who witnessed this, and one or two daring fellows, running into the surf up to their waists, nearly perished in their brave but vain efforts to grasp the drowning man.

Furby did not struggle. He had been rendered insensible by the shock, and although several ropes were thrown to him, and one actually fell over him, he could make no effort to save himself, as the waves rolled him inshore and sucked him back again.

At this moment the sound of horses' hoofs was heard on the sands, and my young friend Kenneth Stuart dashed past us, at full gallop, into the sea!

Kenneth was a splendid and a fearless rider. He kept the finest horses in the neighbourhood. On this occasion he was mounted on a large strong chestnut, which he had trained to gallop into a foaming surf.

Checking his pace suddenly, when about knee-deep in the foam, he took up such a position that the next billow would wash the drowning man within his reach.

The wave came on. When about a hundred yards from the spot where the young horseman stood, it fell with a prolonged roar, and the foam came sweeping in like a white wall, with the dark form of Furby tossing in the midst. The sea rushed furiously upon horse and rider, and the terrified horse, rearing almost perpendicular, wheeled round towards the land. At the same instant the coxswain was hurled against them. Kenneth seized the mane of his steed with one hand, and grasping Furby with the other, held on. The noble charger, swept irresistibly landward, made frantic efforts to regain his footing, and partially succeeded before the full force of the retreating water bore back upon him.

For one moment he stood quivering with the strength of his effort. Kenneth was very strong, else he had never maintained his grasp on the collar of the coxswain.

A moment more, and the horse made a plunge forward; then a dozen hands caught him by bridle and saddle-girth, and almost dragged the trio out of the sea, while a loud cheer greeted their deliverance.

I ordered four stout men to carry the coxswain to Gaff's cottage, remaining behind for a few minutes in order to congratulate my young friend on his escape and success, as well as to see that no other wrecks had occurred in the neighbourhood. Having satisfied myself as best I could on this latter point, I was about to proceed to the cottage when Kenneth came forward, leading his good horse by the bridle, and offered his disengaged arm to my niece.

Lizzie thanked him and declined, observing that, after his gallant and successful rescue of Furby, he must himself stand in need of assistance, or something to that effect. I cannot say what his reply was, but I observed that she immediately afterwards took the proffered arm, and we all walked up to the hut together.

On reaching it we met Kenneth's groom coming out, he having failed, as has been shown, to make any impression on the Russians with his Turkish!

I found the place completely filled with men and women, the latter being in a state of great excitement.

"Here's the agent! make way, lads! here comes Cap'n Bingley," several voices exclaimed as I entered.

Going to the bed and seeing how matters stood with poor Furby, who had been placed on his back, I ordered the people to leave the hut, and had the half-drowned man turned instantly on his face. The other half-drowned man, having recovered, was lying on a blanket before the fire.

"Clear the room, lads," said I firmly, "the man wants fresh air; open the window, and take these wrecked men up to the Home in town. Everything is prepared for them there, hot coffee and beds, and a hearty welcome. Away with you, now; carry those who can't walk."

With the assistance of Kenneth and his man the hut was soon cleared, only a few being allowed to remain to aid me in my efforts to recover the coxswain.

"You see," said I, as I rolled Furby gently and continuously from his face to his side, in order to produce what I may term artificial breathing, "it is not good to lay a half-drowned man on his back, because his tongue will fall into his throat, and prevent the very thing we want to bring about, namely, respiration. Go to the foot of the bed, Kenneth, put your hands under the blankets, and chafe his legs with hot flannel. Hold the smelling salts to his nose, Lizzie. That's it, now. Mrs Gaff, put more hot bottles about him; see, he begins to breathe already."

As I spoke the mysterious vital spark in the man began to revive, and ere long the quivering eyelids and short fitful gasps indicated that "Uncle John," as the coxswain of the lifeboat was styled by the household, had recovered. We gave him a teaspoonful or two of hot coffee when he was able to swallow, and then prepared to take our leave.

I observed, while I was busy with Furby, that my niece took Mrs Gaff aside, and appeared to be talking to her very earnestly. Lizzie was a lovely girl. She was tall and slightly formed, with rich brown hair and a dark clear complexion that might have been almost styled Spanish, but for the roses which bloomed on her cheeks. I could not help

admiring the strong contrast between her and the fair face and portly figure of worthy Mrs Gaff, who listened to what she said with an air of deep respect.

Little Tottie had taken Lizzie's hand in both of hers, and was looking up in her face, and the boy Billy was gazing at her with open-mouthed admiration. I observed, too, that Kenneth Stuart was gazing at her with such rapt attention that I had to address him several times before he heard me!

This I was not surprised at, for I remember to this day the feelings of pleasure with which I beheld my pretty niece, when, having lost her father and mother, poor dear! she came to find a home under my roof, and it was natural she should inspire admiration in a young man like Kenneth.

My family and the Stuarts had become acquainted only a few weeks before the events of which I am now writing, and this was the first time that the young people had met. They were not altogether unknown to each other, however, for Lizzie had heard of Kenneth from the fishermen, who used to speak with interest of his horsemanship and his daring feats in rescuing drowning people from the sea during the storms that so frequently visited our coast, and Kenneth had heard of Lizzie, also from the fishermen, amongst whom she was a frequent visitor, especially when sickness entered their cots, or when the storm made their wives widows, and their little ones fatherless.

I had set my heart on seeing these two married. My dear wife, for the first time in her life I believe, thoroughly agreed with me in this wish. I mention the fact with unalloyed pleasure, as being what I may term a sunny memory, a bright spot, in a life of subdued though true happiness. We neither of us suspected at that time what bitter opposition to our wishes we were to receive from Kenneth's father, who, although in many respects a good man, was very stern—unpleasantly stern.

Having done all that could be done for the wrecked people, Lizzie and I returned to our residence in Wreckumoft at about four in the morning.

Kenneth insisted on walking with us, sending his man home with his horse, which Lizzie patted on the neck, and called a noble creature. It was quite evident that Kenneth wished that he himself was his own horse on that occasion—so evident that Lizzie blushed, and taking my arm hurriedly urged me to go home as it was "very late."

"Very early would be more correct, my dear," said I, "for it is past four. You must be tired, Lizzie; it is wrong in me to allow you to subject yourself to such storms. Give her your arm, Kenneth."

"If Miss Gordon will accept of it," said the youth approaching her promptly, "I shall be—"

"No, thank you," said Lizzie, interrupting him and clinging closer to me; "I am not in the least tired, and your assistance is quite sufficient, uncle."

I must confess to being surprised at this, for it was quite evident to me that Kenneth admired Lizzie, and I was pretty certain—so was my dear wife—that Lizzie admired Kenneth, although of course she never gave us the slightest hint to that effect, and it seemed to me such a good and reasonable opportunity for—well, well, I need not bore you, reader, with my wild ideas, so peculiarly adapted it would seem for the twentieth century—suffice it to say, that I *was* surprised. But if truth must be told, I have always lived in a state of surprise in regard to the thoughts and actions of women, and on this particular night I was doomed to the unpleasant surprise of being received with a sharp rebuke from Mrs Bingley, who roundly asserted that she would stand this sort of thing no longer. That she had no notion of being disturbed at such unearthly hours by the noisy advent of a disagreeably damp and cold husband, and that if I intended to continue to be an agent of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, she would insist upon a separate maintenance!

I was comforted, however, by finding a good fire and a hot cup of coffee in the parlour for myself and Lizzie, provided by our invaluable housekeeper, Susan Barepoles, a girl who was worthy of a better name, being an active, good-looking, cheerful lass. She was the daughter of the skipper of one of our coal sloops, named Haco Barepoles, a man of excellent disposition, but gifted with such a superabundance of animal spirits, courage, and recklessness, that he was known in the port of Wreckumoft as Mad Haco.

Much exhausted by one of the hardest nights of toil and exposure I ever spent, I retired to my room and sought and found repose.

Chapter Five.

The Breakfast Party at Seaside Villa.

The morning after the storm was bright and beautiful. The breakers, indeed, were still thundering on the shore, but otherwise the sea was calm, and the sun shone into the breakfast parlour of Seaside Villa with a degree of intensity that might have warmed the heart of an oyster. It certainly warmed the heart of the household cat, which, being an early riser, was first down-stairs, and lay at full length on the rug, enjoying at once the heat of the glowing fire which tinged its brown back with red, and the blazing sun which turned its white breast yellow.

Presently a dark cloud entered the room. It sat on the brow of George Stuart, Esquire, of Wreckumoft, the head of the family. Mr Stuart walked up to the fire and turned his back to it, as if to offer it a deliberate insult, while yet he accepted all the benefit it could afford him on that cold December morning.

The cat being in his way, he moved it out of his way with his foot. He did it roughly, but he did not exactly kick it, for he was not a cruel, or naturally unkind man.

Having disposed of the cat, and looked twice at his watch, and blown his nose three times—the last twice unnecessarily—Mr Stuart rang the bell with violence.

Mrs Niven entered.

“Why is breakfast not ready?” said the master with asperity.

“Breakfast *is* ready, sir,” replied the housekeeper with dignity.

“Where is my sister, then, and the rest of them?” The questioner was partly answered by the abrupt and somewhat flurried entrance of the sister referred to.

“What’s the meaning of this, Peppy?” demanded Mr Stuart with a frown.

“My dear George,” said Miss Peppy, bustling about actively, “I really *am* sorry, but you know things can’t always be just as one would wish, and then when things *do* turn out occasionally as one would *not* wish, and as one had no expectation of, and, so to speak, without consulting one at all, (dear me, where *is* that key?)—and when one can’t help things turning out so, you know, it’s really too much to—to—you know what I mean, brother; come now, be reasonable.”

“I do *not* know what you mean, Peppy,” (the lady’s name when unabbreviated was Penelope, but as she never was so named by any one, she might as well not have had the name at all), “and,” continued Mr Stuart, emphatically, “I would advise *you* to be reasonable and explain yourself.”

“Dear George, how *can* you,” said Miss Peppy, who talked with great volubility, and who never for a moment ceased to bustle about the room in a series of indescribable, as well as unaccountable, not to say unnecessary, preparations for the morning meal, which had already been prepared to perfection by Mrs Niven; “you surely don’t forget—things do happen *so* surprisingly at times—really, you know, I *can not* see why we should be subjected to such surprises. I’m quite sure that no good comes of it, and then it makes one look *so* foolish. Why human beings were made to be surprised so, *I* never could understand. No one ever sees pigs, or horses, or cows surprised, and they seem to get through life a great deal easier than we do, at all events they have less worry, and they never leave their children at their neighbour’s doors and run away—what *can* have got it?—I’m quite sure I put it there last night with the thimble and scissors.”

Miss Peppy thrust her right hand deep into that mysterious receptacle of household miscellanies her pocket, and fingered the contents inquiringly for a few moments.

“What are you looking for?” inquired her brother impatiently.

“The key of the press,” said Miss Peppy with a look of weariness and disappointment.

“What key is that in your left hand?” said Mr Stuart.

“Why, I declare, that’s *it*!” exclaimed his sister with a laugh; “there *is* no accounting for things. My whole life is a series of small surprises and perplexities. I *wonder* what I was born for! It seems to me so ridiculous that so serious a thing as life should be taken up with such little trifles.”

“What’s that you say about trifles, aunt?” asked Kenneth, who entered the room at the moment, and saluted Miss Peppy on the cheek.

“Nothing, Kennie, nothing worth mentioning,” (she seated herself at the table and began to pour out the tea): “it seems that you have been saving more lives last night.”

“Well, yes, at least I saved *one*,” said Kenneth, with a look of mingled pride and pleasure; “stout John Furby, the coxswain of the new lifeboat, was knocked overboard and nearly drowned. Bucephalus and I chanced to be near the spot at the time, so we managed to pull him out between us.”

“I don’t like Bucephalus,” observed Miss Peppy, stirring her tea with her egg-spoon by mistake.

“Don’t you, aunt—why?”

“Because he’s so big and strong and fierce. I wonder you can take pleasure in riding such a great cart-horse, Kennie.”

Miss Peppy at this moment discovered her mistake in regard to the egg-spoon, and rectified it, observing with a look of resignation, that there *was* no accounting for the way in which things happened in this world.

“Don’t call my Bucephalus a cart-horse, aunt,” said Kenneth, beginning to eat languidly; “true, he is uncommonly big and strong, but then I am unusually big too, so we’re well matched; and then his limbs are as delicately turned as those of a racer; and you should see him taking a five-barred gate, aunt!—he carries me over as if I were a mere feather. Think of his swimming powers too. John Furby is not the first man he has enabled me to drag out of the stormy sea. Ah! he’s a noble horse—worthy of higher praise than you seem inclined to give him, believe me.”

“Well I’m sure I have no objection to the horse if you have none, Kennie, and it’s a good thing for a beast to be able to save human lives, though why human lives should require to be saved at all is a mystery that I never could fathom; surely if men would only agree to give up going to sea altogether, and never build any more ships, there would be no more drowning, and no need of lifeboats and cork boots—or coats, I forget which—that enable them to walk on the water, or float in it, I don’t remember which. I’m sure with all that I have to remember it’s no wonder—what with ridiculous little trifles to worry one, such as keys, and thimbles, and scissors, when we should be giving our

minds to the solemn realities of life—and then,—as if that were not enough for any woman's shoulders,—to have a little child left at one's door."

"Oh, by the way," interrupted Kenneth, "I had quite forgotten the child. Mrs Niven told me about it, and I looked into the crib as I went up to bed last night, or rather this morning, and saw that it was sleeping—somewhat restlessly I fancied. Who brought it here?"

Mr Stuart, who had hitherto eaten his breakfast in silence, looked at his sister as if the reply would interest him.

Before the answer could be given the door opened, and a smart handsome youth of apparently eighteen years of age entered. His dress bespoke him a midshipman in the navy, and the hearty familiarity of his manner showed that he was on intimate terms with the family.

"Gildart, my boy, how are you?" cried Kenneth, springing up and shaking the youth warmly by both hands.

"Hearty, old fellow, and happy to see my ancient chum. How d'ye do, Miss Penelope? How are ye, Mr Stuart?"

My son Gildart had been Kenneth's favourite companion when they were boys at school. They had not met for many years.

"Sit down," said Kenneth, pressing his friend into a chair; "when did you arrive; where did you come from; what brought you home?—your appearance is so unexpected!—hope you've come to stay with *us*. Had breakfast?"

"Well, now, such a string of 'em to answer all at once," replied Gildart Bingley, laughing. "Suppose I try to reply in the same order—came this morning; direct from China, where we've been sinking junks and peppering pirates; got leave of absence for a few weeks to run down here and see the old folks at home; whether I stay with *you* will depend on the treatment I receive; I have had breakfast, and came down here supposing that yours would have been over—but I'm capable of a second meal at any time; have tried a third occasionally with reasonable success. Now, Kennie—I'm not afraid to call you by the old name, you see, although you *have* grown so big and manly, not to say fierce—having answered your questions, will you be so good as to tell me if it's all true that I hear of your having saved the life of a fisherman last night?"

"It is true that I pulled him out of the sea, aided and abetted by Bucephalus, but whether all that you have heard of me is true I cannot tell, not knowing what you have heard. Who told you of it?"

"Who? why the household of the Bingleys, to be sure—all speaking at once, and each louder than the other, with the exception of my pretty coz, by the way, who did not speak at all until the others were out of breath, and then she gave me such a graphic account of the affair that I would certainly have forgotten where I was, and been transported to the scene of action, had not her pretty flushed face and blazing black eyes riveted me to the spot where I sat. I actually gave vent to an irresistible cheer when she concluded. D'ye know, Kennie, you seem to have made an impression in that quarter? I wish I were you!"

The little midshipman sighed, and helped himself to a second slice of buttered toast. Kenneth laughed lightly, glanced askance at his father, and requested another cup of tea. Mr Stuart glanced at his son, frowned at his finished egg, and stuck the spoon through the bottom of the shell as he would have struck a dagger into the hopes of Kenneth, had he possessed the power.

"Peppy," he said, pushing his cup from him, "before our young friend arrived, you were speaking of the little boy who was left mysteriously here last night—"

"It's a girl," interrupted Miss Peppy, "not but that it might have been a boy, brother, if it had been born so, but one cannot ignore facts, and to the best of my belief it was a girl last night. To be sure I was very sleepy when I saw it, but it may be a boy this morning for all I know to the contrary. I'm sure the perplexities that *do* surround us in this world!" (Here Miss Peppy sighed.) "But if there is any doubt on the question we had better ring for Mrs Niven, and send her up-stairs to ascertain."

At that moment Mrs Niven entered, and handed a letter to Mr Stuart.

"Niven," said Miss Peppy, who spoke so fast, all in one tone, that no one had a chance of interrupting her,—"Niven, will you be so good as to go up-stairs and inquire whether the girl—no, the boy—I—I mean the young human being, that—"

"La! ma'am," exclaimed the housekeeper in surprise, "why do you call her a boy? She's as sweet and lovely a girl as ever my two heyes looked on. I never saw nothink like 'er golden 'air—it's quite 'eavenly, ma'am, if I may use the hexpression."

"Oh! she *is* a girl then? ah! I thought so," said Miss Peppy, with a sigh of resignation, as if the fact were a perplexity too deep for investigation, at least at that time.

"It matters nothing to me," said Mr Stuart sternly, "whether she be a boy or a girl, I mean to send her to the workhouse."

"Workhouse, brother!" exclaimed Miss Peppy in surprise.

"Workhouse, sir!" echoed Mrs Niven in horror.

"Father!" said Kenneth, remonstratively.

“Mrs Niven,” said Mr Stuart, breaking the seal of the letter very slowly, “you may leave the room. Sister, I do not choose to have my intentions commented on in such a manner, especially before the domestics. This child I have nothing whatever to do with; it has no claim on me, and I shall certainly hand it over to the parochial authorities to be dealt with—”

“According to law,” suggested the middy.

“Yes, according to law,” assented Mr Stuart with much severity, applying himself to the letter while the rest of the party rose from table.

“Dear me!” he exclaimed, with an expression of annoyance, as his eye fell on the first lines, “I find that Emma and her good-for-nothing husband will, in all likelihood, be here to-night.”

“To-night, father!” said Kenneth, with a look of gladness.

“Probably,” replied Mr Stuart. “The vessel in which they sailed from Australia was seen off the Lizard yesterday, at least my agent writes that he thinks it was the ‘Hawk,’ but the fog was too thick to permit of a clear sight being obtained; so, I suppose, we shall be inflicted with them and their child to-night or to-morrow.”

“To-night or to-morrow, it may be so, *if they have weathered the storm*,” muttered Kenneth in a deep, sad tone.

Chapter Six.

Kenneth indulges in Suspicions and Surmises.

“Will you walk or ride?” said Kenneth Stuart as he and Gildart issued from Seaside Villa, and sauntered down the avenue that led to the principal gate.

“Ride, by all means,” said Gildart, “if you have a respectable horse. I love to ride, not only on the ‘bursting tide,’ but on the back of a thoroughbred, if he’s not too tough in the mouth, and don’t incline to shy.”

Kenneth replied that he had a mount to give him, which, although not quite thoroughbred, was nevertheless a good animal, and not addicted to the bad qualities objected to.

As he spoke Daniel Horsey walked up, and, touching his hat, asked if the horses would be required.

“Yes, Dan. Is Bucephalus none the worse of last night’s work?”

“Niver a taste, sur. He’s like a lark this mornin’.”

“Well, saddle him, and also the brown horse. Bring them both over to Captain Bingley’s as soon as you can.”

“Yis, sur.” Dan touched his cap, and walked smartly away.

“Why to my father’s?” asked Gildart.

“Because, after your father and Miss Gordon were exposed to such unwonted fatigue, I wish to inquire for them personally.”

“Humph! you’re not satisfied with my assurance that they are well?”

“Not quite, my boy,” said Kenneth, with a smile; “I wish to have the assurance from the lips of your sweet cousin.”

“Whew! in love!” exclaimed Gildart.

“No; not in love *yet*,” replied the other; “but, to change the subject, did you observe the manner in which my father received the news of the arrival of the ‘Hawk?’”

“Well, it did not require a fellow to have his weather eye *very* wide-open to perceive that your father has a decided objection to his son-in-law, and does not seem over anxious to meet with him or his wife or child. What have they been up to, Kennie—eloped, eh?”

“No, they did not exactly elope, but they married without my father’s consent, or rather against his wishes, and were discarded in consequence. You must not think my father is an unkind man, but he was deeply disappointed at poor Emma’s choice; for, to say truth, her husband was a wild harum-scarum sort of fellow, fond of steeple-chasing—”

“Like you,” interpolated Gildart.

“Like me,” assented Kenneth, with a nod, “and also of yachting and boating, *like you*.”

“Like me,” assented the middy.

“Nevertheless,” resumed Kenneth, “a good-hearted fellow in the main, who, I am certain, would have acted his part in life well if he had been better trained. But he was spoiled by his father and mother, and I must admit that poor Tom Graham was not over fond of work.”

“Ha!” ejaculated Gildart.

“Hum!” responded his friend, “do either of us, I wonder, perceive in ourselves any resemblance to him in this latter point? I suppose it would require a third party to answer that question truly. But, to continue—My father gave Emma, (for he would not consent to see Tom), a thousand pounds, and dismissed her from his presence, as he said, ‘for ever,’ but I am convinced that he did not mean what he said, for he paced about his bedroom the whole of the night after his last interview with poor Emma, and I heard him groan frequently, although the partition that separates our rooms is so thick that sounds are seldom heard through it. Do you know, Gildart, I think we sometimes judge men harshly. Knowing my father as I do, I am convinced that he is not the cold, unfeeling man that people give him credit for. He acted, I believe, under a strong conviction that the course he adopted was that of duty; he hoped, no doubt, that it would result in good to his child, and that in the course of time he should be reconciled to her. I cannot conceive it possible that any one would cast off his child deliberately and *for ever*. Why, the man who could do so were worse than the beasts that perish.”

“I agree with you. But what came of Tom and Emma?” asked Gildart.

“They went to Australia. Tom got into business there. I never could make out the exact nature of it, but he undoubtedly succeeded for a time, for Emma’s letters to me were cheerful. Latterly, however, they got into difficulties, and poor Emma’s letters were sad, and came less frequently. For a year past she has scarcely written to me at all. Tom has never written. He was a high-spirited fellow, and turned his back on us all when my father cast him and Emma off.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Gildart, “nevertheless his high spirit did not induce him to refuse the thousand pounds, it would seem.”

“You wrong him, Gildart; Emma knew him well, and she told me that she had placed the money in a bank in her own name, without telling him of it. Any success that attended him at first was the result of his own unaided energy and application to business. It is many years now since they went away. Some time ago we heard that they, with their only daughter, little Emma, were coming back to England, whether in wealth or in poverty I cannot tell. The vessel in which they were to sail is named the ‘Hawk,’ and that is the ship that my father has heard of as having been seen yesterday.”

“How comes it, Kenneth, that you have never opened your lips to me on this subject during our long acquaintance? I did not know even that you had a sister.”

“Why, to say truth, the subject was not one on which I felt disposed to be communicative. I don’t like to talk of family squabbles, even to my most intimate friends.”

“So we may look for some family breezes and squalls ere long, if not gales,” said Gildart with a laugh.

Kenneth shook his head gravely.

“I fear much,” said he, “that the ‘Hawk’ was exposed to last night’s gale; she must have been so if she did not succeed in making some harbour before it came on; but I cannot shake off the feeling that she is wrecked, for I know the vessel well, and practical men have told me that she was quite unseaworthy. True, she was examined and passed in the usual way by the inspectors, but every one knows that *that* does not insure the seaworthiness of vessels.”

“Well, but even suppose they *have* been wrecked,” suggested Gildart, “it does not follow that they have been drowned.”

“I don’t know,” replied the other in a low voice—“I have a strange, almost a wild suspicion, Gildart.”

“What may that be?”

“That the little girl who was left so mysteriously at our door last night is my sister’s child,” said Kenneth.

“Whew!” whistled the midshipman, as he stopped and gazed at his friend in surprise; “well, that *is* a wild idea, so wild that I would advise you seriously to dismiss it, Kennie. But what has put it into your head?—fancied likeness to your sister or Tom, eh?”

“No, not so much that, as the fact that she told Niven last night that her name is Emmie.”

“That’s not Emma,” said Gildart.

“It is what I used to call my sister, however; and besides that there is a seaman named Stephen Gaff, who, I find, has turned up somewhat suddenly and unaccountably last night from Australia. He says he has been wrecked; but he is mysterious and vague in his answers, and do what I will I cannot get rid of the idea that there is some connexion here.”

“It is anxiety, my boy, that has made you think in this wild fashion,” said Gildart. “Did I not hear Mrs Niven say that the child gave her name as Emmie Wilson?”

“True, I confess that the name goes against my idea; nevertheless I cannot get rid of it, so I mean to canter to-day down to Cove, where Gaff stays, and have a talk with him. We can go together by the road along the top of the cliffs, which is an exceedingly beautiful one. What say you?”

“By all means: it matters nothing to me what course you steer, so long as we sail in company. But pray don’t let the fascinating Lizzie detain you too long. Oh! you need not laugh as if you were invulnerable. I’ll engage to say that you’ll not come away under an hour if you go into the house without making me a solemn promise to the contrary.”

“Why, Gildart, it strikes me that *you* must be in love with your fascinating cousin from the way in which you speak.”

“Perhaps I am,” said the middy, with a tremendous sigh; “but come, here we are, and the horses at the door before us; they must have been brought round by the other road. Now, then, promise that you’ll not stay longer than half an hour.”

Kenneth smiled, and promised.

On entering my residence, which had been named, by Mrs Bingley’s orders, “Bingley Hall,” the young men found my pretty niece coming down the staircase in that most fascinating of all dresses, a riding-habit, which displayed her neat and beautifully rounded figure to perfection. Lizzie could not be said to blush as she bowed acknowledgment to Kenneth’s salutation, for a blush, unless it were a *very* deep one, usually lost itself among the blush roses that at all times bloomed on her cheek; but she smiled with great sweetness upon the stalwart youth, and informed him that, having just been told that John Furby was still suffering from the effects of his recent accident, she had ordered out her pony and was about to ride down to Cove to see him.

Kenneth began to remark on the curious coincidence that he too had come out with the intention of riding down to the same place; but the volatile middy burst in with—

“Come, Lizz, that’s jolly, we’re bound for the same port, and can set sail in company; whether we keep together or not depends on circumstances, not to mention wind and weather. I rather think that if we take to racing, Bucephalus and Kenneth will be there first.”

“Bucephalus is always well behaved in the company of ladies, which is more than I can say of you, Gildart,” retorted his friend, as he opened the door to let Lizzie Gordon pass out.

“And we won’t race, good cousin,” said Lizzie, “for my uncle is to ride with me, and you know he is not fond of going very fast.”

“How d’ye know that, lass?” said I, coming down-stairs at the moment; “not a few of my friends think that I go much too fast for this century—so fast, indeed, that they seem to wonder that I have not ridden ahead of them into the next! How d’ye do, Kenneth? Gildart was not long of finding you out, I see.”

Saying this, I mounted my cob and cantered down the avenue of Bingley Hall, followed by the young people, whose fresh and mettlesome steeds curvetted and pranced incessantly.

It may be as well to remark here, good reader, that at the time of which I write I was unacquainted, as a matter of course, with many of the facts which I am now narrating: they were made known to me piecemeal in the course of after years. I feel that this explanation is necessary in order to account for my otherwise unaccountable knowledge of things that were said and done when I was not present.

Chapter Seven.

Lizzie Gordon is run away with, and Gaff is “pumped”.

The road to the Cove lay along the top of the cliffs, and was in many parts exceedingly picturesque; now passing, in the form of a mere bridle-path, along the verge of the precipices, where thousands of sea-gulls floated around the giddy heights, or darted down into the waves which fell on shingly beach, or promontory, or bay of yellow sand, far below; anon cutting across the grassy downs on some bold headland, or diverging towards the interior, and descending into a woody dell in order to avoid a creek or some other arm of the sea that had cleft the rocks and intruded on the land.

The day was sunny and sufficiently warm to render a slow pace agreeable to my nag, which was a sedate animal, inclined to corpulency like myself. My young companions and their horses were incapable of restraining themselves to my pace, so they dashed on ahead at intervals, and sometimes came back to me at full gallop. At other times they dismounted and stood on the cliffs looking at the view of the sea, which appeared to them, as it has always been to me, enchanting.

I think a view from a high cliff of the great blue sea, dotted with the white and brown sails of ships and boats, is one of the grandest as well as the most pleasant prospects under the sun.

Kenneth Stuart thought so too, for I heard him make use of that or some similar expression to Lizzie as he stood beside her talking earnestly, in spite of the light and jocular remarks of my son, who stood at Lizzie’s other side commenting on things in general with that easy freedom of speech which is characteristic of middies in the British navy, although not entirely confined to them.

The party had dismounted, and Kenneth held Lizzie’s horse by the bridle, while Gildart held his own. Bucephalus was roaming at large. His master had trained him so thoroughly that he was as obedient as a dog. He followed Kenneth about, and would trot up to him when he whistled. I don’t think I ever saw such a magnificent horse, as to size, beauty, and spirit, coupled with docility, either before or since.

“Why, uncle, we thought you must have gone to sleep,” said Lizzie, turning towards me with a laugh as I rode up.

“Or fallen over the cliffs,” added Gildart.

“In either case you would not have taken it much to heart, apparently,” said I; “come, mount and push on.”

Lizzie placed her little foot in Kenneth's hand, and was in the saddle like a flash of thought, and with the lightness of a rose-leaf. Gildart, being a little fellow, and his horse a tall one, got into the saddle, according to his own statement, as a lands-man clambers into the main-top through the "lubber's hole" in a squall; and I think the idea was not far-fetched, for, during the process of mounting, his steed was plunging like a ship in a heavy sea. Bucephalus came up at once when whistled to.

"You seem very fond of your horse," said Lizzie, as Kenneth vaulted into the saddle.

"I *love* him," replied the youth enthusiastically.

"You love other creatures besides horses," thought I; but the thought had barely passed through my brain when Lizzie went off like an arrow. Kenneth sprang forward like a thunderbolt, and Gildart followed—if I may so speak—like a zig-zag cracker. Now, it chanced that Lizzie's horse was in a bad humour that morning, so it ran away, just as the party came to a grassy slope of half a mile in extent. At the end of this slope the road made a sharp turn, and descended abruptly to the beach. Kenneth knew that if the horse came to this turn at a furious gallop, nothing could save Lizzie from destruction. He therefore took the only course open to him, which was to go by a short cut close along the edge of the cliff, and thus overshoot and intercept the runaway. He dashed spurs into Bucephalus, and was off like an arrow from a bow. There was but one point of danger—a place where the bridle-path was crossed by a fence, beyond which the road turned sharp to the left. The risk lay in the difficulty of making the leap and the turn almost at the same instant. To fail in this would result in horse and man going over the cliff and being dashed to pieces. On they went like the wind, while my son and I followed as fast as we could.

"Bravo, Kenneth!" shouted Gildart, as Bucephalus took the fence like a deer, and disappeared.

Gildart did not know the dangers of the leap: I did, and hastened to the spot with a feeling of intense alarm. On reaching it I saw Kenneth flying far down the slope. He was just in time; a few seconds more, and Lizzie would have been lost. But the bold youth reached the road in time, caught her bridle, reined the horse almost on his haunches, then turned him gradually aside until he galloped with him to a place of safety.

This episode induced us to ride the rest of the way in a more leisurely fashion.

Arrived at Cove, we each went on our several pieces of business, arranging to meet at the north end of the village in about an hour afterwards.

Kenneth found Stephen Gaff at home. Leaving Lizzie to make inquiry as to the health of John Furby, he took the seaman out and walked towards the Downs.

"Well, Stephen, you have been wrecked again, I am told?" said Kenneth.

"So I have, sir; it's the sixth time now. It's quite plain I ain't born to be drownded. I only hope as how I won't live to be hanged."

"I hope not, Stephen. What was the name of the ship?"

"The 'Fairy Queen.'"

"The 'Fairy Queen,'" echoed Kenneth, with a slight feeling of disappointment; "from Australia?"

"Yes, from Australia."

"Did she go to pieces?"

"Ay, not an inch of her left. She was an old rotten tub not fit for sea."

"Indeed! That's by no means an uncommon state of things," said Kenneth, with some degree of warmth. "It seems to me that until men in power take the matter up, and get a more rigid system of inspection instituted, hundreds of lives will continue to be sacrificed every year. It is an awful thing to think that more than a thousand lives are lost annually on our shores, and that because of the indifference of those who have the power, to a large extent, to prevent it. But that is not the point on which I want to speak to you to-day. Was the 'Fairy Queen' bound for this port?"

"No; for the port of London," said Gaff, with a cautious glance at his questioner.

"Then why did she make for Wreckumoft?" inquired Kenneth.

"That's best known to the cap'n, who's gone to his long home," said Gaff gravely.

"Were *all* lost except yourself?" pursued Kenneth, regarding his companion's face narrowly; but the said face exhibited no expression whatever as its owner replied simply—

"It's more than *I* can tell; mayhap some of 'em were carried away on bits o' wreck and may turn up yet."

"At all events none of them came ashore, to your knowledge?"

"I believe that every mother's son o' the crew wos lost but me," replied Gaff evasively.

"Were none of the children saved?"

"What child'n?" asked the other quickly. "I didn't say there was child'n aboord, did I?"

Kenneth was somewhat confused at having made this slip; and Gaff, suddenly changing his tactics, stopped short and said—

“I tell ’ee wot it is, young man—seems to me you’re pumpin’ of me for some ends of yer own as I’m not acquainted with; now, I tell ’ee wot it is, I ain’t used to be pumped. No offence meant, but I ain’t used to be pumped, an’ if you’ve got anything to say, speak it out fair and above board like a man.”

“Well, well, Gaff,” said Kenneth, flushing and laughing at the same moment, “to say truth, I am not used to pump, as you may see, nor to be otherwise than fair and aboveboard, as I hope you will believe; but the fact is that a very curious thing has occurred at our house, and I am puzzled as well as suspicious, and *very* anxious about it.”

Here Kenneth related all that he knew about the little girl having been left at Seaside Villa, and candidly admitted his suspicion that the child was his niece.

“But,” said Gaff, whose visage was as devoid of expression as a fiddle figure-head, “your brother-in-law’s name was Graham, you know.”

“True, that’s what puzzles me; the child’s Christian name is Emma—the same as that of my niece and sister—but she says her last name is Wilson.”

“Well, then, Wilson ain’t Graham, you know, any more nor Gaff ain’t Snooks, d’ye see?”

“Yes, I see; but I’m puzzled, for I *do* see a family likeness to my sister in this child, and I *cannot* get rid of the impression, although I confess that it seems unreasonable. And the thought makes me very anxious, because, if I were correct in my suspicion, that would prove that my beloved sister and her husband are drowned.”

Kenneth said this with strong feeling, and the seaman looked at him more earnestly than he had yet done.

“Your father was hard on your sister and her husband, if I bean’t misinformed,” said Gaff.

“He thought it his duty to be so,” answered Kenneth.

“And you agreed with him?” pursued Gaff.

“No, never!” cried the other indignantly. “I regretted deeply the course my father saw fit to pursue. I sympathised very strongly with my dear sister and poor Tom Graham.”

“Did you?” said Gaff.

“Most truly I did.”

“Hum. You spoke of suspicions—wot was your suspicions?”

“To be candid with you, then,” said Kenneth, “when I came to see you I suspected that it was *you* who left that child at our house, for I heard of your sudden re-appearance in Cove, but I am convinced now that I was wrong, for I know you would not tell me a falsehood, Gaff.”

“No more I would, sir,” said Gaff, drawing himself up, “and no more I *did*; but let me tell to you, sir, nevertheless, that your suspicions is c’rect. *I* left Emmie Wilson at your house, and Emmie Wilson *is* Emma Graham!”

Kenneth stopped and looked earnestly at his companion.

“My sister and brother?” he asked in a low suppressed voice.

“Dead, both of ’em,” said Gaff.

With a mighty effort Kenneth restrained his feelings, and, after walking in silence for some time, asked why Gaff had concealed this from his family, and how it happened that the child did not know her proper name.

“You see, sir,” replied the sailor, “I’ve know’d all along of your father’s ill-will to Mr Graham and his wife, for I went out with them to Australia, and they tuk a fancy to me, d’ye see, an’ so did I to them, so we made it up that we’d jine company, pull in the same boat, so to speak, though it *was* on the land we was goin’ and not the sea. There’s a proverb, sir, that says, ‘misfortin makes strange bed fellows,’ an’ I ’spose it’s the same proverb as makes strange messmates; anyhow, poor Tom Graham, he an’ me an’ his wife, we become messmates, an’ of course we spun no end o’ yarns about our kith and kin, so I found out how your father had treated of ’em, which to say truth I warn’t s’prised at, for I’ve obsarved for years past that he’s hard as nails, altho’ he *is* your father, sir, an’ has let many a good ship go to the bottom for want o’ bein’ properly found—”

“You need not criticise my father, Gaff,” said Kenneth, with a slight frown. “Many men’s sins are not so black as they look. Prevailing custom and temptation may have had more to do with his courses of action than hardness of heart.”

“I dun know *that*,” said Gaff, “hows’ever, I don’t mean for to krittysise him, though I’m bound to say his sins is uncommon dark grey, if they ain’t black. Well, I wos a-goin’ to say that Mr Graham had some rich relations in Melbourne as he didn’t want for to see. He was a proud man, you know, sir, an’ didn’t want ’em to think he cared a stiver for ’em, so he changed his name to Wilson, an’ let his beard an’ mowstaches grow, so that when he put his cap on there was nothin’ of him visible except his eyes and his nose stickin’ out of his face, an’ when his hair grew long, an’ his face was tanned wi’ the sun, his own mother would have cut him dead if she’d met him in the street.

“Well, we worked a year in Melbourne to raise the wind. Tom, (he made me call him Tom, sir), bein’ a clever fellow,

got into a store as a clerk, an' I got work as a porter at the quays; an' though his work was more gentlemanly than mine, I made very near as much as him, so we lived comfortable, and laid by a little. That winter little Emma was born. She just come to poor Tom and his wife like a great sunbeam. Arter that we went a year to the diggin's, and then I got to weary to see my old missus, so I left 'em with a promise to return. I com'd home, saw my wife, and then went out again to jine the Grahams for another spell at the diggin's; then I come home again for another spell wi' the missus, an' so I kep' goin' and comin', year by year, till now.

"Tom was a lucky digger. He resolved to quit for good and all, and return to settle in England. He turned all he had into gold-dust, and put it in a box, with which he shipped aboard the 'Fairy Queen,' of which I was one o' the crew at the time. The 'Fairy Queen,' you must understand, had changed owners just about that time, havin' bin named the 'Hawk' on the voyage out. We sailed together, and got safe to British waters, an' wos knocked all to bits on British rocks, 'cause the compasses wasn't worth a button, as no more wos our charts, bein' old ones, an' the chain o' the best bower anchor had bin got cheap, and wasn't fit to hold a jolly-boat, so that w'en we drove on a lee-shore, and let go the anchor to keep off the reefs, it parted like a bit o' packthread. I took charge of Emmie, and, by God's blessin', got safe to land. All the rest went down.

"Now, sir," continued Gaff, "it came into my head that if I took the little gal to her grandfather, he, bein' as hard as nails, an' desp'rit unforgivin', would swear I wos tellin' a lie, and refuse to take her in. So I thought I'd just go and put her down in the passage an' leave her, so that he'd be obleeged to take her in, d'ye see, not bein' able to see what else to do wi' her. You know he couldn't throw her out, and let her die in the street, could he, sir?"

"Not exactly," replied Kenneth, with a sad smile, "nevertheless he would not find it difficult to dispose of her in some other way; in fact, he has already spoken of sending her to the workhouse."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed I do, but keep your mind easy, Gaff, for, without telling my father who little Emmie is, I will see to it that she is properly cared for."

Kenneth rode back to town that day with a heart so heavy that the bright eyes of Lizzie Gordon failed to rouse him to even the semblance of cheerfulness, and the effervescing small-talk of the volatile Gildart was almost intolerable.

Chapter Eight.

Dan Horsey does the Agreeable in the Kitchen.

"Captain Bingley," said Kenneth, entering my study somewhat hastily on the following morning, "I am going to carry off Gildart for the day to have a ride with me, and I looked in on you in passing to tell you that Haco has arrived in his schooner, and that he is going to sail this evening for London and will take your Russians to their consul if you wish it."

"Thank you, lad; many thanks," said I, "some of them may be able to go, but others, I fear, are too much hurt, and may require to be nursed in the 'Home' for some time yet. I will consider it; meanwhile will you carry a note to your father for me?"

"With pleasure; at least I will send Dan Horsey with it, if that will do as well."

"Quite as well, if you can spare him; send him into the kitchen while I write the note. Adieu, lad, and see that you don't break Gildart's neck. Remember that he is not much accustomed to horses."

"No fear of him," said Kenneth, looking back with a laugh as he reached the door, "he is well used to riding out hard gales, and that is more arduous work than steeple-chasing." When Dan Horsey was told to go to the kitchen and await further orders, he received the command with a cheerful smile, and, attaching the bridle of his horse to a post, proceeded to obey it.

The kitchen of Bingley Hall was the abode of two females who severally owned a distinct and dissimilar character, both mental and physical. The first female—first in most senses of the word—was Bounder the cook, who was fat, as cooks ought to be in order to prove that their productions agree with them; and self-opinionated, as cooks generally are, in order, no doubt, to prove that they know their business.

The second female was Susan Barepoles, a slim, graceful housemaid, apparently modest, (cook did not even pretend to that virtue), and wonderfully sharp-eyed. Both females were good-looking and young, and both were desperately in love with Daniel Horsey. Each knew the fact, and so did Dan. Each was mortally jealous of the other, and Dan was dreadfully perplexed in consequence.

Not that he was uncertain as to which of the two he preferred, for Susan's image was "engruven," as he expressed it, deeply on his heart, to the exclusion of all other images, but he found that the jealousy of the two interfered somewhat with the course of true love, causing it to run in its proverbially rough channel.

"It's a fine mornin', my darlints," said Dan, as he entered the kitchen with a swagger, and laid his hat and riding-whip on the dresser, at the same time seating himself on the edge of a small table that stood near the window. This seat he preferred to a chair, partly because it enabled him to turn his back to the light, and partly because it afforded him an opportunity of swinging his legs gently with an easy motion that was agreeable, and, at the same time, in his opinion, graceful.

"None o' yer imperance," said cook, stirring the contents of a large pan carefully.

Susan tossed her head slightly, but admitted that the morning *was* good.

“He’s a-writin’ of a letter to Grumpy,” said Dan, pointing with his thumb towards the ceiling, in order to indicate that the “he” referred to was myself.

“Who’s Grumpy?” inquired cook, with a look of interest.

“Arrah, now, don’t ye know it’s old Stuart?”

Susan laughed, and cook observed that the name seemed to her an extremely disrespectful one.

“It’s not bad enough for him, the old pair o’ tongs,” said Dan, taking up his whip with a gentlemanly assumption of ease, and flipping the toe of his boot with it; “av it wasn’t for the love that my master Kenneth bears me, I’d have left ’em long ago. But, you see, the young master is a first-rater, and couldn’t get on without me no how, so I’m willin’ to stop. Besides,” continued Dan, with a *very* small sigh, “I have private raisons for not carin’ to leave just now.”

He accompanied the latter remark with a sly glance at Susan, who chanced quite accidentally to cast a sly glance at Dan, so that their eyes met, and the result was that Susan blushed and began to rub the silver tea-pot, which she was cleaning, unmercifully, and Dan laughed. Whereupon cook looked round hastily and asked what he was laughing at, to which Dan responded that his own imagination, which happened to be a brilliant one, had just then suggested a train of comical ideas which had tickled his risible muscles so that he couldn’t help it!

“I don’t believe it,” said cook, who observed Susan’s confusion of face, and became internally red hot with jealousy, “I b’lieve you was larfin’ at me.”

“Och, Miss Bounder!” exclaimed Dan, looking at her with an expression so awfully reproachful that cook instantly repented and laughed.

“There’s bin some strange doin’s up at the Villa,” said Susan, by way of changing the subject, while she polished the tea-pot yet more unmercifully.

“Ah,” exclaimed cook, “that’s true; what does it all mean, Mr Horsey?”

“That’s more nor myself can tell,” said Dan; “the facts o’ the case is clear, so far as they come’d under our obsarvation. But as to the circumstances o’ the case, ’specially those of ’em as hasn’t yet transpired, I don’t rightly know myself wot opinions I ought to entertain.”

Susan listened to these remarks with profound admiration, chiefly because she did not understand them; but cook, who was more matter-of-fact in her nature, and somewhat demonstrative in her tendencies, advised Dan not to talk gammon, but to explain what he meant.

“Explain what I mean, coolinary sunbeam!” said Dan; “isn’t it explainin’ that I am as plain as the nose on yer face, (an’ a purty wan it is), though I haven’t got the powers of a lawyer, nor yit a praist? Didn’t a drippin’ wet sailor come to our door at the dead o’ night an’ ring the bell as bowld as brass, an’ when Mrs Niven, whose intellect was niver much beyond that of a poplypus—”

“What’s a poplypus?” interrupted cook.

“Well now,” remonstrated Dan, “I ain’t ’xactly a walkin’ dictionary; but I b’lieve it’s a baist o’ the say what hain’t got nothin’ but a body an’ a stummik, indeed I’m not sure but that it’s all stummik together, with just legs enough to move about with, or may be a fin or two, an’ a hole to let in the wittles; quite in your line, by the way, Miss Bounder.”

“Imperance!” ejaculated cook.

“No offence,” said Dan; “but ‘to resoom the thread o’ the narrative,’ as the story books say, Mrs Niven she opened the door, and the drippin’ wet sailor he puts a little wet spalpeen in her arms, an’ goes right off without so much as by your lave, an’ that’s all we know about it. An’ Grumpy he goes ragin’ about the house sayin’ he’ll have nothin’ to do wi’ the poor little thing—who’s not so little naither, bein’ a ten-year-old if she’s an hour, an’ a purty sweet face to boot—an’ that he’ll send her to the workus’ or pris’n, or anywhere; but in his house she’s not to stop another day. Well, not havin’ the management o’ the whole of this world’s affairs, (fort’nately, else a scrubbily managed world it would be), Grumpy finds out that when he wants to send little Emmie, (as she calls herself), off, she’s knocked down by a ragin’ fever, an’ the doctor he says it’s as much as her life is worth to move her. So Grumpy has to grin and bear it, and there’s little Emmie lyin’ at this minit in our best bed, (where Mrs Niven put her the moment she was took bad), a-tossin’ her purty arms in the air, an’ makin’ her yellow hair fly over the pillows, and kickin’ off the close like a young angel in a passion, and callin’ on her mama in a voice that would make a stone immage weep, all the while that Miss Penelope is snivellin’ on one side o’ the bed, an’ Mrs Niven is snortin’ on the other.”

“Poor dear,” said Susan in a low voice, devoting herself with intensified zeal to the tea-pot, while sympathetic tears moistened her eyes.

I interrupted the conversation at this point by entering the kitchen with my note to my friend Stuart. I had to pass through the kitchen to my back garden when I wished to leave my house by the back garden gate. I had coughed and made as much noise as possible in approaching the cook’s domains, but they had been so much engrossed with each other that they did not hear me. Dan sprang hastily off the table, and suddenly assumed a deeply respectful air.

“Dan,” said I, “take this note to Mr Stuart as quickly as possible, and bring me an answer without delay. I am going to see Haco Barepoles at—”

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed Susan with a start, and looking at me interrogatively.

“Oh, I forgot, Susan; your father has just arrived from Aberdeen, and is at this moment in the Sailors’ Home. You may run down to see him, my girl, if you choose.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Susan, with a glow of pleasure on her good-looking face, as she pushed the tea-pot from her, and dropt the cloth, in her haste to get away to see her sire.

“Stay, Susan,” said I; “you need not hurry back. In fact, you may spend the day with your father, if you choose; and tell him that I will be down to see him in a few minutes. But I shall probably be there before you. You may take Mr Stuart’s answer to the Home,” I added, turning to Dan; “I shall be there when you return with it.”

“*Yes*, sir,” said Dan in a tone so energetic as to cause me to look at him. I observed that he was winking towards the kitchen door. Casting my eyes thither I saw that Susan’s face was much flushed as he disappeared into the passage. I also noted that the cook’s face was fiery red, and that she stirred a large pot, over which she bent, with unnecessary violence—viciously, as it were.

Pondering on these things I crossed my garden and proceeded towards the Home, which stood on a conspicuous eminence near the docks, at the east end of the town.

Chapter Nine.

The Sailors’ Home and the Mad Skipper.

The Sailors’ Home in Wreckumoft was a neat, substantial, unpretending edifice, which had been built by a number of charitable people, in order to provide a comfortable residence, with board at moderate terms, for the numerous seamen who frequented our port. It also served as a place of temporary refuge to the unfortunate crews of the numerous wrecks which occurred annually on our shores.

Here I found Haco Barepoles, the skipper of a coal sloop, seated on the side of his bed in one of the little berths of the Home, busily engaged in stuffing tobacco into the bowl of a great German pipe with the point of his little finger. Susan, who had outstripped me, was seated beside him with her head on his shoulder.

“Oh, father!” I heard Susan say, as I walked along the passage between the rows of sleeping berths that lined each side of the principal dormitory of our Home; “I shall lose you some day, I fear. How was it that you came so near bein’ wrecked?”

Before the skipper could reply I stood in the doorway of his berth.

“Good-day, Haco,” said I; “glad to see you safe back once more.”

“Thankee, Cap’n Bingley—same to you, sir,” said Haco, rising hastily from the bed and seizing my hand, which he shook warmly, and, I must add, painfully; for the skipper was a hearty, impulsive fellow, apt to forget his strength of body in the strength of his feelings, and given to grasp his male friends with a gripe that would, I verily believe, have drawn a roar from Hercules.

“I’ve come back to the old bunk, you see,” he continued, while I sat down on a chest which served for a chair. “I likes the Home better an’ better every time I comes to it, and I’ve brought all my crew with me; for you see, sir, the ‘Coffin’s’ a’most fallin’ to pieces, and will have to go into dock for a riglar overhaul.”

“The Coffin?” said Susan, interrogatively.

“Yes, lass; it’s only a nickname the old tub got in the north, where they call the colliers coal-coffins, ’cause it’s ten to one you’ll go to the bottom in ’em every time ye go to sea.”

“Are they *all* so bad as to deserve the name?” inquired Susan.

“No, not ’xactly all of ’em; but there’s a good lot as are not half so fit for sea as a washin’ tub. You see, they ain’t worth repairin’, and owners sometimes just take their chance o’ makin’ a safe run by keepin’ the pumps goin’ the whole time.”

I informed Haco that I had called for the purpose of telling him that I had applied to Mr Stuart, who owned his little coal sloop, to give a few wrecked Russians a passage to London, in order that they might be handed over to the care of their consul; but that I would have to find a passage for them in some other vessel, as the “Coffin” was so unseaworthy.

“Don’t be in too great a hurry, sir,” said Haco, with a peculiar smile and twinkle in his eye; “I’m inclined to think that Mr Stuart will send her back to London to be repaired there—”

“What!” exclaimed Susan, with a flush of indignation, “an’ risk your life, father?”

“As to that, lass, my life has got to be risked anyhow, and it ain’t much worth, to say the truth; so you needn’t trouble yourself on that pint.”

“It’s worth a great deal to me,” said Susan, drawing herself closer to the side of her rugged parent.

I could not help smiling as I looked at this curious specimen of a British seaman shaking his head gravely and

speaking so disparagingly of himself, when I knew, and every one in the town knew, that he was one of the kindest and most useful of men. He was a very giant in size, with a breadth of shoulder that would have made him quite ridiculous had it not been counterbalanced by an altitude of six feet four. He had a huge head of red hair, and a huge heart full of tenderness. His only fault was utter recklessness in regard to his own life and limbs—a fault which not unfrequently caused him to place the lives and limbs of others in jeopardy, though he never could be brought to perceive that fact.

“Whatever your life may be worth, my friend,” said I, “it is to be hoped that Mr Stuart will not risk it by sending you to sea in the ‘Coffin’ till it is thoroughly overhauled.”

“Come in!” shouted the skipper, in answer to a rap at the door.

The invitation to enter was not accepted, but the rap was repeated.

“Go, Susan,” said I, “see who it is.”

Susan obeyed—with unusual alacrity, as I fancied, but did not return with equal quickness. We heard her whispering with some one; then there was a sound as if of a suppressed scream, followed by something that was marvellously like a slap applied to a cheek with an open hand. Next moment Susan re-appeared with a letter and a very flushed face.

“A letter, sir,” said Susan, dropping her eyes.

“Who brought it?” I inquired.

“Mr Horsey, sir.” Susan stammered the name, and looked confused. “He waits an answer, sir.”

Haco Barepoles had been eyeing his daughter gravely the while. He now sprang up with the wild energy that was his peculiar characteristic, and flinging the door wide-open with a crash that shook the whole framework of the berth, stood face to face with Dan Horsey.

Intense gravity marked the features of the groom, who stood, hat in hand, tapping the side of his top-boot with a silver-mounted riding-whip. He met Haco’s steady frown with a calm and equally steady gaze of his clear grey eyes; and then, relaxing into a smile, nodded familiarly, and inquired if the weather was fine up there, bekaise, judgin’ from his, (Haco’s), face he would be inclined to think it must be raither cowld!

Haco smiled grimly: “Ye was to wait an answer, was ye?”

“If I may venture to make so bowld as to say so in the presence of your highness, I was.”

“Then wait,” said Haco, smiling a little less grimly.

“Thank ye, sir, for yer kind permission,” said Dan in a tone and with an air of assumed meekness.

The skipper returned to the bed, which creaked as if taxed to its utmost, when he sat down on it, and drew Susan close to his side.

“This is from Mr Stuart, Haco,” said I, running my eye hastily over the note; “he consents to my sending the men in your vessel, but after what you have told me—”

“Don’t mind wot I told ye, Captain Bingley. I’ll see Mr Stuart to-day, an’ll call on you in the afternoon. The ‘Coffin’ ain’t quite so bad as she looks. Have ’ee any answer to send back?”

“No,” said I, turning to Dan, who still stood at the door tapping his right boot with a jaunty air; “tell your master, with my compliments, that I will see him about this matter in the evening.”

“And hark’ee, lad,” cried Haco, again springing up and confronting the groom, “d’ye see this young ’ooman?” (pointing to Susan.)

“Sure I do,” replied Dan, with a smile and a nod to Susan, “an’ a purty cratur she is, for the eye of man to rest upon.”

“And,” shouted Haco, shaking his enormous fist within an inch of the other’s nose, “d’ye see them there knuckles?”

Dan regarded them steadfastly for a moment or two without winking or flinching.

“They’re a purty bunch o’ fives,” he said at length, drawing back his head, and placing it a little on one side in order to view the “bunch,” with the air of a connoisseur; “very purty, but raither too fat to do much damage in the ring. I should say, now, that it would get ‘puffy’ at the fifth round, supposin’ that you had wind and pluck left, at your time of life, to survive the fourth.”

“Well now, lad,” retorted the skipper, “all I’ve to say is, that you’ve seed it, an’ if you don’t mind yer eye ye’ll *feel* it. ‘A nod’s as good as a wink to a blind horse.’”

Haco plunged the “bunch of fives” into his coat-pocket, and sat down again beside his agitated daughter.

“I can speak purfessionally,” said Dan, “in regard to yer last obsarvation consarnin’ blind hosses, and I belave that ye’re c’rect. It *don’t* much matter whether ye nod or wink to a blind hoss; though I can’t spake from personal exparience ’caise I niver tried it on, not havin’ nothin’ to do with blind hosses. Ye wouldn’t have a weed, would ye, skipper?” he added, pulling out a neat leather case from which he drew a cigar!

“Go away, Dan, directly,” said I with some asperity, for I was nettled at the impudence of the man in my presence, and not a little alarmed lest the angry Haco should kick him down-stairs.

Dan at once obeyed, bowing respectfully to me, and, as I observed, winking to Susan as he turned away. He descended the stair in silence, but we heard him open the door of the public room and address the Russians, who were assembled there, warming themselves at the fire, and enjoying their pipes.

“Hooray! my hearties,” said Dan; “got yer broken legs rewived I hope, and yer spurrits bandaged up? Hey,—och! I forgot ye can swaller nothin’ but Toorko—cum, squaki lorum ho po, doddie jairum frango whiskie looro—whack?—eh! Arrah! ye don’t need to answer for fear the effort opens up yer wounds afresh. Farewell, lads, or may be it’s wishin’ ye fair-wind would be more nat’ral.”

So saying he slammed the door, and we heard him switching his boots as he passed along the street under the windows, whistling the air of “The girls we left behind us,” followed, before he was quite out of earshot, by “Oh my love is like the red red rose, that’s newly sprung in June.”

Immediately after Dan’s departure I left Haco and Susan together, and they held the following conversation when left alone. I am enabled to report it faithfully, reader, because Susan told it word for word to her mistress, who has a very reprehensible habit of listening to the gossip of her maid. Of course Mrs B told it to me, because she tells everything to me, sometimes a good deal more than I care to hear. This I think a very reprehensible habit also. I am bound to listen, because when my strong-minded wife begins to talk I might as well try to stop a runaway locomotive as attempt to silence her. And so it comes about that I am now making the thing public!

“Susan,” said Haco, earnestly looking at his daughter’s downcast face, on which the tell tale blood was mantling. “Are you fond o’ that—that feller?”

“Ye–yes, father,” replied Susan, with some hesitation.

“Humph! an’ is he fond o’ *you*?”

“Oh, isn’t he, just,” said Susan, with a little confused laugh.

“Susan,” continued Haco, with increasing earnestness, “Are ye sure he’s worthy of you?”

“Yes, father, I’m *quite* sure of that.”

“Well then, Susan, you’re a sensible girl, and you ought to know best; but I don’t feel easy about ye, ’cause you’re just as like as two peas to your dear mother, what went to the bottom in the last coal-coffin I commanded, an’ you would ha’ gone too, darlin’, if I hadn’t bin spared to swim ashore with ye on my back. It was all I could do. Ah, Susan! it was a black night for you an’ me that. Well, as I was a sayin’, you’re as like yer mother as two peas, and she was as trustful as you are, an’ little knew wot a bad lot she got when she set her heart on me.”

“Father, that’s not true.”

“Ain’t it, lass? Well, let it pass, but then this feller, this Dan Hursey—”

“Horsey, father,” said Susan.

“Well, well, it ain’t much better; this Horsey is an Irishman, an’ I don’t like Irishmen.”

“Father, you’d get to like ’em if you only knew ’em better,” said Susan earnestly. “What bell’s that?” she added, as a loud ringing echoed through the house.

“The dinner bell, lass. Come an’ see wot a comf’rable feed they git. I can tell ’ee that them Sailors’ Homes is the greatest blessin’ that was ever got up for us sea-dogs. We ain’t ’xactly such soft good natur’d ignorant big babies as some o’ your well-meanin’ pheelanthropists would make us out; but we *are* uncommon hard put to it when we git ashore, for every port is alive with crimps an’ land-sharks to swaller us up when we come off a long voyage; an’ the wust of it is, that we’re in a wild reckless humour for the most part when we git ashore with our pockets full o’ yellow boys, an’ are too often quite willin’ to *be* swallered up, so that lots of us are constantly a-goin’ to sticks an’ stivers. An’ then before the Homes was set a-goin’, the fellers as wanted to get quiet lodgin’s didn’t find it easy to know where to look for ’em, an’ was often took in; an’ when they wanted to send cash to their wives or mothers, they didn’t well know how to manage it; but now, wherever there’s a Home you can git cheap board, good victuals, help in the way o’ managin’ yer cash, an’ no end of advice gratis. It’s only a pity there ain’t one or two of ’em in every port in the kingdom.

“See here,” continued Haco, warming with his subject as he led Susan past the dormitories where the Russians, who had been maimed during the recent wrecks, were being supplied with dinner in their berths, “see here,—another o’ the best o’ the institootions o’ this land looks arter them poor fellers, an’ pays their shot for ’em as long as they’re here, an’ sends them to their homes free of expense—that’s the Shipwrecked Fishermen’s and Mariners’ Society. You’ve heerd o’ that Society, Susan, haven’t ’ee?”

“No father, never.”

“What, never heerd o’ the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society with its hundreds o’ honorary agents all round the coast, who have done more to dry the tears o’ orphans an’ comfort widders’ hearts than tongue can tell?—Never heerd o’ it, an’ you a sailor’s daughter?”

“I daresay I’m very stupid for being so ignorant, father; but I never heard of it. You know I’ve spent most o’ my life

inland with old Auntie Bess, an' only come here this year.

"Mayhap," continued Haco, shaking his head gravely, "you've never heer'd, neither, o' the Lifeboat Institootion."

"Never," said Susan meekly. "I've seen the lifeboat we have here, you know, but I never heard of the Institootion."

"Well, well, Susan, I needn't be surprised, for, to say truth, there's many in this country, who think no small beer o' theirselves, that know precious little about either the one or the other, although they're the most valooable Institootions in the country. I'll tell 'ee about 'em, lass, some other time—how they saves hundreds o' lives, an' relieves no end o' distress annooally. It's enough just now to say that the two Institootions is what I calls brother an' sister—the Lifeboat one bein' the brother; the Shipwrecked Mariners' one bein' the sister. The brother, besides savin' thousands o' pounds worth o' goods, saves hundreds o' lives every year. But when the brother has saved the shipwrecked sailor, his work is done. He hands him over to the sister, who clothes him, feeds him, warms him—as you see bein' done to them there Roosians—and then sends him home. Every sailor in the country should be a member o' the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, say I. I've been one myself for many years, an' it only costs me three shillings a year. I'll tell 'ee some other time what good it does me; but just now you an' I shall go an' have some grub."

"Where shall we go to get it, father?"

"To the refreshment room below, lass. It won't do to take ye to the dinin' hall o' the Home for three reasons,—first, 'cause ye're a 'ooman, an' they ain't admitted; second, 'cause it wouldn't be pleasant for ye to dine wi' forty or fifty Jack-tars; and, thirdly, if ye wanted it ever so much yer old father wouldn't let ye—so come along, lass, to dinner."

Chapter Ten.

The Dinner in the Restaurant—Haco meets an Old Friend and becomes Communicative.

The room to which Haco led his daughter was a small oblong one, divided off into compartments similar to those with which we are familiar in eating-houses and restaurants of the poorer class. It formed part of the Home, but was used by the general public as well as by seamen, who wished to order a meal at any time and pay for it.

Haco Barepoles, being at the time a boarder in the home, was entitled to his dinner in the general mess-room, but being bent on enjoying his meal in company with Susan, he chose to forego his rights on that occasion.

Being the hour at which a number of seamen, labourers, clerks, and others were wont to experience the truth of the great fact that nature abhors a vacuum, the room was pretty full, and a brisk demand was going on for soup, tea, coffee, rolls, and steaks, etcetera, all of which were supplied on the most moderate terms, in order to accommodate the capacities of the poorest purse.

In this temple of luxury you could get a small bowl of good soup for one penny, which, with a halfpenny roll, might form a dinner to any one whose imagination was so strong as to enable him to believe he had had enough. Any one who was the fortunate possessor of threepence, could, by doubling the order, really feel his appetite appeased. Then for those whose poverty was extreme, or appetite unusually small, a little cup of tea could be supplied for one halfpenny—and a good cup of tea too, not particularly strong, it is true, but with a fair average allowance of milk and sugar.

"Waiter," cried Haco Barepoles in a voice that commanded instant attention.

"Yessir."

"Soup for two, steaks an' 'taties for ditto to foller."

"Yessir."

"Please, father, I would like a cup of coffee after the soup instead of a steak. I don't feel very hungry."

"All right, lass. Waiter, knock off one o' the steaks an' clap a cup o' coffee in its place."

"Yessir. Roll with it, Miss?"

"Of course," said Haco.

"Butter, Miss?"

"Sartinly. An' double allowance o' milk an' sugar," replied the skipper. "S'pose you han't got cream?"

"No sir."

"Never mind. Look alive now, lad. Come, Susan, here's a box with only one man in't, we'll— Hallo! shiver my timbers if it ain't—no—it can't be—Stephen Gaff, eh! or his ghost?"

"Just so," said Stephen, laying down his knife and fork, and shaking warmly the hand which Haco stretched across the table to him; "I'm always turnin' up now an' again like a bad shillin'. How goes life with 'ee, Haco? you don't seem to have multiplied the wrinkles since I last saw ye."

"Thank 'ee, I'm pretty comf'rable. This is my darter Susan," said Haco, observing that his friend glanced inquiringly at

his fair companion—“The world always uses me much the same. I find it a roughish customer, but it finds me a jolly one, an’ not easily put out. When did I see ye last? Let me see,—two years come Christmas. Why, I’ve been wrecked three times since then, run down twice, an’ drownded at least half-a-dozen times; but by good luck they always manages to bring me round—rowsussitate me, as the doctors call it.”

“Ay, you’ve had hard times of it,” observed Gaff, finishing his last morsel of meat, and proceeding to scrape up the remains of gravy and potato with his knife; “I’ve bin wrecked myself sin’ we last met, but only once, and that warn’t long ago, just the last gale. You coasters are worse off than we are. Commend me to blue water, and plenty o’ sea-room.”

“I believe you, my boy,” responded the skipper. “There’s nothin’ like a good offing an’ a tight ship. We stand but a poor chance as we go creepin’ ’long shore in them rotten tubs, that are well named ‘Coal-Coffins.’ Why, if it comes on thick squally weather or a gale when yer dodgin’ off an’ on, the ‘Coal-Coffins’ go down by dozens. Mayhap at the first burst o’ the gale you’re hove on your beam-ends, an’ away go the masts, leavin’ ye to drift ashore or sink; or p’raps you’re sharp enough to get in sail, and have all snug, when, just as ye’re weatherin’ a headland, away goes the sheet o’ the jib, jib’s blowed to ribbons, an’ afore ye know where ye are, ‘breakers on the lee bow!’ is the cry. Another gust, an’ the rotten foretops’l’s blow’d away, carryin’ the fore-topmast by the board, which, of course, takes the jib-boom along with it, if it an’t gone before. Then it’s ‘stand by to let go the anchor.’ ‘Let go!’ ‘Ay, ay, sir.’ Down it goes, an’ the ‘Coffin’s’ brought up sharp; not a moment too soon, mayhap, for ten to one but you see an’ hear the breakers, roarin’ like mad, thirty yards or so astern. It may be good holdin’ ground, but what o’ that?—the anchor’s an old ’un, or too small; the fluke gives way, and ye’re adrift; or the cable’s too small, and can’t stand the strain, so you let go both anchors, an’ ye’d let go a dozen more if ye had ’em for dear life; but it’s o’ no use. First one an’ then the other parts; the stern is crushed in a’most afore ye can think, an’ in two minutes more, if not less, it’s all up with ye, unless there’s a lifeboat at hand.”

“Ah! pity there’s not more of ’em on the coast,” said Gaff.

“True,” rejoined Haco, “many a poor feller’s saved every year by them blessed boats, as would otherwise have gone to the bottom, an’ left widder and childer to weep for him, an’ be a burden, more or less, on the country.”

The waiter appeared at this point in the conversation with the soup, so Haco devoted himself to dinner, while Gaff ordered a plate of bread and cheese extra in order to keep him company. For some minutes they all ate in silence. Then Haco, during the interval between the courses, informed Gaff that he expected to return to the port of London in a day or two; whereupon Gaff said that he just happened to be lookin’ out for a ship goin’ there, as he had business to do in the great city, and offered to work his way. The skipper readily promised to ship him as an extra hand, if the owner chose to send the ‘Coffin’ to sea without repairs, “which,” observed Haco, “is not unlikely, for he’s a close-fisted customer.”

“Who is he?” inquired Gaff.

“Stuart of Seaside Villa,” said Haco.

“Ha! he *is* a tough un,” observed Gaff, with a significant grin. “I knows him well. He don’t much care riskin’ fellers’ lives, though I never heard of him riskin’ his own.”

“He’d very near to answer for mine this voyage,” said Haco, as well as he could through a mouthful of steak and potato.

“How was that?”

“This is how it was,” answered the skipper, bolting the mouthful, “you see the ‘Coffin’s’ not in a fit state for sea; she’s leaky all over, an’ there’s a plank under the starboard quarter, just abaft the cabin skylight, that has fairly struck work, caulk it and pitch it how you please, it won’t keep out the sea no longer, so when we was about to take in cargo, I wrote to Mr Stuart tellin’ him of it, an’ advisin’ repairs, but he wrote back, sayin’ it was very awk’ard at this time to delay that cargo, an’ askin’ if I couldn’t work the pumps as I had used to do, besides hintin’ that he thought I must be gettin’ timid as I grew old! You may be sure I didn’t think twice. Got the cargo aboard; up sail an’ away.

“Well, it was blowin’ a stiff nor’-wester when we got away, an’ we couldn’t have beat into port again if our lives depended on it. So I calls the crew aft, an’ told ’em how the matter stood. ‘Now, lads,’ says I, ‘to speak plain English, the sloop is sinkin’ so you had as well turn to an’ pump for yer lives, an’ I’ll show ye how.’ With that I off coat an’ set to work, an’ took my turn the whole voyage. But it was touch an’ go with us. We nigh sank in the harbour here, an’ I had to run her ashore to perwent her goin’ down in deep water. They’re patchin’ up the rotten plank at this minute, an’ if old Stuart won’t go in for a general overhaul, we’ll be ready for sea in a day or two, and you’ll have the pleasure o’ navigatin’ a lot o’ wrecked Roosians to London. Now, waiter, ahoy!—”

“Yessir.”

“Fetch me a pannikin o’ tea, for it’s dry work tellin’ a anikdot. You see, Gaff, I’m a reg’lar teetotaller—never go the length o’ coffee even without a doctor’s surtificate. Another cup, Susan?”

“No thank ’ee, father, I couldn’t.”

“Werry good. Now, Gaff, what’s the ’ticklers o’ *your* case. Time about’s fair play, you know.”

Gaff, feeling a gush of confidence come over him, and having ascertained that, in regard to secrecy, Susan was as “safe as the bank,” related the circumstances of the wreck, and his having left Emmie at her grandfather’s villa; the relation of all which caused Haco Barepoles to give vent to a series of low grunts and whistles, expressive of great

surprise.

“Now,” said Gaff in conclusion, “there’s a land-shark, (by which I means a lawyer), in London what writes to me that there’s somethin’ I’ll hear of to my advantage if I calls on him.”

“Don’t go,” said Haco, stoutly, as he struck the table with his fist, causing the crockery to rattle again; “take the advice of an old friend, an’ *don’t go*. If you do, he’ll *do* you.”

“Thank’ee, an’ I’d foller yer advice, but I happens to know this land-shark. He’s an old acquaintance, an’ I can trust him.”

“Oh, that alters the case—well?”

“Well, but before I go,” continued Gaff, “I wants to write a letter to old Stuart to warn him to look arter Emmie; a very partikler letter.”

“Ay, how much partikler a one?” inquired Haco.

“A hambigoo-ous one,” replied his friend.

“A ham—what?” said Haco interrogatively.

“A ham-big-oo-ous one.”

“What sort of a one may that be, mate?”

“Well,” said Gaff, knitting his heavy brows, and assuming altogether a learned aspect, “it’s a one that you can’t make head nor tail of nohow; one as’ll read a’rnost as well back’ard as for’ard, an’ yet has got a smack o’ somethin’ mysterious in it, w’ich shows, so to speak, to what pint o’ the compass your steerin’ for—d’ye see?”

“H’m—rather hazy ahead,” answered the skipper with a deeply sagacious look; “a difficult letter to write in my opinion. How d’ye mean to do it?”

“Don’t mean to do it at all. Couldn’t do it to save my life; but I’ll get a clerk to do it for me, a smart young clerk too; *you* know who I mean.”

“Ay, who’ll it be? I’ll never guess; never guessed a guess in my life.”

“You know my darter Tottie?”

“What, blue-eyed Tottie? oh, yer jokin’!”

“Not a bit. That child’s a parfec’ cooriosity of intelligence. She can write and read most wonderful for her age.”

“But she’ll never be able to do the ham—what d’ye call it?” suggested Haco.

“Of course not; she’s too young for that, but the wife’ll do that. You’ve no notion how powerful hambigoo-ous she is now an’ again. We’ll manage it amongst us. Tottie can write like a parson, my wife can read, though she can’t write, an’ll see that it’s all c’rect, specially the spellin’ an’ the makin’ of it hambigoo-ous; an’ I’ll supply the idees, the notions like, an’ superintend, so to speak, an’ we’ll make little Billy stand by wi’ the blottin’-paper, just to keep him out o’ mischief.”

Haco regarded his friend with deepening admiration. The idea of producing a “hambigoo-ous” letter by such an elaborate family combination, in which each should supply his co-labourer’s deficiency, was quite new and exceedingly interesting to him. Suddenly his countenance became grave, as it occurred to him that there was no call for such a letter at all, seeing that Kenneth Stuart was sure to do his best to induce his father to take care of the child. On observing this to his friend, the latter shook his head.

“I’m not quite sure o’ Mister Kenneth,” said he, “it’s likely that he’ll do the right thing by her, but ‘like father, like son’ is an old proverb. He may be a chip o’ the old block.”

“That he is not,” interrupted Haco warmly. “I know the lad well. He takes after his poor mother, and I’m sartin sure ye may trust him.”

“Well, I *must* trust him,” said Gaff, “but I’ve had no experience of him; so I mean to ‘make assurance doubly sure,’ as the prophet says, if it wasn’t the poet—an’ that’s why I’ll write this letter. If it don’t do no good, it won’t do no harm.”

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” said Haco, shaking his head as they rose to depart, “hows’ever, you know best. Now mind, Susan, not a word o’ this to any one.”

Susan promised, and in the course of the evening related the whole affair to Daniel Horsey “*in confidence*;” her conscience being apparently relieved by the idea that having told it only in strict confidence she had not broken her word!

Dan made her promise solemnly that she would tell the tale to no one else on earth, either in confidence or otherwise, and thus he checked the stream of gossip as close to its fountain-head as possible.

Chapter Eleven.

The Writing of the “Hambigoo-ous” Letter.

When Stephen Gaff approached his own cottage, he beheld his wife belabouring the Bu’ster with both hands and tongue unmercifully. What special piece of mischief Billy had been doing is not of much consequence. It is enough to state that he suddenly planted the heel of his naked foot somewhat effectively on his mother’s little toe, which chanced to be resting on a sharp stone at the moment, burst from her grasp, and rushed down the steep bank to the beach cheering, weeping, and laughing all at once, in a sort of hysterical triumph.

Mrs Gaff shouted at the top of her voice to the cherub to come back and get mauled; but the cherub declined the invitation until he heard his father’s voice, when he returned joyously, and took shelter under his wing. Mrs Gaff, who could change at a moment’s notice from the extreme of anger to perfect quiescence, contented herself with shaking her fist at the Bu’ster, and then relapsed from the condition of a fury into a quiet, good-looking dame.

This appears to be the normal condition of fisher-folk, who would seem to require to make use of an excessive amount of moral and physical suasion in order suitably to impress their offspring.

“Now, Jess,” said Gaff, leading his son by the hand; “let’s set to work at once wi’ that there letter.”

“What’s all the hurry, Stephen?”

“I’ve just seed my old shipmate, Haco Barepoles, an’ it’s not unlikely he’ll be ready for sea day arter to-morrow; so the sooner we turn this little job out o’ hands the better. Come, Tottie, you’re a good *girl*; I see you’ve purvided the paper and ink. Get the table cleaned, lass, and you, Billy, come here.”

The Bu’ster, who had suddenly willed to have a shy at the household cat with a small crab which he had captured, and which was just then endeavouring vainly to ascend the leg of a chair, for a wonder did not carry out his will, but went at once to his sire.

“Whether would ye like to go play on the beach, lad, or stop here and hold the blottin’-paper while we write a letter?”

Billy elected to hold the blotting-paper and watch proceedings, being curious to know what the letter was to be about.

When all was ready—the table cleared of everything except what pertained to the literary work then in hand—Stephen Gaff sat down at one end of the table; his wife drew her chair to the other end; Tottie, feeling very proud and rather nervous, sat between them, with a new quill in her hand, and a spotless sheet of foolscap before her. The Bu’ster stood by with the blot-sheet, looking eager, as if he rather wished for blots, and was prepared to swab them up without delay.

“Are ye ready, Tot?” asked Gaff.

“Yes, quite,” answered the child.

“Then,” said Gaff; with the air of a general officer who gives the word for the commencement of a great fight, “begin, an’ fire away.”

“But what am I to say, daddy?”

“Ah, to be sure, you’d better begin, Tottie,” said Gaff, evidently in perplexity; “you’d better begin as they teach you to at the school, where you’ve larnt to write so butiful.”

Here Mrs Gaff advised, rather abruptly, that she had better write, “this comes hoping you’re well;” but her husband objected, on the ground that the words were untrue, inasmuch as he did not care a straw whether the person to be written to was well or ill.

“Is’t to a man or a ’ooman we’re a-writin’, daddie?” inquired the youthful scribe.

“It’s a gentleman.”

“Then we’d better begin ‘dear sir,’ don’t you think?”

“But he an’t dear to me,” said Gaff.

“No more is he to me,” observed his wife.

“Make it ‘sir,’ plain ‘sir’ means nothin’ in partickler, I b’lieve,” said Gaff with animation, “so we’ll begin it with plain ‘sir.’ Now, then, fire away, Tottie.”

“Very well,” said Tottie, dipping her pen in the ink-bottle, which was a stone one, and had been borrowed from a neighbour who was supposed to have literary tendencies in consequence of his keeping such an article in his cottage. Squaring her elbows, and putting her head *very* much on one side, to the admiration of her parents, she prepared to write.

The Bu’ster clutched the blotting-paper, and looked on eagerly, not to say hopefully.

“Oh!” exclaimed Tottie, “it’s *red* ink; see.”

She held up the pen to view, and no one could deny the fact, not even Billy, who, feeling that he had repressed his

natural flow of spirits rather longer than he was accustomed to, and regarding the incident as in some degree destructive of his mother's peace of mind, hailed the discovery with an exulting cheer.

Mrs Gaff's palm instantly exploded like a pistol-shot on Billy's ear, and he measured his length—exactly three feet six—on the floor.

To rise yelling, and receive shot number two from his mother, which sent him headlong into the arms of his father, who gave him the red ink-bottle, and bade him cut away and get it changed as fast as he could scuttle—to do all this, I say, was the work of a moment or two.

Presently Billy returned with the same bottle, and the information that the literary neighbour had a black-ink-bottle, but as there was no ink in it he didn't think it worth while to send it. A kind offer was made of a bottle of shoe-blacking if the red ink would not do.

"This is awk'ard," said Gaff, rubbing his nose.

"Try some tar in it," suggested Mrs Gaff.

Gaff shook his head; but the suggestion led him to try a little soot, which was found to answer admirably, converting the red ink into a rich dark brown, which might pass for black.

Supplied with this fluid, which having been made too thick required a good deal of water to thin it, Tottie again squared her elbows on the table; the parents sat down, and the Bu'ster re-mounted guard with the blotting-paper, this time carefully out of earshot.

"Now, then, 'dear sir,'" said Tottie, once more dipping her pen.

"No, no; didn't I say, plain 'Sir,'" remonstrated her father.

"Oh, I forgot, well—there—it—is—now, '*Plane sur*,' but I've not been taught that way at school yet."

"Never mind what you've bin taught at school," said Mrs Gaff somewhat sharply, for her patience was gradually oozing out, "do you what you're bid."

"Why, it looks uncommon like *two* words, Tottie," observed her father, eyeing the letters narrowly. "I would ha' thought, now, that three letters or four at most would have done it, an' some to spare."

"Three letters, daddie!" exclaimed the scribe with a laugh, "there's eight of 'em no less."

"Eight!" exclaimed Gaff in amazement. "Let's hear 'em, dear."

Tottie spelled them off quite glibly. "P-l-a-n-e, that's plane; s-u-r, that's sur."

"Oh, Tot," said Gaff with a mingled expression of annoyance and amusement, "I didn't want ye to *write* the word 'plain.' Well, well," he added, patting the child on the head, while she blushed up to the roots of her hair and all down her neck and shoulders, "it's not much matter, just you score it out; there, go over it again, once or twice, an' scribble through it,—that's your sort. Now, can ye read what it was?"

"No, daddie."

"Are ye sure?"

"Quite sure, for I've scratched it into a hole right through the paper."

"Never mind, it's all the better."

"Humph!" interjected Mrs Gaff. "He'll think we began 'dear sir,' and then changed our minds and scratched out the 'dear!'"

To this Gaff replied that what was done couldn't be undone, and ordered Tottie to "fire away once more."

"What next," asked the scribe, a good deal flurried and nervous by this time, in consequence of which she dipped the pen much too deep, and brought up a globule of ink, which fell on the paper just under the word that had been written down with so much pains, making a blot as large as a sixpence.

The Bu'ster came down on it like lightning with the blot-sheet, and squashed it into an irregular mass bigger than half-a-crown.

For this he received another open-hander on the ear, and was summarily dismissed to the sea-beach.

By this time the family tea-hour had arrived, so Mrs Gaff proposed an adjournment until after tea. Tottie, who was now blotting the letter with an occasional tear, seconded the motion, which was carried by acclamation. While the meal was being prepared, Gaff fondled Tottie until she was restored to her wonted equanimity, so that after tea the task was resumed with spirit. Words and ideas seemed to flow more easily, and the letter was finally concluded, amid many sighs of relief, about bed-time.

Much blotted, and almost unreadable though it was, I think it worthy of being presented to my readers without correction.

“I beggs to stait that ittle bee for yoor int’rest for to look arter that air gurl cald Eme as was left yoor doar sum dais bak, if yoo doant ittle bee wors for yer, yood giv yer eer an noas too to no wot i nos abowt that gurl, it’s not bostin nor yet threttenin I am, no, I’m in Downrite arnist wen I sais as yool bee sorrie if yoo doant do it.”

(This part was at first written, “if you doant look arter the gurl,” but by the advice of Mrs Gaff the latter part was cut out, and “doant do it” substituted as being more hambigoo-ous and alarming! The letter continued:—)

“Now sur, i must cloas, not becaws my papers dun, no nor yet my idees, but becaws a nods as good as a wink—yoo no the rest. Wot ive said is troo as gospl it’s of no use tryn to find owt hoo *i* am, caws whi—yoo kant, and if yoo cood it wood doo yoo no good.

“Yoors to comand,

“The riter.”

When this letter was placed in Mr Stuart’s hands the following morning he was in the act of concluding a conversation with Haco Barepoles.

“Well, Haco,” he said, regarding the ill-folded and dirty epistle with suspicion, as it lay on the table before him; “of course I have no wish that men should risk their lives in my service, so you may lay up the sloop in dock and have her overhauled; but I have always been under the impression until now that you were a fearless seaman. However, do as you please.”

Mr Stuart knew well the character of the man with whom he had to do, and spoke thus with design. Haco fired at once, but he displayed no temper.

“Very likely I *am* gittin’ summat fusty an’ weak about the buzzum,” he said, almost sadly. “A man can’t expect to keep young and strong for ever, Mr Stuart. Hows’ever, I’ll look at her bottom again, an’ if she can float, I’ll set sail with the first o’ the ebb day arter to-morrow. Good-day, sir.” Haco bowed and left the room quite modestly, for he hated the very appearance of boasting; but when he was in the passage his teeth snapped together like nut-crackers as he compressed his lips, and on gaining the street he put on his hat with a bang that would have ruinously crushed it had it not been made of some glazed material that was evidently indestructible.

Going straight to the docks he gave orders to the carpenter to have all tight before next morning—this in a tone that the carpenter knew from experience meant, “fail if you dare.”

Then he went up to the Home, and ordered his men and the Russians to get ready for sea. Thereafter he went away at full speed to Cove, with his red locks and his huge coat-tails flowing in the breeze. Rapping at the door he was bid to enter.

“How are ’ee, lad?” said Haco to Uncle John, who was seated at the fireside smoking.

“Thank’ee, rather shaky. I must ha’ bin pretty nigh finished that night; but I feel as if I’d be all taught and ready for sea in a few days.”

“That’s right!” said Haco heartily. “Is Gaff hereabouts to-day?”

The man in request entered at the moment.

“Good-day, skipper,” said Gaff, “I seed ’ee comin’. Ony news?”

“Ay, the ‘Coffin’ starts day arter to-morrow. I just run down to let you know. Sink or swim, fair or foul, it’s up anchor with the first o’ the mornin’ ebb. I’m goin’ up to see Cap’n Bingley now. Not a moment to spare.”

“Avast heavin’,” said Gaff, pulling on a pilot coat; “I’m goin’ with ’ee. Goin’ to jine the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society. Since my last swim I’ve bin thinkin’ that three shillin’s a year is but a small sum, and the good that they’d do to my widder and childer, if I was drownded, would be worth while havin’.”

“Right, lad, right; every sailor and fisherman should jine it. But come along; no time for talkin’ here. My respects to the missus. Good-bye, lad.”

Shaking hands with Uncle John, the restless skipper once more put on the imperishable hat with inconceivable violence and left the hut, followed by his friend.

Returning to Mr Stuart, we find him perusing the ambiguous letter. His first glance at the contents called forth a look of indignation, which was succeeded by one of surprise, and that was followed by a smile of contempt, mingled with amusement.

“Kenneth,” he said, tossing the letter to his son, who entered at the moment, “can you make anything of that?”

“Not much,” replied Kenneth, who at once guessed that it came from Gaff. “The persons who left the child here would appear to be mad, and anxious to get rid of their own offspring. But I came to tell you of sad forebodings that fill my breast, father.”

“Don’t give way to forebodings, Kenneth,” said the father gravely; “it is unmanly, unreasonable.”

“Well, suspicions, if you think the word more appropriate. I fear much, *very* much, that my dear sister and poor Tom Graham were lost in the last storm—”

“Why do you omit the child?” asked Mr Stuart quietly, almost coldly.

“I was thinking only of those whom I had known and loved when I spoke,” replied Kenneth with some emotion.

“There is no *certainty* that they are lost,” observed Mr Stuart.

Kenneth thought there was a slight tremor in his father’s voice, but, on glancing at his stern features, he felt that he must have been mistaken.

“We know that the ship was telegraphed as having been seen in the Channel; we have heard that they were passengers in her, and nothing has been heard or seen of her since the night of the storm.”

“There is no *certainty* in all that,” reiterated the other; “they may not have come in that vessel; if they did, some of them may have escaped. We cannot tell.”

Mr Stuart looked so cold and so sternly immovable as he said this, while carelessly turning over some papers, that Kenneth, who had come prepared to reveal all, resolved to keep his secret, believing that there was no pity left in his father’s breast.

As he lay awake and sorrowing that night he heard his father’s step pacing to and fro incessantly during the whole night, and hoped that the loss he had in all probability sustained would break up the ice; but next morning at breakfast he was as cold as ever. He looked very pale, indeed, but he was sterner and even more irascible than usual in regard to the merest trifles, so Kenneth’s resolution not to confide in his father was confirmed.

Chapter Twelve.

The Bu’ster wills to accomplish Mischief, and gets into Trouble.

“At sea.”—How differently do human beings regard that phrase! To one it arouses feelings akin to rapture; to another it is suggestive of heavings and horror. To him whose physical condition is easily and disagreeably affected by aquatic motion, “at sea” savours of bad smells and misery. To him who sings of the intensity of his love for “a ride on the fierce, foaming, bursting tide,” “at sea” sounds like the sweet ringing of a silver bell floating towards him, as if from afar, fraught with the fragrance and melody of distant climes—such as coral isles, icy mountains, and golden sands.

Let us regard the phrase in its pleasant aspect just now, good reader.

I have always loved the sea myself, from the hour I first set foot on board a man-of-war and skylarked with the middies, to that sad and memorable day when, under the strong—I might almost say irresistible—influence of my strong-minded wife, I bade adieu to the royal navy for ever, and retired into private life. Alas! But what is the use of sighing? If a man *will* get born in his wrong century, he ought to lay his account with being obliged to suffer much from the strange, I had almost said childish, fallacies, follies, and inconsistencies peculiar to the more early period in which his lot has been cast by mistake.

You see, reader, I have accepted my position. There is a bare possibility that those who have assigned it to me may be wrong, but I have long ago ceased to dispute that point.

At sea! Haco’s sloop is there now, just out of sight of land, although not far from it, and resting on as glassy a sheet of water as is ever presented by the ocean in a deep dead calm. Haco himself, big, hairy, jovial, ruddy, is seated on the after skylight, the sole occupant of the deck.

To look at him one might fancy that Neptune having found a deserted ship, had clambered upon deck and sat him down to take a complacent view of his wide domains, and enjoy a morning pipe.

It is early morning, and the other inhabitants of that floating house are asleep below.

The “Coal-Coffin,” albeit an unseaworthy vessel, is a picturesque object. Its dirty sails are of a fine rich colour, because of their very dirtiness. Its weather-worn and filthy spars, and hull and rigging, possess a harmony of *tone* which can only be acquired by age. Its cordage being rotten and very limp, hangs, on that account, all the more gracefully in waving lines of beauty and elegant festoons; the reef points hang quite straight, and patter softly on the sails—in short, the *tout ensemble* of the little craft is eminently picturesque—draped, as it were, with the mellowness of antiquity; and the whole—hull, spars, sails, cordage, and reef points,—clearly and sharply reflected in the depths below.

“Wot a splendid mornin’!” said Stephen Gaff, putting his head and shoulders out of the after hatchway, and yawning violently.

“So ’tis, shipmet,” responded the skipper, “a’most too butiful for this world.”

Both men spoke in subdued tones, as if unwilling to disturb the delightful stillness of nature. Gaff, having slowly raised himself out of the hole in the deck which served as a door to the bandbox, termed, out of courtesy, the cabin, looked up at the mast-head to see if the vane indicated any wind; then he gazed slowly round the horizon. Meeting with nothing particular there to arrest his eyes, he let them fall on Haco, who was gazing dreamily at the bowl of his German pipe.

“Dead calm,” said Gaff.

“Won’t last long,” said Haco.

“Won’t it?”

“No. Glass fallin’ fast.”

This seemed to be as much mental food as Gaff could comfortably digest at that time, for he made no rejoinder, but, drawing a short black pipe from his vest-pocket, sat down beside his friend, and filled and smoked it in silence.

“How’s the Roosians?” he inquired, after a long pause.

“All square,” said the skipper, who was addicted somewhat to figurative language and hyperbole in the form of slang, “another week in the doctor’s hands, an’ the grub of the London Home, will set ’em up taught an’ trim as ever.”

“Goin’ to blow hard, think ’ee?” asked Gaff.

“Great guns,” said Haco, puffing a cloud of smoke from his mouth, which was at that time not a bad imitation of a *little* gun.

“Soon?” inquired Gaff.

“P’r’aps yes, p’r’aps no.”

Once more the seamen relapsed into a silence which was not again broken until two of the crew and several Russians came on deck.

Haco gave orders to have the topsail reefed, and then commencing to pace to and fro on the small deck, devoted himself entirely to smoke and meditation.

Soon after, there was a loud cheer from Billy Gaff. The Bu’ster had suddenly awakened from an unbroken sleep of twelve hours, tumbled incontinently out of his berth, rushed up the ladder, thrust his head above the hatchway, and, feeling the sweet influences of that lovely morning, vented his joy in the cheer referred to.

Billy had begged hard to be taken to London, and his father, thinking that, the sooner he began the seafaring life to which he was destined, the better, had consented to take him.

Billy willed to accomplish a great number of pieces of mischief during the five minutes which he spent in gazing breathlessly round the ship and out upon the glittering sea; but he was surrounded by so many distracting novelties, and the opportunities for mischief were so innumerable, that, for the first time in his life, he felt perplexed, and absolutely failed to accomplish anything for a considerable time.

This calm, however, like the calm of nature, was not destined to last long.

“Daddy,” said the cherub suddenly, “I’m a-goin’ up the shrouds.”

“Very good, my lad,” said Gaff, “ye’ll tumble down likely, but it don’t much matter.”

Billy clambered up the side, and seized the shrouds, but missing his foothold at the first step, he fell down sitting-wise, from a height of three feet.

There was a sounding thud on the deck, followed by a sharp gasp, and the boy sat staring before him, considering, apparently, whether it were necessary or not to cry in order to relieve his feelings. Finding that it was not, he swallowed his heart with an effort, got up, and tried it again.

The second effort was more successful.

“That’ll do, lad, come down,” said Gaff, when his son had got half-way up the mast, and paused to look down, with a half-frightened expression.

Contrary to all precedent, Billy came down, and remained quiet for ten minutes. Then he willed to go out on the bowsprit, but, being observed in a position of great danger thereon, was summarily collared by a sailor, and hauled inboard. He was about to hurl defiance in the teeth of the seaman, and make a second effort on the bowsprit, when Haco Barepoles thrust his red head up the after-hatch, and sang out—“breakfast!”

“Breakfast, Billy,” repeated Gaff.

To which the cherub responded by rushing aft with a cheer, and descending the square hole after his father.

Having been horribly sea-sick the first day of his voyage, and having now quite recovered, Billy was proportionably ravenous, and it was a long time before he ceased to demand and re-demand supplies of biscuit, butter, and tea. With appetite appeased at last, however, he returned to the deck, and, allowing quarter of an hour for digestion and reflection, began to consider what should next be done.

The opportunity for some bold stroke was a rare one, for the crew, consisting of five men and a boy, were all forward, earnestly endeavouring to pick acquaintance by means of signs with the convalescent Russians, while Gaff and Haco were still below at breakfast, so that Billy had the after part of the sloop all to himself.

He began operations by attempting to get at the needle of the compass, but finding that this was secured powerfully by means of glass and brass, he changed his mind, and devoted himself heart and soul to the wheel. Turning it round

until the helm was hard down, he looked up at the sails, and with some curiosity awaited the result, but the vessel having no motion no result followed.

Failing in this he forced the wheel round with all his might and let it go suddenly, so that it spun round with the recoil, and narrowly missed knocking him down!

This was a pleasant source of amusement, uniting, as it did, considerable effort and some danger, with the prospect of a smash in some of the steering tackle, so Billy prepared to indulge himself; but it struck him that the frequent recurrence of the accompanying noise would bring the skipper on deck and spoil the fun, so on second thoughts he desisted, and glanced eagerly about for something else, afraid that the golden opportunity would pass by unimproved.

Observing something like a handle projecting from a hole, he seized it, and hauled out a large wooden reel with a log-line on it. With this he at once began to play, dipping the log into the sea and hauling it up repeatedly as though he were fishing, but there was want of variety in this. Looking about him he espied a lead-line near the binnacle; he cut the lead from this, and fastening it to the end of the log-line, began forthwith to take deep-sea soundings. This was quite to his taste, for when he stood upon the vessel's side, in order to let the line run more freely, and held up the reel with both hands, the way in which it spun round was quite refreshing to his happy spirit. There must have been a hitch in the line, however, for it was suddenly checked in its uncoiling, and the violence of the stoppage wrenched the reel from his grasp, and the whole affair disappeared beneath the calm water!

The Bu'ster's heart smote him. He had not meant anything so wicked as *that*.

"Ha! you young rascal, *I* saw you," said one of the men coming up at that moment.

Billy turned round with a start, and in doing so fell headlong into the sea.

The sailor stood aghast as if paralysed for a moment, then—as Billy rose to the surface with outstretched hands and staring eyes, and uttered a yell which was suddenly quenched in a gurgling cry—he recovered himself, and hastily threw a coil of rope towards the boy.

Now it is a curious and quite unaccountable fact, that comparatively few sailors can swim. At all events no one can deny the fact that there are hundreds, ay, thousands, of our seafaring men and boys who could not swim six yards to save their lives. Strange to say, of all the men who stood on the deck of that sloop, at the time of the accident to Billy, (Russians included), not one could swim a stroke. The result was that they rushed to the stern of the vessel and gazed anxiously over the side; some shouting one thing, and some another, but not one venturing to jump overboard, because it was as much as his life was worth to do so!

Several ropes were instantly thrown over the drowning boy, but being blinded both by terror and salt water, he did not see them. Then one of the men hastily fastened the end of a line round his waist, intending to spring over and trust to his comrades hauling him on board. At the same moment several men rushed to the stern boat, intent on lowering her. All this occurred in a few brief seconds. Billy had risen a second time with another wild cry when his father and the skipper sprang up the after-hatch and rushed to the side. Haco dashed his indestructible hat on the deck, and had his coat almost off, when Gaff went overboard, head first, hat, coat, and all, like an arrow, and caught Billy by the hair when he was about four feet below the surface.

Of course Gaff's re-appearance with his son in his arms was greeted with heartfelt and vociferous cheers; and, of course, when they were hauled on board, and Gaff handed Billy to the skipper, in order that he might the more conveniently wring a little of the superabundant water from his garments, another and a still more hearty cheer was given; but Gaff checked it rather abruptly by raising himself and saying sternly—

"Shame on you, lads, for not bein' able to swim. The child might ha' drownded for all *you* could do to help him. A soldier as don't know how to shoot is not much wuss than a sailor as don't know how to swim. Why, yer own mothers—yer own *sweet-hearts*—might be a-drownin' afore yer eyes, an' you'd have to run up an' down like helpless noodles, not darin' to take to the water, (which ought to be your native element), any more than a blue-nosed Kangaroo. Shame on ye, I say, for not bein' able to swim."

"Amen to that, say I," observed Haco with emphasis. "Shame on stout hulkin' fellers like you for not bein' able to swim, and shame on them as steers the ship o' State for not teachin' ye. You can put that in yer pipes and smoke it, lads, an' if it don't smoke well, ye can make a quid of it, and chew it. If I could make quids o' them there sentiments, I'd set up a factory an' send a inexhaustible supply to the big-wigs in parlymint for perpetooal mastication. There now, don't stare, but go for'ard, an' see, two of you take in another reef o' the mains'l. If the glass speaks true, we'll be under my namesake—barepoles—before long; look alive, boys!"

It was something new to the crew of the "Coal-Coffin" to be thus checked in an enthusiastic cheer, and to be rebuked by the object of their admiration for *not being able to swim*.

Deep and long was the discussion they had that evening around the windlass on this subject. Some held that it was absurd to blame men for not being able, "when p'raps they couldn't if they wor to try." Others thought that they might have tried first before saying that "p'raps they couldn't." One admitted that it was nothing but laziness that had prevented *him* from learning, whereupon another opined that dirtiness had something to do with it too. But all agreed in wishing earnestly that they had learned the noble and useful art, and in regretting deeply that they had not been taught it when young.

The boy, who formed one of the crew, silently congratulated himself that he *was* young, and resolved in his own mind that he would learn as soon as possible.

The sun set in the west, and the evening star arose to cheer the world with her presence, while the greater luminary retired. Slowly the day retreated and dusky night came on. One by one the stars shone out, faintly at first, as if too modest to do more than glimmer, but stronger and brighter, and more numerous by degrees, until the whole sky became like a great resplendent milky way.

Still there was no evidence that a double-reef in the mainsail was necessary; no indication that the weather-glass had told a truthful tale.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Storm, and its Consequences.

It came at length with awful speed and fury.

At first there was a stifling heat in the atmosphere; then clouds began to dim the sky. Mysterious and solemn changes seemed to be taking place in nature—noiselessly for a time. Ere long the war began with a burst of heaven's artillery. It was distant at first; muttering, prolonged, and fitful, like the rattling musketry of advancing skirmishers. Soon a roar of deafening thunder rent the sky. Another and another followed, with blinding flashes of lightning between, while rain came down in torrents.

The order had been given to take in the mainsail, and the little vessel was almost under bare poles, when the storm burst upon it, and threw it nearly on its beam-ends.

Righting from the first shock, it sprang away like a living creature trying to escape from some deadly foe. Ere long the waves were up and the storm was raging in all its fury.

"If it holds like this till to-morrow, we'll be in port by noon," said Haco Barepoles to Gaff as they stood near the wheel, holding on to the backstays, and turning their backs to the seas that swept heavily over the side from time to time.

"You speak as if you wor *sure* o' gettin' in," said Gaff.

"Well, we an't sure o' nothin' in this world," replied the skipper; "if Providence has willed it otherwise, we can't help it, you know. We must submit whether we will or no."

"D'ye know," rejoined Gaff, "it has often bin in my mind, that as Christian men, (which we profess to be, whether we believe our own profession or not), we don't look at God's will in the right way. The devil himself is obliged to submit to God whether he will or no, because he can't help it. Don't 'ee think it would be more like Christians if we was to submit *because* it is His will?"

Before Haco could answer, an enormous wave came curling over the stern.

"Mind your helm, lad!"

The words were scarce uttered when a heavy mass of water fell inboard, almost crushing down the deck. For some moments it seemed as if the little vessel were sinking, but she cleared herself, and again rushed onward.

That night the wind chopped round, and Haco was obliged to lay-to until daylight, as the weather was thick. Before morning the gale took off and at sunrise had moderated into a stiff breeze. All that day they beat slowly and heavily against the wind, which, however, continued to decrease. At night the wind again veered round to the northward, enabling the "Coal-Coffin" to spread most of her canvass, keep her course, and bowl pleasantly along before the breeze. But the weather was still thick, necessitating a sharp look-out.

During most of this time our friend Billy was confined, much against his will, to the bandbox cabin, where he did as much mischief as he could in the circumstances.

Towards midnight, while Haco and Gaff were standing by the man on the look-out, who was on the heel of the bowsprit, they fancied they observed something looming up against the dark sky on the weather bow.

The look-out gave a shout.

"Port! port! hard a-port!" roared the skipper, at the same moment bounding aft.

"Port it is!" replied the man at the wheel, obeying with promptitude.

The sloop sheered away to leeward. At the same instant the hull of a great vessel bore right down upon them. The yell of the steam-whistle betrayed her character, while the clanging of the fog-bell, and shouts of those on board, proved that the sloop had been observed. At the same time the seething sea that flowed like milk round her bow, showed that the engines had been reversed, while the captain's voice was heard distinctly to shout "starboard! starboard hard!" to the steersman.

The promptitude with which these orders were given and obeyed, prevented the steamer from running down the sloop altogether. A collision, however, was unavoidable. The crew of the sloop and the Russians, seeing this, rushed to the place where they expected to be struck, in order to leap, if possible, into the head of the steamer. Even the steersman left his post, and sprang into the weather shrouds in the hope of catching some of the ropes or chains below the bowsprit.

On came the steamer like a great mountain. Her way had been so much checked that she seemed merely to touch the side of the sloop; but the touch was no light one. It sent the cutwater crashing through bulwark, plank, and beam, until the “Coal-Coffin” was cut right down amidships, within a foot of the water-line. There was a wild cry from the men as they leaped towards their destroyer. Some succeeded in grasping ropes, others missed and fell back bruised and stunned on the sloop’s deck.

Billy had been standing beside his father when the steamer was first observed, and naturally clung to him. Gaff put his left arm tight round the boy, and with the others prepared for a spring, believing, as did all the rest, that the sloop would be sunk at once.

Not so Haco Barepoles, who went to the wheel of his little vessel, and calmly awaited the result.

Gaff’s spring at the chains of the cutwater was successful, but in making it he received a blow on the head from one of the swinging blocks of the sloop which almost stunned him, insomuch that he could only cling to the chain he had caught with the tenacity of despair.

One of the sailors observed him in this position of danger, and instantly descending with a rope fastened it under his chest, so that he and Billy were safely hauled on board, and the former was led below to have his head examined by the surgeon.

Meanwhile the men in the bow of the steamer shouted to Haco to come on board.

“No, thank’ee,” replied the skipper, “shake yourself clear o’ my riggin’ as fast as ye can, and let me continoo my voyage.”

“Your sloop is sinking,” urged the captain of the steamer.

“Not sinkin’ yet; I’ll stick to her as long as she can float.”

“But you’ve none of your men left on board, have you?”

“No; better without ’em if they’re so easy frightened.”

As he said this one of his own men slid quickly down a rope that hung from the steamer’s bowsprit, and dropt on the deck of the sloop, exclaiming—

“It’ll never be said o’ Tom Grattan that he forsack his ship so long as a man wos willin’ to stick by her.”

Haco took Tom by the hand as he went aft and shook it.

“Any more comin’?” he said, glancing at the faces of the men that stared down upon him.

There was no reply.

“You can’t expect men to volunteer to go to the bottom,” said the captain of the steamer. “You’re mad, both of you. Think better of it.”

“Back your ship off, sir!” said Haco in a deep stern voice.

The order was given to back off, and the vessels were soon clear. Haco put his sloop at once on the larboard tack, and looking over the side observed that the bottom of the yawning gap was thus raised nearly three feet out of the water.

“Tom,” said he, resuming his place at the wheel, “go and nail a bit of canvas over that hole. You’ll find materials down below. We’ll have to steer into port on this tack, ’cause if we try to go on the other, she’ll sink like a stone. I only hope the wind’ll hold as it is. Look alive now!”

In a few minutes the little craft was away and the captain of the steamer, seeing that she did not sink, continued his course.

Next day Haco Barepoles steered the “Coal-Coffin” triumphantly into the port of London, with a hole in her side big enough, if Tom Grattan’s report is to be believed, “to admit of a punt bein’ row’d d’rect from the sea into the hold!”

Chapter Fourteen.

Gaff and Billy become the Sport of Fortune, and see Strange Things.

The steamer which had run down the sloop of Haco Barepoles was a large iron one, which had just set out on a voyage to the West Indies.

Being anxious to send on shore the men whom he had so unexpectedly picked up at sea, the captain hailed the first inward-bound vessel he met with, and put them on board. It was found, however, that the blow received by Stephen Gaff had been more severe than was at first imagined, and the doctor advised that he should not be moved until farther down the Channel. He and Billy were therefore retained on board; but when the steamer passed the Isle of Wight, the weather became thick and squally, and continued so for several days, so that no vessel could be spoken with.

In these circumstances the captain was compelled to carry Gaff and his boy away to sea, much to the regret of the former, who was curious to know what the news could be that was to be to his advantage in London, besides being grieved at the anxiety his sudden disappearance with Billy would cause to his wife.

The Bu'ster did not by any means share the regret or grief of his father. To that amiable cherub the whole affair was a piece of unexpected and unparalleled good fortune. It was the realisation to some extent of his rapturous dreams of travel and adventure in foreign lands, and it freed him, at one fell swoop, from the iron yoke of his mother.

Billy, although he congratulated himself on the deliverance, did, strange to say, shed a few tears in memory of his mother, for the boy had an affectionate disposition, and really loved his mother, and would have shown his love too if she would have let him.

Gaff feared there was but little prospect of being speedily delivered from the steamer; nevertheless he begged the captain to put him on board the first homeward-bound vessel they should meet with. To this request the captain agreed.

An opportunity occurred sooner than had been expected. On the afternoon of the fifth day out, a large barque hove in sight. On nearing this vessel the captain ran up his colours, and the signal was replied to by the Union Jack. On being asked as to where they were bound, the port of Liverpool was signalled in answer.

"You're in luck. Gaff," said the captain; "I'll put you on board of that barque if you choose."

"Thank 'ee, sir, I'd like it well."

"I rather think that your little boy would prefer to go with *us*," added the captain, laughing.

Billy at once admitted that he would, and begged to be allowed to stay where he was, but this request could not be granted.

"Now, Gaff," said the captain confidentially, "if you're short o' cash I'll be happy to—"

"Thank'ee, sir, I've as much as I require."

"Very well, then, you'd better get ready, and I'll order a boat to be lowered."

Half an hour afterwards Gaff stood on the deck of the barque, waving his hat to the few friends he had made during his short stay in the steamer.

The barque turned out to be a South Sea whaler from New York, which had suffered severely in a recent gale which had driven her far out of her course to the northward. She was obliged to run to Liverpool for repairs. The captain, whose name was Graddy, and who was one of the most ill-favoured and ill-mannered men that Gaff had ever set eyes on, agreed to take the newcomer to England on condition that he should work his way besides paying for his rations.

There was something about this vessel which was very offensive to the critical eye of Gaff. The nature of her work might account for her being so dirty; but that was no reason for the slovenliness of her rigging and general management, the surliness and tyranny of her captain, and the semi-mutinous condition of her crew.

The crew was a mixed one. There seemed to be representatives of at least half a dozen nations. The captain himself was of mixed blood, and no one could have told from his look or speech to what nation he belonged. He was a big powerful man, much feared by the crew, who hated him cordially. He was well aware of this, and returned the hatred with interest. Besides this, being monarch of the ship, he worried them in every way that lay in his power.

It is awful to think of the ruinous effects of sin, and how nearly men can come to resemble devils. This monster actually laid plots to entrap his men in order that he might have an excuse to vent his hatred on them.

Gaff soon found that he had got into a nest, so to speak, of evil spirits. Before he had been two days with them, he would have given all he possessed, or ever hoped to possess, in order to escape from the "Rattlesnake," which was the vessel's name.

As for Billy, his heart sank to a depth of woe he had never hitherto conceived of. Every one kicked and cuffed him and swore at him for being in the way, and when he was wanted he was kicked, cuffed, and sworn at for being out of the way. Poor boy! his dreams had never presented him with *this* species of adventure.

So bad did the state of things become that the men began to talk among themselves of deserting the moment they should reach port, no matter what should be the consequences. This threat reached the captain's ears, and he frustrated it by telling the mate that he thought the needful repairs could be managed on board by the ship's carpenters; and so gave orders to alter the course for South America!

Deep and fierce were the counsels that went on in the forecastle that night among the men. Some hinted darkly at murder. Others suggested that the captain should be put on shore on a desert island and left to his fate. All agreed that something must be done, that a decisive blow must be struck, with the exception of Gaff, who remained silent while his shipmates were discussing the matter.

Observing this they called upon him for his opinion.

"Lads," said he in decided tones, "I've got no opinion to offer. I am—at least I strive to be—a Christian man; an', to be plain with ye, I won't go for to consult or act with murderers, or mutineers, or pirates, which it appears you intend to

become, if you're not that a'ready. One opinion I will give ye, however, an' one piece of advice I'll offer. The opinion is, that if you go on as you've bin a-goin' on since I came aboard, you'll all live to be hanged. The advice is, that you should face yer troubles like men—take things as ye find 'em, an' if ye can't mend 'em, why grin and bear 'em."

The crew received this in varied mood. Some laughed, others swore, and one suggested that Gaff should be thrown overboard.

This latter, who was a big strong man, and a sort of bully among his mates, shook his fist at Gaff, and said—

"Now, I'll tell ye wot it is, Mister Toogood, if you go for to tell the cap'n wot we've bin a-talkin' about, I'll knock yer two daylights into one, so see that ye keep yer tongue in order."

"What's past is past," said Gaff quietly; "but I tell ye plainly, that if you let *your* tongues go the same pace again in my hearin', I'll go aft and report ye. I'll be no spy, but I give ye fair warnin'."

At this the bully lost command of himself. Seizing an iron bar that lay on a chest close by, he rushed at Gaff with the evident intention of felling him. But the latter was on his guard. He was active and powerful too, besides being quite cool. Leaping nimbly aside, he avoided the bully's onset, and at the same moment laid him flat on the deck with one blow of his fist.

"Sarves him right!"

"So it does!" exclaimed several of the men, who were not sorry to see one whom they disliked so roughly handled.

"Well, so it does sarve him right," added one who had been a prominent speaker in the recent debates; "but hark'ee, friend," he said, turning to Gaff with a scowl, "you can't knock the whole crew down in that fashion. I advise ye, for your own sake, to mind what ye're about."

"I means to do so," said Gaff; "I'll stick to my dooty and to the cap'n."

"Very good," replied the other with a sneer, "then wotiver is the cap'n's fate you'll have the pleasure of sharin' it with him."

"Tumble up there! tumble up, an' reef tops'ls!" roared the captain down the hatch at that moment.

The men obeyed, and for the time their mutinous intentions seemed to have been dismissed. For many weeks after this Gaff heard nothing that could lead him to suppose that the men still harboured their dark designs. Yet the state of affairs on board became worse and worse. The captain cursed and tyrannised more than ever, and the men grew sulkier and more wretched, but no word of a murderous nature was ever uttered in the hearing of Gaff or his little son.

As for Billy his small mind had received such a rude shock by the sudden and terrible change in his circumstances, that he seemed to have lost all his wonted vivacity as well as his mischief. In fact, both qualities, or tendencies, had been thoroughly kicked out of him before he had been a week on board. He was protected to some extent by his father, who one day quietly knocked another of the men down for giving Billy an undeserved beating; but some of them kicked and cuffed the poor boy when his father was not present.

Billy was found to be active and useful in small matters and light duties suited to his age, and in the course of time was appointed to the position of steward's assistant, in which capacity he became deeply learned in the matter of washing cups, dishes, etcetera, besides acquiring a knowledge of baking, pudding-making, and many other useful arts more or less allied to cookery; in addition to which he had the inestimable benefit of being taught thoroughly submission and obedience—a lesson which the Bu'ster found very hard to learn, and thought particularly grievous, but which at his age, and considering his previous training, was an absolute blessing.

The way in which that cherub went about that ship in a little blue jacket, straw hat, and canvas trousers, rubbing and cleaning, and according prompt obedience at all times to every one, would have charmed his mother as much as it gratified his father, who was in consequence somewhat reconciled to his otherwise hard lot.

Now, philosophical reader—if such you be—do not suppose that I advocate kicking and cuffing as the best possible cure for general mischievousness and badness in a boy. By no means. My strong-minded wife says I do; but then she always forms, or rather partially forms, her opinions on assumptions, retains them in confusion, states them at haphazard, according to her mood at the time being, and, having stated them, sticks to them like a limpet to a rock.

You will judge differently when I explain my ideas on this point. I maintain that Billy Gaff, *alias* the Bu'ster, was taught to accord obedience—simple obedience and nothing else—by means of the kicking and cuffing he received on board of that whaler; and, further, that the method is a sure one. I do not say that it is the *best* one, but that does not affect the fact that it is almost infallible. It was reserved for Billy's father, however, by means of wise counsels, kindly given advice, and otherwise affectionate treatment, to save Billy from being turned into an obedient but misanthropic brute, and to lead him to accord his obedience, not because he could not help it, but because his father wished him to do it.

This appeal went right home to Billy's heart, because he loved his father fervently. He had always loved him in time past, now more than ever, for the poor boy regarded him much as a drowning man regards the solitary plank to which he clings as his last hope. Thus did Billy practically learn the great truth, that "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

Weeks rolled on; gales succeeded calms, and calms succeeded gales. The "line" was passed; southern seas were reached; new constellations glittered overhead; strange fish and luminous creatures gambolled in the sea, and the whalers' fishing-ground was entered. Latterly the men had ceased to grumble at the captain, although he had by no

means ceased to swear at and bully the men, and Gaff began to hope that they had got over their bad fit, and were going to settle down to work peaceably.

The calm, however, was deceitful; it preceded a storm.

One sultry afternoon when Gaff was standing at the helm and the captain beside him, the men came aft in a body, and two of their number, with pistols in their hands, advanced to seize the captain.

He saw at once what they meant to do, and, springing back, seized a handspike.

“Lay that down and surrender, else I’ll blow out yer brains,” said one of the two, levelling his pistol.

Instead of obeying, the captain raised the heavy handspike, and the man pulled the trigger. At the same instant Gaff struck up the muzzle with his hand; the ball passed over the captain’s head, and the handspike descended on the seaman’s crown felling him at once.

Upon this the entire crew made a rush and overpowered Gaff and the captain. The latter, who struggled with the fury of a tiger, was kicked while down until he was nearly dead. Gaff at once gave in, knowing that any attempt at further resistance, besides being hopeless, would only render matters worse. He was therefore allowed to rise, and his hands were tied behind his back.

The captain, being similarly secured, was raised to his feet.

“Now, you tyrant,” said the ringleader of the crew with a terrible oath, “how would you like to have your throat cut?”

The man slowly opened a long clasp-knife as he spoke, and felt its keen edge with his thumb. Blood was flowing down his face and breast from the wound inflicted by the handspike, and the fiendish expression of his countenance, added to the terribleness of his aspect, while it showed that his sarcastic question would certainly be followed by the murderous deed. But the other mutineers restrained him.

“It’s too good for him, make him walk the plank and drown like a dog—as he is,” cried one.

“Hang him up to the yard-arm,” said another.

Several voices here expressed dissent, and an elderly seaman stepped forward and said that they didn’t intend to become pirates, so they had better not begin with murder.

“Hear, hear!” from several voices emphatically.

“What’ll we do with him, then?” inquired one in angry excitement.

Upon this they all began to consult noisily, and they were so much engrossed that they failed to perceive the movements of Billy, who, when his first alarm at the uproar was over, began to feel deep anxiety in regard to his father’s bound and helpless condition. His active mind did not remain long paralysed; pulling out the clasp-knife which he always carried in his pocket, he quickly cut the cords that fastened Gaff’s wrists. Before the latter could avail himself of his freedom the act was discovered, and he was secured again more firmly than before, while Billy was favoured with a slap on the ear so tremendous that it threw all those he had ever received from his mother utterly into the shade!

Recovering from this, he sat down on the deck at his father’s feet, and wept silently.

In a few minutes the mutineers agreed among themselves. One of the smallest boats in the ship was lowered, and the captain and Gaff having been cast loose were ordered to get into it. The former obeyed at once, pronouncing a terrible curse on the crew as he went down the side.

One of the men at the same time threw a bag of biscuit into the boat.

“Come along, Billy,” said Gaff, as he followed the captain.

The boy was about to do so, when one of the men seized him and pulled him back.

“No, no,” said he, “the lad’s useful, and will only eat up your biscuit faster than need be. We’ll keep him aboard.”

Gaff listened to this with an expression of agony on his rugged features.

“Oh, have mercy on my son!” he cried, as they cast the boat adrift. Then feeling that an appeal to such desperadoes was useless, he clasped his hands, and, looking up to Heaven, prayed God, for Christ’s sake, to deliver him from the company of sinful men.

A light breeze was blowing, and the ship, which had been hove-to while the boat was being lowered, soon gathered way, and left the boat behind.

All of a sudden Billy broke away, and, rushing towards the stern, sprang wildly into the sea!

“Down with the helm! heave-to!” shouted some of the men.

“No, no, let the whelp go,” cried others; “besides, he’d be able to peach on us.”

This last argument was all-powerful. The ship held on her course, and Billy was left to his fate.

The moment that Gaff saw him take the leap he seized the oars, and applying all his strength to them, succeeded in catching hold of his son before his struggles had ceased.

Billy was none the worse for his adventure beyond the ducking. Gaff soon wrung the water out of his garments, and then placing him on his knee, sat down to watch the ship as it sailed slowly away.

The captain, who sat in the stern with his chin resting in his hand, and a dark scowl on his face, also watched the retreating vessel.

Soon it glimmered like the wing of a sea-mew on the horizon, and then, just as night began to set in, it disappeared, leaving the boat a solitary speck in the midst of the great wide sea.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Dinner Party—A Sudden Piece of Questionable Good Fortune befalls Mrs Gaff.

"It is a most unfortunate piece of good fortune this that has befallen Mrs Gaff," said Mr George Stuart, "a very unfortunate thing indeed."

"Dear me, do you think so? Now I don't agree with you at all, brother," observed Miss Peppy. "I think that good fortune is always good fortune, and never can be bad fortune. I wish it would only come to me sometimes, but it never does, and when it does it never remains long. Only think how she'll flaunt about now, with a coach-and-four perhaps, and such like. I really think that fortune made a mistake in this case, for she has been used to such mean ways, not that I mean anything bad by mean, you know, but only low and common, including food and domestic habits, as well as society, that—that—dear me, I don't exactly know how to express myself, but it's a puzzle to me to know how she'll ever come to be able to spend it all, indeed it is. I wonder why we are subjected to such surprises so constantly, and then it's *so* perplexing too, because one will never be able to remember that she's not a fisherwoman as she used to be, and will call her Jessie in spite of one's-self; and how it ever came about, that's another puzzle. But after all there is no accounting for the surprising way in which things *do* come about, dear me, in this altogether unaccountable world. Take a little more soup, Captain Bingley?"

The above observations were made by Miss Peppy and my friend Stuart, from the head and foot respectively of their dinner-table, around which were assembled my wife, my niece Lizzie Gordon, an elderly spinster named Miss Eve Flouncer, a Miss Martha Puff, (niece to Miss Flouncer), a baronet named Sir Richard Doles, my son Gildart, and Kenneth Stuart.

I was seated beside Miss Peppy, opposite to Sir Richard Doles, who was one of the slowest, dullest, stupidest men I ever met with. He appeared to me to have been born without any intellect. When he told a story there was no end to it, indeed there seldom was anything worthy the name of a beginning to it, and it never by the remotest chance had any point.

In virtue of his rank, not his capacity of course, Sir Richard was in great demand in Wreckumoft. He was chairman at every public meeting; honorary member of every society; a director in the bank, the insurance company, the railway, the poorhouse, and the Sailors' Home; in all of which positions and institutions he was a positive nuisance, because of his insane determination to speak as long as possible, when he had not the remotest notion of what he wished to say, so that business was in his presence brought almost to a dead lock. Yet Sir Richard was tolerated; nay, courted and toadied, because of his title.

My wife was seated opposite to Miss Eve Flouncer, who was one of the strong-minded women. Indeed, I think it is but just to say of her that she was one of the strongest-minded women in the town. In her presence the strength of Mrs Bingley's mind dwindled down to comparative weakness. In form she was swan-like, undulatory, so to speak. Her features were *prononcé*; nose, aquiline; eyes, piercing; hair, black as night, and in long ringlets.

Miss Flouncer was, as I have said, an elderly spinster. Sir Richard was an elderly bachelor. Miss Flouncer thought of this, and often sighed. Sir Richard didn't think of it, and never sighed, except when, having finished a good dinner, he felt that he could eat no more. By the way, he also sighed at philanthropic meetings when cases of distress were related, such as sudden bereavement, coupled, perhaps, with sickness and deep poverty. But Sir Richard's sighs were all his contributions to the cause of suffering humanity. Sometimes, indeed, he gave it his blessing, though it would have puzzled the deepest philosopher to have said what that consisted in, but he never gave it his prayers, for this reason, that he never prayed for himself or anybody else. He held that this world was in a sufficiently satisfactory condition, and advised that men should let well alone, and contended that any attempt to interfere with its arrangements in the way of prayer was quite indefensible. He did indeed read his prayers in church on Sundays, in a very loud and distinct voice, to the great annoyance and distraction, not to say irritation, of all who sat within fifty yards of him, but this he regarded as a commendable institution of the country. But to return to Miss Flouncer.

This state of affairs between Sir Richard and herself did not augur much for her prospects; but then she was a very strong-minded woman, and had hopes; whereas Sir Richard was a very weak-minded man, and had no hopes of any kind worth mentioning, being perfectly satisfied—good, easy man—with things as they then stood.

Miss Martha Puff was niece to Miss Flouncer—age apparently sixteen. It struck me, as I sat looking at her placid face, that this young lady was well named. Her pink round visage was puffed up with something so soft that I could scarcely venture to call it fat. Her round soft arms were so puffy to look at, that one could not help fearing that an accidental prick from a pin would burst the skin and let them out. She seemed so like trifle in her pink muslin dress, that I could imagine a puff of wind blowing her away altogether. She could not be said to be puffed up with conceit, poor girl; but she dined almost exclusively on puff paste, to the evident satisfaction of my gallant son Gildart, who

paid her marked attention during dinner.

Miss Puff never spoke except when spoken to, never asked for anything, never remarked upon anything, did not seem to care for anything, (puff paste excepted), and never thought of anything, as far as I could judge from the expression of her countenance. Gildart might as well have had a wax doll to entertain.

“To what unfortunate piece of good fortune does your brother refer, Miss Stuart?” asked Sir Richard when Miss Peppy had concluded her observations in regard to it.

“Is it possible that you have not heard of it?” exclaimed Miss Peppy in surprise. “Why, the town has been ringing with it for a fortnight at least, and those odious creatures, the gossips, (who never come near me, however, because they know I will not tolerate them), have got up all sorts of wild stories, showing that the man must have got the money by foul means, though I don’t know, I’m sure, why he shouldn’t have got a surprise as well as anybody else, for the unaccountable and astonishing way in which things *do* happen in this world, at least to human beings, for I do not believe that cows or sheep or horses ever experience them; the want of expression on their faces shows that, at all events they never leave their offspring at people’s doors, and then go away without—”

“You’d better tell Sir Richard what piece of news you refer to, my dear,” interrupted Mr Stuart, somewhat testily.

“Ah yes, I was forgetting—(a little more fowl, Captain Bingley? May I trouble you *again*, Sir Richard? thank you—a leg, if you please, I know that the Captain prefers a leg)—well, as I was saying—let me see, what *was* I saying?”

“You had only got the length of forgetting, ma’am,” observed the baronet.

“Ah, to be sure, I was forgetting to tell you that Mrs Gaff has fallen heir to ten thousand pounds.”

Sir Richard exclaimed, with an appearance of what might have been mistaken for surprise on his face, “Indeed!”

Miss Flouncer, to whom the news was also fresh, exclaimed, “You *don’t* say so!” with strong emphasis, and an immensely swan-like undulation of her body.

“Indeed I do,” continued Miss Peppy with much animation; “Mrs Gaff, the fisherman’s wife, has got a fortune left her amounting to ten thousand pounds, which, at five per something or other, as my brother tells me, yields an annual income of 500 pounds.”

“But who left it to her, and how?” asked Sir Richard.

“Ah, who left it, and how?” echoed Miss Flouncer.

“What a jolly thing to be left five hundred a year!” whispered Gildart. “Wouldn’t you like some one to leave that to you, Miss Puff?”

“Yes,” said Miss Puff.

“Have you any rich East Indian uncle or aunt who is likely to do it?” inquired Gildart with a desperate attempt at jocularity.

“No,” answered Miss Puff.

These two words—yes and no—were the utmost extent to which Miss Puff had yet ventured into the dreaded sea of conversation. I could perceive by the fagged expression of his face that the middy was beginning to lose heart.

“Brother,” said Miss Peppy, “you had better tell Sir Richard how it happened. I have *such* a memory—I really don’t remember the details. I never *could* remember details of anything. Indeed I have often wondered why details were sent into this world to worry one so. It *is* so surprising and unaccountable. Surely we might have got on quite well without them.”

“Well, you know,” observed Gildart in a burst of reckless humour, “we could not get on very well, Miss Stuart, without some sorts of details. Ox-tails, for instance, are absolutely necessary to the soup which we have just enjoyed so much. So, in like manner, are pig-tails to Chinamen.”

“Ay, and coat-tails to puppies,” added Kenneth slyly, alluding to a bran new garment which the middy had mounted that day for the first time.

“Perhaps,” interposed Miss Flouncer, “after such bright coruscations of wit, Mr Stuart may be allowed to go on with his—”

“Wittles,” whispered Gildart in Miss Puff’s ear, to the alarm of that young lady, who, being addicted to suppressed laughter, was in horror lest she should have a fit.

“Allowed to go on,” repeated Miss Flouncer blandly, “with his tale of this unfortunate piece of good fortune, which I am sure Sir Richard is dying to hear.”

“It can hardly be called a tale,” said Mr Stuart, “but it is a curious enough circumstance. You remember Stephen Gaff, Sir Richard?”

“Perfectly. He is the man who appeared in the village of Cove rather mysteriously some months ago, is he not?”

“The same,” returned Mr Stuart; “and it was he who accompanied Haco Barepoles in my sloop, which he persists in

naming the ‘Coffin,’ although its proper name is the ‘Betsy Jane,’ on that memorable voyage when Haco sailed her into port on the larboard tack after she had been cut down to the water’s edge on the starboard side. Well, it seems that Gaff went with him on that occasion in consequence of having received a letter from a London lawyer asking him to call, and he would hear something to his advantage.

“You all know the way in which the people were taken out of the sloop by the steamer which ran into her, and how they were all landed safely except Gaff and his son William, who were carried away to sea. You are aware, also, that the steamer has since then returned to England, telling us that Gaff and his boy were put on board a barque bound for Liverpool, and that this vessel has never made its appearance, so that we have reason to believe that it has perished in one of the great storms which occurred about that time.

“Well,” continued Mr Stuart, helping Mrs Bingley to a glass of sherry, “not long ago I had occasion to send Haco Barepoles to London, and he bethought him of the lawyer who had written to Gaff, so he called on him and told him of his friend’s disappearance. The lawyer then asked if Gaff’s wife was alive, and on being informed that she was, he told Haco that Gaff had had a brother in Australia who had been a very successful gold digger, but whose health had broken down owing to the severity of the work, and he had left the diggings and gone to Melbourne, where he died. Before his death this brother made a will, leaving the whole of his fortune to Stephen. The will stated that, in the event of Stephen being dead, or at sea on a long voyage, the money should be handed over unconditionally to his wife. About three weeks ago the lawyer came here to see Mrs Gaff, and make arrangements and inquiries, and in the course of a short time this poor woman will be in possession of ten thousand pounds.”

“It will be the ruin of her, I fear,” said Sir Richard.

“No doubt of it,” observed Miss Flouncer, emphatically.

“It is always the way,” said my wife.

“D’ye think it would ruin *you*?” whispered Gildart.

This being an impertinent question, Miss Puff blushed, and made no reply.

“You need not be at all afraid of Mrs Gaff being ruined by prosperity,” said Lizzie Gordon, with sudden animation. “I have seen a good deal of her during her recent sorrows, and I am quite sure that she is a good sensible woman.”

“What sorrows do you refer to, Miss Gordon?” asked Sir Richard.

“To her husband and son’s sudden disappearance, and the death of her brother-in-law John Furby,” replied Lizzie. “Uncle, you can tell more about the matter than I can.”

“Yes,” said I; “it has been my lot to witness a good many cases of distress in my capacity of agent for the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society, and I can answer for it that this has been a very severe one, and the poor woman has borne up against it with Christian fortitude.”

“How did it happen? Pray *do* tell us about it,” cried Miss Flouncer, with an undulating smile.

“How does it happen, Miss Flouncer, that you are not already acquainted with these things?”

“Because I have been absent from home for more than two months, and, if I mistake not, Sir Richard’s ignorance rests on somewhat similar foundation.”

Miss Flouncer smiled and undulated towards the baronet, who, being thus pointedly appealed to, smiled and bowed in return, and begged that I would relate the facts of the case.

I observed that my son Gildart pressed Miss Puff to attempt another tart, and whispered something impertinent in her ear, for the poor thing’s pink round face suddenly became scarlet, and she puffed out in a dangerously explosive manner with suppressed laughter.

“Well then,” said I, addressing myself to Miss Flouncer, “a month or so before the lawyer brought Mrs Gaff tidings of her good fortune, her brother-in-law John Furby was drowned. The brave fellow, who, you are aware, was coxswain of our lifeboat, and has helped to save many a life since he was appointed to that post of danger, went off in his own fishing-boat one day. A squall upset the boat, and although the accident was seen from the shore, and several boats put off at once to the rescue, four of the crew perished, and Furby was one of these.

“The scene in Gaff’s cottage when the body was carried in and laid on the bed, was heartrending for the woe occasioned to poor Mrs Gaff by the recent loss of her husband and little boy was, as it were, poured upon her head afresh, and for some time she was inconsolable. My good niece went frequently to read the Bible and pray with her, and I believe it was the blessed influence of God’s word that brought her at length to a state of calm resignation. What made her case worse was the fact, that, both husband and brother-in-law being taken away, she was left in a state of absolute destitution. Now, at this point she began to feel the value of the noble institution of which I have the happiness of being an honorary agent—I mean the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners’ Society. Poor Furby had been a member for several years, and regularly paid his annual sum of three shillings. Stephen Gaff had also become a member, just before starting on his last voyage, having been persuaded thereto by Haco Barepoles, who is a stanch adherent and advocate of our cause. Many a sailor has Haco brought to me to enrol as a member, and many a widow and fatherless child has had occasion to thank God that he did so. Although Gaff had only paid his first year’s contribution of three shillings, I took upon me to give the sum of 5 pounds to Mrs Gaff and her little girl, and the further sum of 3 pounds because of Furby’s membership. This sum was quite sufficient to relieve her from want at the time, so that, in the midst of her deep affliction, she was spared the additional pains and anxieties of destitution.”

“The society is a most noble one,” said Miss Flouncer, with a burst of enthusiasm.

“It is,” said I, much pleased with her warmth of manner; “I think—at least if my memory does not play me false—you are a contributor to its funds, are you not?”

“Well, a—no. I have not the pleasure—a—”

Miss Flouncer was evidently a little put out.

“Then I trust, my dear madam,” said I, hasting to her relief by affording her an opportunity of being generous, “that you will allow me to put down your name as an annual subscriber.”

Miss Flouncer, being a *very* strong-minded woman, had recovered herself very suddenly, and replied with calm deliberation, accompanied by an undulation—

“No, Captain Bingley, I have made it a rule never to give charity from impulse; I always give, when I *do* give—”

“Ahem!” coughed Gildart slightly.

“When I *do* give,” repeated Miss Flouncer, “from principle, and after a careful examination of the merits of each particular case.”

“Indeed!” said Sir Richard, with an appearance of faint surprise; “what a bore you must find the examination of the cases!”

“By no means, Sir Richard. *Very* little time suffices for each case, for many of them, I find, almost intuitively, merit dismissal on the spot; and I assure you it saves a great deal of money. You would be surprised if you knew how little I find it necessary to give away in charity in the course of the year.”

Miss Flouncer undulated at Sir Richard as she gave utterance to this noble sentiment, and Mrs Bingley applauded it to Mr Stuart, who took no notice of the applause, and indicated no opinion on the point whatever.

“Now,” continued Miss Flouncer, firmly, “before I become a subscriber to your society, Captain Bingley. I must be quite certain that it accomplishes much good, that it is worthy of support.”

Being somewhat fired by the doubt that was implied in this speech, I replied with warmth—

“My dear madam, nothing will gratify me more than to enlighten you.”

Hereupon I began an address, the substance of which is set down in the following chapter.

Chapter Sixteen.

Jack Tar before and after the Institution of the S.F.M.S.

One beautiful evening in autumn, many years ago, a sailor was observed to approach an English village which lay embosomed among trees, near the margin of a small stream whose waters gleamed in the rays of the setting sun.

The village was an inland one, far removed alike from the roar and the influences of the briny ocean. It must have cost the sailor some pain to reach it; for he walked with a crutch, and one of his bare feet was bandaged, and scarcely touched the ground at each step. He looked dusty and fatigued, yet he was a stout, well-favoured, robust young fellow, so that his hapless condition was evidently the result of recent misfortune and accident—not of prolonged sickness or want. He wore the picturesque blue jacket, wide trousers, and straw hat of a man-of-war’s man; and exposed a large amount of brown chest beneath his blue flannel shirt, the broad collar of which was turned well over.

Going straight to the inn of the village, he begged for a night’s food and lodging. Told a sad story, in off-hand fashion, of how he had been shipwrecked on the western isles of Scotland, where he had lost all he possessed, and had well-nigh lost his life too; but a brave fisherman had pulled him out of the surf by the hair of the head, and so he was saved alive, though with a broken leg, which took many weeks to mend. When he was able to travel, he had set out with his crutch, and had walked two hundred miles on his way to Liverpool, where his poor wife and two helpless children were living in painful ignorance of his sad fate!

Of course this was enough to arouse all the sympathies of the villagers, few of whom had ever seen a real sailor of any kind in their lives—much less a shipwrecked one. So the poor fellow was received with open arms, entreated hospitably, lodged and fed at the public expense, and in the morning sent on his way rejoicing.

All the forenoon of that day the shipwrecked sailor limped on his way through a populous district of old England in the midst of picturesque scenery, gathering pence and victuals, ay, and silver and even gold too, from the pitying inhabitants as he went along. Towards the afternoon he came to a more thinly peopled district, and after leaving a small hamlet in which he had reaped a rich harvest he limped to the brow of the hill at the foot of which it lay, and gazed for a few minutes at the prospect before him.

It was a wide stretch of moorland, across which the road went in almost a straight line. There were slight undulations in the land, but no houses or signs of the presence of man.

Having limped on until the village was quite hidden from view, the sailor quietly put his crutch across his broad

shoulder, and brightening up wonderfully, walked across the moor at the rate of full five miles an hour, whistling gaily in concert with the larks as he sped along.

An hour and a half of such walking brought him to a small patch of scrubby underwood, from the neighbourhood of which a large town could be seen looming against the evening sky in the far distance. The sailor entered the underwood with the air of a man who had aimed at the spot as a goal, and who meant to rest there a while. He reached an open space, in the centre of which grew a stunted tree. Here he sat down, and taking off his wallet, ate a hearty supper of scraps of excellent bread, cheese, and meat, which he washed down with a draught of gin. Afterwards he lit his pipe, and, while enjoying himself thus, reclining at the foot of the tree, proceeded to increase his enjoyment by counting out his gains.

While thus agreeably engaged, a rustling of the bushes caused him to bundle the gains hastily up in a handkerchief, which he thrust into his pocket, while he leaped nimbly to his feet, and seized his crutch.

“Oh, it’s only you, Bill! why, I declare I thought it was—well, well, never mind. How have ye got on?”

The individual addressed entered the enclosure, and sat down at the foot of the tree with a sigh, which might, without much exaggeration, have been termed a growl. Bill was also, strange to say, a sailor, and a wounded one, (doubtless a shipwrecked one), because his left arm was in a sling.

“It’s tough work, Jim, an’ little pay,” said the newcomer. “Why, I’ve walked twenty mile good, an’ only realised two pun’ ten. If it don’t improve, I’ll take to a better trade.”

“You’re a discontented dog,” replied Jim, spreading out his treasures. “Here have I limped the same distance, an’ bin an’ got five pun’ two.”

“Whew!” whistled the other. “You don’t say that? Well—we go ’alves, so I’m better—’ere pass that bottle. I’ll drink to your good ’ealth. ’Ow did you ever come by it, Bill?”

To this Bill replied that he had fallen in with several ladies, whose hearts were so touched by his pitiful tale that most of them gave him crown pieces, while two, who actually shed tears while he spoke, gave him half a sovereign each!

“I drink to them ’ere two ladies,” exclaimed Bill, applying the gin bottle to his mouth, which was already full of bread and beef.

“So does I,” said Jim, snatching the bottle from his comrade, “not so much for the sake of them there ladies, ’owever, as to get my fair share o’ the tipple afore you.”

The remainder of the sentence was drowned by gin; and after they had finished the bottle, which was only a pint one however, these two men sat down together to count their ill-gotten gains; for both of them were vile impostors, who had never been on the salt water in the whole course of their worthless lives.

“Now, madam,” said I, pointedly addressing Miss Flouncer, who had listened with rapt attention, “this circumstance happened *before* the existence of the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society, and similar cases happened frequently. In fact, the interior of our land was at that time constantly visited by shipwrecked sailors of this kind.”

“Indeed!” said Miss Flouncer, undulating to me, with a benignant smile.

“Yes, madam,” said I. “Now observe another side of this picture.”

Hereupon I resumed my address, the substance of which was as follows:

It chanced that when impostor Jim started away over the moor at the slapping pace I have already referred to, he was observed by two of the village boys, who were lying in a hollow by the road-side amusing themselves. These urchins immediately ran home, and told what they had seen. The gossips of the place congregated round the inn door, and commented on the conduct of the pretended seaman in no measured terms—at the same time expressing a wish that they only had him there, and they would let him smell the peculiar odour of their horse-pond. At this point the courage and the ire of three stout young ploughmen, who had been drinking deeply, was stirred up so much that they vowed to be revenged, and set off in pursuit of the offender. As they ran nearly all the way, they soon came to the spot where Jim and Bill had been enjoying themselves, and met these villains just as they were issuing from the underwood to continue their journey.

A fight immediately ensued, but Jim made such play with his crutch that the ploughmen were driven back. Bill, too, who had been a London prize-fighter, unslung his left arm, and used it so vigorously that the rustics, after having had all their eyes blackened and all their noses bled, were fain to turn round and fly!

This event, as you may suppose, made a considerable sensation in the neighbourhood; travellers and carriers conveyed the news of it along the road from village to village; and the thing was thoroughly canvassed, and the impostors duly condemned.

Well, about three weeks afterwards a great storm arose; a ship was wrecked on the coast, and all the crew and passengers drowned except one man—a powerful seaman, who chanced to be a good swimmer, and who nearly lost his own life in his gallant efforts to save the life of the only female who was on board. This man swam to the shore with one arm, while with the other he supported the woman.

He could barely crawl up the beach through the heavy surf, dragging his burden after him. But he succeeded, and then lay for some time insensible. When he recovered, he found that the woman appeared to be dead. Anxious, however, to do all in his power to restore her, he tried to chafe her limbs; but seeing that he could make no

impression, he hastened away to search for human dwellings and send help. Four miles did he stagger along before he came to a fishing village.

Here he told his tale; the men of the place hurried away to the scene of the wreck, but arrived too late to be of any use.

The sailor remained some days with the fishermen, who received him kindly, and gave him a few pence to help him on his way to the nearest town, where he received a few shillings from some charitable persons, and then set off to walk on foot to his native place, which happened to be on the opposite coast of England.

The poor fellow got on very well until he came to the road which led to the village where Jim had been so successful. All along this road he was scouted as an impostor, and, but for his imposing size and physical strength, would doubtless have received more kicks than halfpence. As it was he was well-nigh starved.

Arriving one afternoon, famishing and almost knocked up, at the village, he went in despair to the inn door, and began to tell his sorrowful tale. He told it to unsympathetic ears. Among his auditors were the three ploughmen who had been so roughly handled by Jim and Bill. These only heard the first two or three sentences when they rushed upon the sailor, calling on their comrades, who were numerous, to help them to duck the rascal in the horse-pond.

The stout tar, although taken by surprise and overpowered, was not disposed to submit without a struggle. He was a very Samson in strength. Rising up by main force with two of his foes on his back, he threw them off, drove his right fist into the eye of one, his foot into the stomach of a second, flattened the nose of a third on his face with a left-hander, and then wheeling round at random, plunged his elbow into the chest of another who was coming on behind, and caused him to measure his length on the ground. Before the rustics recovered from their surprise at the suddenness of these movements, two more of their number were sprawling in the dust, and the rest stood off aghast!

“Now, then,” shouted the indignant tar, as he clapped his back to the side of the inn, “come on! the whole of ’ee. I hope yer wills is made. What! ye’re afeard, are ye? Well, if ye won’t come on I’ll bid ye good afternoon, ye low minded, cowardly land-lubbers!”

And with that he made a rush at them. They tumbled over each other in heaps, trying to get out of his way, so that he could only get a passing dig at one or two of them, and cleared away as fast as he could run.

They did not follow him far, so Jack soon stopped and sat down on the road-side, in a very savage state of mind, to wipe the blood from his face and knuckles.

While he was thus engaged, an elderly gentleman in the garb of a clergyman approached him.

“What has happened to you, my man?” he asked.

“That’s none o’ your business,” answered Jack with angry emphasis. “Ax no questions, an’ you’ll be told no lies!”

“Excuse me, friend,” replied the clergyman gently, “I did not mean to annoy you; but you seem to have been badly wounded, and I would assist you if you will allow me.”

“I ax yer parding, sir,” said Jack, a little softened, though by no means restored to his wonted good-humour; “no offence meant, but I’ve been shamefully abused by the scoundrels in yonder village, an’ I am riled a bit. It’s only a scratch, sir, you don’t need to consarn yerself.”

“It is more than a scratch, if I may judge from the flow of blood. Permit me to examine.”

“Oh, it’ll be all right d’rectly,” said Jack; but as he said so he fell back on the grass, fainting from loss of blood which flowed from a large wound on his head.

When the sailor’s senses were restored, he found himself in a bed in the clergyman’s dwelling, with his head bandaged up, and his body a good deal weaker than he had ever before felt it. The clergyman took care of him until he recovered; and you may be sure that he did not miss the opportunity to urge the sailor to think of his soul, and to come to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, whose name is Love, and whose teaching is all summed up in this, “Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.”

When Jack was quite recovered, the clergyman gave him some money to enable him to reach his home without begging his way.

Now this case also occurred *before* the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society was instituted. I cannot say that such cases of rough handling were frequent; but cases in which true-blue shipwrecked tars were treated as impostors were numerous, so that, in those days, knaves and rascals often throve as wrecked seamen, while the genuine and unfortunate men were often turned rudely from door to door. This state of things does not exist now. It *cannot* exist now, for honorary agents of the society are to be found on every part of our coasts, so that the moment a wrecked man touches the land, no matter whether he be a Briton or a foreigner, he is at once taken care of, clothed, housed, fed, supplied with a little money, and forwarded to his home, or to the nearest consul of his nation. The society has therefore accomplished two great and good objects, for which the entire nation owes it a debt of gratitude; it has rid the land of begging impostors clad in sailors’ clothes, and it has provided relief and assistance to the shipwrecked among our brave and hardy seamen who are in every sense the bulwarks of our island, and without whose labours, in the most perilous of all callings, Great Britain would be one of the poorest and most uninfluential kingdoms on the face of the earth.

But the society does a great deal more than that, for it comforts and assists with money and advice hundreds and thousands of widows and orphans whose husbands, fathers, or brothers have been drowned; and this it does from

year to year regularly—as regularly as the storms come and scatter death and destruction on our shores. It cannot be too earnestly impressed on the people of England, and especially on those who dwell inland, that at least a thousand lives are lost, two thousand ships are wrecked, and two millions sterling are thrown away upon the coasts of this country *every year*.

It is owing to the untiring energy of the National Lifeboat Institution that those figures are not much, *very* much higher; and it is the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society that alleviates much, *very* much, of the woe resulting from storms and wrecks upon our shores. Sailors and fishermen know this well, and support both institutions largely. I would that ladies and gentlemen knew this better, and felt that they have a positive duty incumbent on them in regard to these societies, for they are not local but *national*.

"Now, madam," said I, again addressing myself pointedly to Miss Flouncer, "would you like to hear a few interesting facts in reference to the objects of this Society?"

Miss Flouncer smiled and undulated in order to express her readiness to listen; at the same time she glanced at Sir Richard, who, I observed, was sound asleep. I also noticed that Mrs Bingley sniffed impatiently; but I felt that I had a duty to perform, so with unalterable resolution I prepared to continue my address, when Miss Peppy, who had been nearly asleep during the greater part of the time I was speaking, suddenly said to Miss Flouncer—

"Well, it *is* a most surprising state of things that people *will* go to sea and get wrecked just to let societies like these spring up like mushrooms all over the land. For my part, I think I would rather do without the things that ships bring to us from foreign lands than always hear of those dreadful wrecks, and—but really one cannot expect the world to alter just to please one, so I suppose people must go on being drowned and saved by rocket-boats and lifeboats; so we had better retire to the drawing-room, my dear."

The last observation was addressed to Mrs Bingley, who responded to it with a bow of assent as she drew on her gloves.

Immediately after, the ladies rose, and I was thus constrained to postpone my narration of interesting facts, until another opportunity should offer.

Chapter Seventeen.

Mrs Gaff endeavours fruitlessly to understand the Nature of Cash, Principal, and Interest.

At first, as I have said, poor Mrs Gaff was quite inconsolable at the bereavements she had sustained in the loss of her husband and son and brother. For a long time she refused to be comforted, or to allow her spirit to be soothed by the visits, (the "angel visits" as she styled them), of Lizzie Gordon, and the entrance of God's Word into her heart.

Much of the violence of the good woman's character was the result of training and example on an impulsive and sanguine, yet kindly spirit. She had loved Stephen and Billy with a true and ardent love, and she could not forgive herself for what she styled her "cruelty to the dear boy." Neither could she prevail on herself to enjoy or touch a single penny of the money which ought, she said, to have been her husband's.

Night after night would Mrs Gaff sit down by the cottage fireside to rest after her day of hard toll, and, making Tottie sit down on a stool at her feet, would take her head into her lap, and stroke the hair and the soft cheek gently with her big rough hand, while she discoursed of the good qualities of Stephen, and the bravery of her darling boy, to whom she had been such a cruel monster in days gone by.

Poor Tottie, being of a sympathetic nature, would pat her mother's knee and weep. One evening while they were sitting thus she suddenly seemed to be struck with a new idea.

"Maybe, mother," said she, "Daddy an' Billy will come back. We've never hearn that they's been drownded."

"Tottie," replied Mrs Gaff earnestly, "I've thoughten o' that afore now."

Little more was said, but from that night Mrs Gaff changed her manner and her practice. She set herself earnestly and doggedly to prepare for the return of her husband and child!

On the day that followed this radical change in her feelings and plans, Mrs Gaff received a visit from Haco Barepoles.

"How d'ye find yerself to-day, Mrs Gaff?" said the big skipper, seating himself carefully on a chair, at which he cast an earnest glance before sitting down.

This little touch of anxiety in reference to the chair was the result of many years of experience, which told him that his weight was too much for most ordinary chairs, unless they were in sound condition.

"Well and hearty," replied Mrs Gaff, sitting down and seizing Tottie's head, which she began to smooth. She always smoothed Tottie, if she were at hand, when she had nothing better to do.

"Heh!" exclaimed Haco, with a slight look of surprise. "Glad to hear it, lass. Nothin' turned up, has there?"

"No, nothin'; but I've bin busy preparin' for Stephen and Billy comin' home, an' that puts one in good spirits, you know."

A shade of anxiety crossed Haco's brow as he looked earnestly into the woman's face, under the impression that

grief had shaken her reason, but she returned his glance with such a calm self-possessed look that he felt reassured.

“I hope they’ll come, lass,” he said sadly; “what makes ye think they will?”

“I feel *sure* on it. I feel it here,” replied the woman, placing her hand on her breast. “Sweet Miss Lizzie Gordon and me prayed together that the Lord would send ’em home if it was His will, an’ ever since then the load’s bin off my heart.”

Haco shook his head for a moment, then nodded it, and said cheerily, “Well, I hope it may be so for your sake, lass. An’ what sort o’ preparations are ye goin’ to make?”

Mrs Gaff smiled as she rose, and silently went to a cupboard, which stood close to the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, and took therefrom a tea-caddy, which she set on the table with peculiar emphasis. Tottie watched her with an expression of awe, for she had seen her mother weeping frequently over that tea-caddy, and believed that it must certainly contain something very dreadful.

“The preparations,” said Mrs Gaff, as she searched her pocket for the key of the box, “will depend on what I’m able to afford.”

“You’ll be able to afford a good deal, then, if all that’s reported be true, for I’m told ye’ve got ten thousand pounds.”

“Is that the sum?” asked Mrs Gaff, still searching for the key, which, like all other keys in like circumstances, seemed to have gone in for a game of hide-and-seek; “I’m sure I ought to know, for the lawyer took great pains to teach me that; ay, there ye are,” (to the key); “found ye at last. Now then, Haco, we’ll have a look at the book and see.”

To Tottie’s surprise and no small disappointment, the only object that came out of the mysterious tea-caddy was a small book, which Mrs Gaff, however, seemed to look upon with respect, and to handle as if she half-expected it would bite.

“There, that’s my banker’s book. You read off the figures, Haco, for I can’t. To be sure if I had wanted to know, Tottie could have told me, but I haven’t had the heart to look at it till to-day.”

“Ten thousand, an’ no mistake!” said Haco, looking at the figures with intense gravity.

“Now, then, the question is,” said Mrs Gaff, sitting down and again seizing Tottie’s head for stroking purposes, while she put the question with deep solemnity—“the question is, how long will that last?”

Haco was a good deal puzzled. He bit his thumb nail, and knit his shaggy brows for some time, and then said—

“Well, you know, that depends on how much you spend at a time. If you go for to spend a thousand pounds a day, now, it’ll just last ten days. If you spend a thousand pounds a year, it’ll last ten years. If you spend a thousand pounds in ten years, it’ll last a hundred years—d’ye see? It all depends on the spendin’. But, then, Mrs Gaff,” said the skipper remonstratively, “you mustn’t go for to live on the principal, you know.”

“What’s the principal?” demanded Mrs Gaff.

“Why, the whole sum; the money *itself*, you know.”

“D’ye suppose that I’m a born fool, Mr Barepoles, that I should try to live on the money itself? I never heerd on anybody bilin’ up money in a kettle an’ suppin’ goold soup, and I’m not a-goin’ for to try.”

With infinite difficulty, and much futile effort at illustration, did Haco explain to Mrs Gaff the difference between principal and interest; telling her to live on the latter, and never on any account to touch the former, unless she wished to “end her days in a work’us.”

“I wonder what it’s like,” said Mrs Gaff.

“What what’s like?” inquired the skipper.

“Ten thousand pounds.”

“Well, that depends too, you know, on what it’s made of—whether copper, silver, goold, or paper.”

“What! is it ever made o’ paper?”

In attempting to explain this point, Haco became unintelligible even to himself, and Mrs Gaff became wildly confused.

“Well, well,” said the latter, “never mind; but try to tell me how much I’ll have a year.”

“That depends too—”

“Everything seems to depend,” cried Mrs Gaff somewhat testily.

“Of course it does,” said Haco, “everything *does* depend on somethin’ else, and everything will go on dependin’ to the end of time: it depends on how you invest it, and what interest ye git for it.”

“Oh, dearie me!” sighed Mrs Gaff, beginning for the first time to realise in a small degree the anxieties and troubles inseparable from wealth; “can’t ye tell me what it’s *likely* to be about?”

“Couldn’t say,” observed Haco, drawing out his pipe as if he were about to appeal to it for information; “it’s too deep

for me."

"Well, but," pursued Mrs Gaff, becoming confidential, "tell me now, d'ye think it would be enough to let me make some grand improvements on the cottage against Stephen and Billy's return?"

"Why, that depends on what the improvements is to be," returned Haco with a profound look.

"Ay, just so. Well, here are some on 'em. First of all, I wants to get a noo grate an' a brass tea-kettle. There's nothing like a cheery fire of a cold night, and my Stephen liked a cheery fire—an' so did Billy for the matter o' that; but the trouble I had wi' that there grate is past belief. Now, a noo grate's indispens'ble."

"Well?" said Haco, puffing his smoke up the chimney, and regarding the woman earnestly.

"Well; then I want to get a noo clock. That one in the corner is a perfit fright. A noo table, too, for the leg o' that one has bin mended so often that it won't never stand another splice. Then a noo tea-pot an' a fender and fire-irons would be a comfort. But my great wish is to get a big mahogany four-post bed with curtains. Stephen says he never did sleep in a four-poster, and often wondered what it would be like—no more did I, so I would like to take him by surprise, you see. Then I want to git—"

"Well?" said Haco, when she paused.

"I'm awful keen to git a carpit, but I doubt I'm thinkin' o' too many things. D'ye think the first year's—what d'ye call it?"

"Interest," said Haco.

"Ay, interest—would pay for all that?"

"Yes, an' more," said the skipper confidently.

"If I only knew how much it is to be," said Mrs Gaff thoughtfully.

At that moment the door opened, and Kenneth Stuart entered, followed by his friend Gildart Bingley. After inquiring as to her welfare Kenneth said:

"I've come to pay you the monthly sum which is allowed you by the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society. Mr Bingley asked me to call as he could not do so; but from all accounts I believe you won't need it. May I congratulate you on your good fortune, Mrs Gaff."

Kenneth took out his purse as he spoke to pay the sum due to her.

Mrs Gaff seemed to be struck with a sudden thought. She thanked Kenneth for his congratulations, and then said:

"As to my not needin' the money you've brought me, young man, I take leave to say that I *do* need it; so you'll obleege me by handin' it over."

Kenneth obeyed in surprise not unmingled with disappointment in finding such a grasping spirit in one whom he had hitherto thought well of. He paid the money, however, in silence, and was about to take his leave when Mrs Gaff stopped him.

"This sum has bin paid to me riglarly for the last three months."

"I believe it has," said Kenneth.

"And," continued Mrs Gaff, "it's been the means o' keepin' me and my Tottie from starvation."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned Kenneth, who began to wonder what was to follow; but he was left to wonder, for Mrs Gaff abruptly asked him and Gildart to be seated, as she was anxious to find out a fact or two in regard to principal and interest.

Gildart could scarce avoid laughing as he glanced at his companion.

"Now," began Mrs Gaff, seating herself opposite Kenneth, with a hand on each knee, "I wants to know what a principal of ten thousand pounds comes to in the way of interest in a twel'month."

"Well, Mrs Gaff," said Kenneth, "that depends—"

"Dear me!" cried Mrs Gaff petulantly, "every mortial thing that has to do with money seeps to *depend*. Could ye not tell me somethin' about it, now, that doesn't depend?"

"Not easily," replied Kenneth with a laugh; "but I was going to say that if you get it invested at five per cent, that would give you an income of five hundred pounds a year."

"How much?" inquired Mrs Gaff in a high key, while her eyes widened with astonishment.

Kenneth repeated the sum.

"Young man, you're jokin'."

“Indeed I am not,” said Kenneth earnestly, with an appealing glance at Gildart.

“True—as Johnson’s Dictionary,” said the middy. Mrs Gaff spent a few moments in silent and solemn reflection.

“The Independent clergyman,” she said in a low meditative tone, “has only two hundred a year—so I’m told; an’ the doctor at the west end has got four hundred, and he keeps a fine house an’ servants; an’ Sam Balls, the rich hosier, has got six hundred—so they say; and Mrs Gaff, the poor critter, has only got five hundred! That’ll do,” she continued, with a sudden burst of animation, “shake out the reefs in yer tops’ls, lass, slack off yer sheets, ease the helm, an’ make the most on it while the fair wind lasts.”

Having thus spoken, Mrs Gaff hastily folded up in a napkin the sum just given her, and put it, along with the bank-book, into the tea-caddy, which she locked and deposited safely in the corner cupboard. Immediately after, her visitors, much surprised at her eccentric conduct, rose and took their leave.

Chapter Eighteen.

Mrs Gaff becomes a Woman of Business, and finds it awfully Hard Work.

Soon after the conversation narrated in the last chapter, the clerks in the bank of Wreckumoft were not a little interested by the entrance of a portly woman of comely appearance and large proportions. She was dressed in a gaudy cotton gown and an enormously large bonnet, which fluttered a good deal, owing as much to its own magnitude and instability as to the quantity of pink ribbons and bows wherewith it was adorned.

The woman led by the hand a very pretty little girl, whose dress was much the same in pattern, though smaller in proportion. Both woman and child looked about them with that air of uncertainty peculiar to females of the lower order when placed in circumstances in which they know not exactly how to act.

Taking pity upon them, a clerk left his perch, and going forward, asked the woman what she wanted.

To this she replied promptly, that she wanted money.

She was much flushed and very warm, and appeared to have come some distance on foot, as well as to be in a state of considerable agitation, which, however, she determinedly subdued by the force of a strong will.

“If you go to yonder rail and present your cheque,” replied the clerk kindly, “you’ll get the money.”

“Present what, young man?”

“Your cheque,” replied the clerk.

“What’s that?”

“Have you not a cheque-book—or a slip of paper to—”

“Oh! ay, a *book*. Of course I’ve got a book, young man.”

Saying this, Mrs Gaff, (for it was she), produced from a huge bag the bank-book that had erstwhile reposed in the mysterious tea-caddy.

“Have you no other book than this?”

“No, young man,” replied Mrs Gaff, feeling, but not exhibiting, slight alarm.

The clerk, after glancing at the book, and with some curiosity at its owner, then explained that a cheque-book was desirable, although not absolutely necessary, and went and got one, and showed her the use of it,—how the sum to be drawn should be entered with the date, etcetera, on the margin in figures, and then the cheque itself drawn out in words, “*not in figures*,” and signed; after which he advised Mrs Gaff to draw out a cheque on the spot for what she wanted.

“But, young man,” said Mrs Gaff, who had listened to it all with an expression of imbecility on her good-looking face, “I never wrote a stroke in my life ’xcept once, when I tried to show my Billy how to do it, and only made a big blot on his copy, for which I gave him a slap on the face, poor ill-used boy.”

“Well, then, tell me how much you want, and I will write it out for you,” said the clerk, sitting down at a table and taking up a pen.

Mrs Gaff pondered for a few seconds, then she drew Tottie aside and carried on an earnest and animated conversation with her in hoarse whispers, accompanied by much nodding and quivering of both bonnets, leading to the conclusion that what the one propounded the other heartily agreed to.

Returning to the table, Mrs Gaff said that she wanted a hundred pounds.

“How much?” demanded the clerk in surprise.

“A hundred pound, young man,” repeated Mrs Gaff, somewhat sternly, for she had made up her mind to go through with it come what might; “if ye have as much in the shop just now—if not I’ll take the half, and call back for the other half to-morry—though it be raither a longish walk fro’ Cove and back for a woman o’ my size.”

The clerk smiled, wrote out the cheque, and bade her sign it with a cross. She did so, not only with a cross, but with two large and irregular blots. The clerk then pointed to a partition about five feet six in height, where she was to present it. Going to the partition she looked about for a door by which to enter, but found none. Looking back to the clerk for information, she perceived that he was gone. Pickpockets and thieves instantly occurred to her, but, on searching for the bank-book and finding that it was safe, she felt relieved. Just as she was beginning to wonder whether she was not being made game of, she heard a voice above her, and, looking up, observed a man's head stretched over the top of the partition and looking down at her.

"Now, then, good woman, what do you want?" said the head.

"I wants a hundred pound," said Mrs Gaff, presenting her cheque in a somewhat defiant manner, for she began to feel badgered.

The head put over a hand, took the cheque, and then both disappeared.

Mrs Gaff stood for some time waiting anxiously for the result, and as no result followed, she began again to think of thieves and pickpockets, and even meditated as to the propriety of setting up a sudden cry of thieves, murder, and fire, in order to make sure of the clerk being arrested before he should get quite clear of the building, when she became aware of a fluttering of some sort just above her. Looking up she observed her cheque quivering on the top of the partition. Wondering what this could mean, she gazed at it with an expression of solemn interest.

Twice the cheque fluttered, with increasing violence each time, as though it were impatient, and then the head re-appeared suddenly.

"Why don't you take your cheque?" it demanded with some asperity.

"Because I don't want it, young man; I wants my money," retorted Mrs Gaff, whose ire was beginning to rise.

The head smiled, dropped the cheque on the floor, and, pointing with its nose to a gentleman who stood behind a long counter in a sort of stall surrounded with brass rails, told her to present it to the teller, and she'd get the money. Having said which the head disappeared; but it might have been noted by a self-possessed observer, that as soon as Mrs Gaff had picked up the cheque, (bursting two buttons off her gown in the act), the head re-appeared, grinning in company with several other heads, all of which grinned and watched the further movements of Mrs Gaff with interest.

There were four gentlemen standing behind the long counter in brazen stalls. Three of these Mrs Gaff passed on her way to the one to whom she had been directed by the head's nose.

"Now, sir," said Mrs Gaff, (she could not say "young man" this time, for the teller was an elderly gentleman), "I hope ye'll pay me the money without any more worrittin' of me. I'm sure ye might ha' done it at once without shovin' about a poor ignorant woman like me."

Having appealed to the teller's feelings in this last observation, Mrs Gaff's own feelings were slightly affected, and she whimpered a little. Tottie, being violently sympathetic, at once began to weep silently.

"How would you like to have it, my good woman?" asked the teller kindly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Mrs Gaff.

"Would you like to have it in notes or gold?" said the teller.

"In goold, of course, sir."

Tottie here glanced upwards through her tears. Observing that her mother had ceased to whimper, and was gazing in undisguised admiration at the proceedings of the teller, she turned her eyes in his direction, and forgot to cry any more.

The teller was shovelling golden sovereigns into a pair of scales with a brass shovel as coolly as if he were a grocer's boy scooping out raw sugar. Having weighed the glittering pile, he threw them carelessly out of the scale into the brass shovel, and shot them at Mrs Gaff, who suddenly thrust her ample bosom against the counter, under the impression that the coins were about to be scattered on the floor. She was mistaken. They were checked in their career by a ledge, and lay before her unbelieving eyes in a glittering mass.

Suddenly she looked at the teller with an expression of severe reproof.

"You've forgot to count 'em, sir."

"You'll find them all right," replied the teller, with a laugh.

Thereupon Mrs Gaff, in an extremely unbelieving state of mind, began to count the gold pieces one by one into a little cotton bag which had been prepared by her for this very purpose, and which Tottie held open with both hands. In ten minutes, after much care and many sighs, she counted it all, and found that there were two sovereigns too many, which she offered to return to the teller with a triumphant air, but that incredulous man smiled benignantly, and advised her to count it again. She did count it again, and found that there were four pieces too few. Whereupon she retired with the bag to a side table, and, in a state of profuse perspiration, began to count it over a third time with deliberate care.

Tottie watched and checked each piece like a lynx, and the sum was at last found to be correct!

Mrs Gaff quitted the bank with a feeling of intense relief, and met Lizzie Gordon walking with Emmie Wilson just outside the door.

“My dear Miss Gordon,” exclaimed the poor woman, kissing Lizzie’s hand in the fulness of her heart, “you’ve no ideer what agonies I’ve bin a-sufferin’ in that there bank. If they’re a-goin’ to treat me in this way always, I’ll draw out the whole o’ my ten hundred thousand pound—if that’s the sum—an’ stow it away in my Stephen’s sea-chest, what he’s left behind him.”

“Dear Mrs Gaff, what have they done to you?” asked Lizzie in some concern.

“Oh, it’s too long a story to tell ye here, my dear. Come with me. I’m a-goin’ straight to yer uncle’s, Captain Bingley. Be he to home? But stop; did ye ever see a hundred golden pounds?”

Mrs Gaff cautiously opened the mouth of her bag and allowed Lizzie to peep in, but refused to answer any questions regarding her future intentions.

Meanwhile Emmie and Tottie had flown into each other’s arms. The former had often seen my niece, both at the house of Mr Stuart and at my own, as our respective ladies interchanged frequent visits, and Miss Peppy always brought Emmie when she came to see us. Lizzie had taken such a fancy to the orphan that she begged Miss Peppy to allow her to go with her and me sometimes on our visits to the houses of distressed sailors and fishermen. In this way Emmie and Tottie had become acquainted, and they were soon bosom friends, for the gentle, dark-eyed daughter of Mrs Gaff seemed to have been formed by nature as a harmonious counterpart to the volatile, fair-haired orphan. Emmie, I may here remark in passing, had by this time become a recognised inmate of Mr Stuart’s house. What his intentions in regard to her were, no one knew. He had at first vowed that the foundling should be cast upon the parish, but when the illness, that attacked the child after the ship-wreck, had passed away, he allowed her to remain without further remark than that she must be kept carefully out of his way. Kenneth, therefore, held to his first intention of not letting his father or any one else know that the poor girl was indeed related to him by the closest tie. Meanwhile he determined that Emmie’s education should not be neglected.

Immediately on arriving at my residence, Mrs Gaff was, at her own request, ushered into my study, accompanied by Tottie.

I bade her good-day, and, after a few words of inquiry as to her health, asked if I could be of any service to her.

“No, capting, thank ’ee,” she said, fumbling with her bag as if in search of something.

“No news of Stephen or Billy, I suppose?” said I in a sad tone.

“Not yet, capting, but I expect ’em one o’ these days, an’ I’m a-gettin’ things ready for ’em.”

“Indeed! what induces you to expect them so confidently?”

“Well, capting, I can’t well tell ’ee, but I do, an’ in the meantime I’ve come to thank ’ee for all yer kindness to Tottie an’ me when we was in distress. Yer Society, capting, has saved me an’ Tottie fro’ starvation, an’ so I’ve come for to give ye back the money ye sent me by Mr Stuart, for there’s many a poor widder as’ll need it more nor I do.”

So saying, she placed the money on the table, and I thanked her heartily, adding that I was glad to be able to congratulate her on her recent good fortune.

“Moreover,” continued Mrs Gaff, taking a small bag from the large one which hung on her arm, and laying it also on the table, “I feel so thankful to the Almighty, as well as to you, sir, that I’ve come to give ye a small matter o’ goold for the benefit o’ the Society ye b’longs to, an’ there it be.”

“How much is here?” said I, lifting up the bag.

“A hundred pound. Ye needn’t count it, capting, for it’s all c’rekt, though it *was* shovelled out to me as if it war no better than coals or sugar. Good-day, capting.”

Mrs Gaff, turning hastily round as if to avoid my thanks, or my remonstrances at so poor a woman giving so large a sum, seized Tottie by the wrist and dragged her towards the door.

“Stop, stop, my good woman,” said I; “at least let me give you a receipt.”

“Please, capting, I doesn’t want one. Surely I can trust ye, an’ I’ve had my heart nigh broke with bits o’ paper this good day.”

“Well, but I am required by the rules of the Society to give a receipt for all sums received.”

Mrs Gaff was prevailed on to wait for the receipt, but the instant it was handed to her, she got up, bounced out of the room, and out of the house into the street. I hastened to the window, and saw her and Tottie walking smartly away in the direction of Cove, with their enormous bonnets quivering violently, and their ribbons streaming in the breeze.

Half an hour afterwards, Dan Horsey, who had been sent to me with a note from my friend Stuart, went down into my kitchen, and finding Susan Barepoles there alone, put his arm round her waist.

“Don’t,” said Susan, struggling unsuccessfully to get free. “What d’ye think Mrs Gaff has bin an’ done?”

“Don’t know, my jewel, no more nor a pig as has niver seen the light o’ day,” said Dan.

“She’s bin—and gone—and given—” said Susan, with great deliberation, “one—hundred—gold sovereigns—to the Shipwrecked thingumbob Society!”

“How d’ye know that, darlint?” inquired Dan.

“Master told Miss Lizzie, Miss Lizzie told missis, and missis told me.”

“You don’t say so! Well, I wish I wor the Shipwrecked thing-me-bob Society, I do,” said Dan with a sigh; “but I an’t, so I’ll have to cut my stick, clap spurs to my horse, as the story books say, for Capting Bingley towld me to make haste. But there’s wan thing, Susan, as I wouldn’t guv for twice the sum.”

“An’ what may that be?” asked Susan shyly.

“It’s *that*,” said Dan, imprinting a kiss on Susan’s lips, to the dismay of Bounder, who chanced to be in the back scullery and heard the smack.

Cook rushed to the kitchen, but when she reached it Dan was gone, and a few minutes later that worthy was cantering toward Seaside Villa, muttering to himself:

“Tin thousand pound! It’s a purty little bit o’ cash. I only wish as a brother o’ mine, (if I had wan), would leave me half as much, an’ I’d buy a coach and six, an’ put purty Susan inside and mount the box meself, an’ drive her to Africay or Noo Zealand, (not to mintion Ottyheity and Kangaroo), by way of a marriage trip! Hey! Bucephalus, be aisy now. It isn’t Master Kenneth that’s on yer back just now, so mind what yer about, or it’ll be wus for ye, old boy.”

Chapter Nineteen.

The Open Boat on the Pacific—Gaff And Billy in Dreadful Circumstances—A Message from the Sea, and a Madman’s Death.

While these events are taking place in the busy seaport of Wreckumoft, let us return to the little boat which we left floating, a solitary speck, upon the breast of the great Pacific Ocean.

As long as the whale-ship continued visible, the three occupants of the boat sat immovable, gazing intently upon her in deep silence, as if each felt that when she disappeared his last hold upon earth was gone.

Billy was the first to break silence.

“She’s gone, father,” he whispered.

Both men started, and looked round at the boy.

“Ay, she’s gone,” observed Gaff with a sigh; “and now we’ll have to pull for it, night an’ day, as we are able.”

He began slowly to get out one of the oars as he spoke.

“It would have been better if they had cut our throats,” growled Captain Graddy with a fierce oath.

“You’d have been worse off just now if they had, captain,” said Gaff, shaking off his depression of spirits by a strong effort of will. “Come, Cap’n Graddy, you an’ I are in the same fix; let’s be friends, and do our best to face the worst, like men.”

“It makes little matter how we face it,” said the captain, “it’ll come to the same thing in the long run, if we don’t manage to make it a short run by taking strong measures. (He touched the hilt of a knife which he wore at all times in his belt.) However, we may as well pull as not.”

He rose and sulkily took an oar, while Gaff took another.

“Now, captain,” said Gaff, “you know better than me how far we be fro’ land, an’ which is the way to pull.”

“I should think we’re five hundred miles from the nearest land,” said Graddy, “in a nor’-east direction, an’ there’s no islands that I know of between us an’ South America, so we may just pull about for exercise till the grub’s done, an’ then pull till we’re dead.”

The captain burst into a loud, fierce laugh, as if he thought the last remark uncommonly witty.

Presently he said, “You may as well see how much we’ve got to eat an’ drink before beginnin’ our work.”

“All right, my hearty!” cried Gaff, rising with alacrity to examine their store of provisions; “here’s a small bag o’ biscuit as’ll last us three days, mayhap, on half allowance, so we’ll be able to do with quarter allowance for the first few days, an’ then reduce to an eighth, which’ll make it spin out a few days longer. By that time we may fall in with a sail, who knows?”

“We’re far beyond the track o’ ships,” said the captain bitterly. “Is there never a drop o’ water in the boat?”

“Not a drop,” replied Gaff, “I’ve searched all round, an’ only found a empty bottle.”

“Ay, meant for to smuggle brandy aboard when they got the chance, the brutes!” said the captain, referring to his

recent crew. “Well, it don’t matter. We’ve now the prospect of dyin’ o’ thirst before we die of starvation. For my part, I prefer to die o’ starvation, so ye may put yourself an’ your brat on full allowance as long as it lasts.”

Poor Billy’s horror at the prospect before him was much aggravated by the fierce and brutal manner of Graddy, and he would fain have gone and hid his face in his father’s bosom; but he had been placed at the helm while the two were pulling, so he could not forsake his post.

It was a calm evening when they were thus cast adrift on the boundless sea, and as night advanced the calm deepened, so that the ocean became like a sea of ink, in which the glorious host of stars were faithfully mirrored.

Hour after hour the two men pulled at the oars with a slow-measured steady stroke, while Billy sat at the helm, and kept the boat’s head in the direction of a certain star which the captain pointed out to him. At length the star became like a moon to Billy’s gazing eyes; then it doubled itself, and then it went out altogether as the poor boy fell forward.

“Hallo, Billy! mind your helm!” cried his father.

“I felled asleep, daddy,” said the Bu’ster apologetically, as he resumed his place.

“Well, well, boy; lie down and take a sleep. It’s too hard on you. Eat a biscuit first though before you lie down, and I’ll keep the boat’s head right with the oar.”

The captain made no remark, but the moon, which had just arisen, shone on his hard features, and showed that they were more fierce and lowering than at the beginning of the night.

Billy gladly availed himself of the permission, and took a biscuit out of the bag. Before he had eaten half of it he fell back in the stern-sheets of the boat, dropt into a sound sleep, and dreamed of home and his mother and Tottie.

Hour after hour the men pulled at the oars. They were strong men both of them, inured to protracted exertion and fatigue. Still the night seemed as if it would never come to an end, for in those high southern latitudes at that time of the year the days were very short and the nights were long.

At last both men stopped rowing, as if by mutual consent.

“It’s a pity,” said Gaff, “to knock ourselves up together. You’d better lie down, cap’n, an’ I’ll pull both oars for a spell.”

“No, no, Gaff,” replied Graddy, with sudden and unaccountable urbanity; “I’m not a bit tired, and I’m a bigger man than you—maybe a little stronger. So do you lie down beside the boy, an’ I’ll call ye when I want a rest.”

Gaff remonstrated, protesting that he was game to pull for hours yet, but the captain would take no denial, so he agreed to rest; yet there was an uneasy feeling in his breast which rendered rest almost impossible. He lay for a long time with his eyes fixed on the captain, who now pulled the two oars slowly and in measured time as before.

At last, in desperation, Gaff gave Billy a poke in the ribs which roused him.

“Come, boy,” said his father almost sternly, “you’ve slept long enough now; get up an’ steer. Don’t you see the cap’n’s pullin’ all alone!”

“All right, daddy,” said Billy, uttering a loud yawn and stretching himself. “Where am I? Oh! oh!”

The question was put before he had quite recovered consciousness; the terminal “oh!” was something like a groan of despair, as his eye fell on the forbidding countenance of the captain.

Billy took the tiller in silence. After a little while Gaff drew his son’s ear near to his mouth, and said in a low whisper—

“Billy, my lad, I *must* have a sleep, but I dursn’t do it unless you keep a sharp eye on the captain. He’s after mischief, I’m quite sure o’ that, so give me a tremendous dig in the ribs if he offers to rise from his seat. Mind what I say now, lad. Our lives may depend on it.”

Billy promised to be watchful, and in less than two minutes afterwards Gaff was sunk in deep repose.

The boy was faithful to his trust. Without appearing to be watching him, he never for one moment removed his eyes so far from where the captain sat labouring at the oars as to give him a chance of moving without being seen. As time passed by, however, Billy found it difficult to keep awake, and, in proportion as this difficulty increased, his staring at the captain became more direct and intense. Of course Graddy perceived this, and the sneering smile that crossed his visage showed that he had made a shrewd guess at the cause of the lad’s attentions.

By degrees Billy’s eyes began to droop, and he roused himself frequently with a strong effort, feeling desperately alarmed lest he should be overcome. But nature was not to be denied. Again and again did his head fall forward, again and again did he look up with a startled expression to perceive that Graddy was regarding him with a cold sardonic smile. Gradually Billy’s eyes refused to convey a correct impression of what they rested on. The rower’s head suddenly became twice as large as his body, a sight which so alarmed the boy that he started up and could scarce restrain a cry, but the head had shrunk into its ordinary proportions, and the sardonic smile was there as before.

Oh! what would not Billy have given at that time to have been thoroughly wide-awake and fresh! He thought for a moment of awaking his father, but the thought was only half formed ere sleep again weighed down his spirit, causing his eyelids to blink despite his utmost efforts to keep them open. Presently he saw Graddy draw the right oar quietly into the boat, without ceasing to row with the left one, and slowly draw the knife which hung at his belt.

The boy tried to shout and arouse his father, but he was paralysed with horror. His blood seemed to curdle in his veins. No sound would issue from his lips, neither could he move hand or foot while the cold glassy eye of the captain rested on him.

Suddenly Graddy sprang up, and Billy's voice found vent in a shrill cry. At the same moment Stephen Gaff awoke, and instinctively his hand grasped the tiller. He had no time to rise, but with the same force that drew the tiller from its socket in the helm he brought it forward with crashing violence on the forehead of Graddy, who was stooping to plunge the knife into his breast. He staggered beneath the blow. Before he could recover himself it was repeated, and he fell heavily back into the bottom of the boat.

"Thank the Lord," murmured Gaff, as he leaned over his fallen foe, "the villain's hand has bin stopped short this time. Come, Billy, help me to lift him up."

Gaff's blows had been delivered with such vigour that Graddy's head was much damaged, and it was a long time before the two could get him restored sufficiently to sit up. At length, however, he roused himself and looked with a bewildered air at the sun, which had just risen in a flood of golden light. Presently his eyes fell on Gaff, and a dark scowl covered his face, but being, or pretending to be unable to continue long in a sitting posture, he muttered that he would lie down and rest in the bow of the boat. He got up and staggered to the spot, where he lay down and soon fell fast asleep.

"Now, Billy lad, we'll let him rest, an' I'll take the oars. You will lie down and sleep, for you've much need of it, my poor boy, and while I'm pullin' I'll consider what's best for to be done in the circumstances."

"Better let me take one o' the oars, daddy. I'm wide-awake now, and not a bit tired."

"No, boy, no. Lay down. The next time I require to sleep I must have you in a more wakeful condition—so turn in." Gaff said this in a tone of command that did not admit of remonstrance; so Billy lay down, and soon fell into a deep slumber.

For a long time Gaff rowed in silence, gazing wistfully up into the sky, which was covered with gorgeous piles of snowy clouds, as if he sought to forget his terrible position in contemplating the glories of heaven. But earth claimed the chief share of his thoughts. While he rowed with slow unflagging strokes during these calm morning hours, he did indeed think of Eternity; of the time he had mis-spent on earth; of the sins he had committed, and of the salvation through Jesus Christ he had for so many years neglected or refused to accept.

But invariably these thoughts diverged into other channels: he thought of the immediate danger that menaced himself and his son; of death from thirst and its terrible agonies—the beginning of which even at that moment were affecting him in the old familiar way of a slight desire to drink! He thought, too, of the fierce man in the bow of the boat who evidently sought his life—why, he could not tell; but he surmised that it must either be because he had become deranged, or because he wished to get all the food in the boat to himself, and so prolong for a few days his miserable existence. Finally, his thoughts reverted to his cottage home, and he fancied himself sitting in the old chimney-corner smoking his pipe and gazing at his wife and Tottie, and his household goods.

"I'll maybe never see them agin," he murmured sadly.

For some minutes he did not speak, then he again muttered, while a grieved look overspread his face, "An' they'll never know what's come o' me! They'll go on thinkin' an' thinkin', an' hopin' an' hopin' year after year, an' their sick hearts'll find no rest. God help them!"

He looked up into the bright heavens, and his thoughts became prayer.

Ah! reader, this is no fancy sketch. It is drawn after the pattern of things that happen every year—every month—almost every week during the stormy seasons of the year. Known only to Him who is Omniscient are the multitudes of heartrending scenes of protracted agony and dreary death that are enacted year by year, all unknown to man, upon the lonely sea. Now and then the curtain of this dread theatre is slightly raised to us by the emaciated hand of a "survivor," and the sight, if we be thoughtful, may enable us to form a faint conception of those events that we never see. We might meditate on those things with advantage. Surely *Christians* ought not to require strong appeals to induce them to consider the case of those "who go down into the sea in ships, who do business in the great waters!" And here let me whisper a word to you ere I pass on, good reader:— Meditation, unless it results in action, is worse than useless because it deepens condemnation.

While Gaff was gazing upward a bright look beamed in his eyes.

"That's not a bad notion," he muttered, drawing in both oars, and rising. "I'll do it. It'll give 'em a chance, an' that's better than nothin'."

So saying he put his hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket, and drew out a letter, which he unfolded, and tore off a portion of the last leaf which was free from writing. Spreading this upon the thwart, he sought for and found a pencil which he was in the habit of carrying in his vest-pocket, and prepared to write.

I have shown elsewhere that Gaff could neither read nor write. Yet it does not follow that he had no knowledge whatever of these subjects. On the contrary, he understood the signification of capital letters when printed large and distinct, and could, (with inconceivable pains and difficulty no doubt), string a few simple words together when occasion required. He could also sign his name.

After much deep thought he concocted the following sentence:—

AT SEE IN PASIFIK. NO LAND FOR 5000 MILES. OPN BOET. THE SKIPER, BILLY, AND MEES KAST ADRIFT BY KREW. SKIPER MAD, OR ELSE A VILIN. FOAR OR FIVE DAIS BISKIT; NO WATTER. JESS, DEAR LAS, MY LAST THOATS ARE OF YOO.

STEPHEN GAFF.

He meant to put down 500, and thought that he was right!

Having completed his task, he folded up the letter carefully, and addressed it to “Mrs Gaff, sailor’s wife, The Cove, England.” Then he inserted it into the empty bottle to which reference has been made, and corking it up tight committed it to the waves with an earnest prayer for its safe arrival at its destination. He then resumed his oars with a feeling of great relief, as if a heavy weight had been taken off his mind, and watched the precious bottle until it was out of sight astern.

By this time the face of nature had changed somewhat. With the advancing day the wind arose, and before noon it was blowing a stiff breeze. The rolling of the boat awoke Billy, who looked up anxiously.

“Ay, it’ll be all over sooner than I thought on,” murmured Gaff, as he glanced to windward.

“What’ll be all over, daddy?” inquired the boy, who, being accustomed to boating in rough weather, thought nothing of the threatening appearance of things.

“Nothin’, lad, nothin’; I was only thinkin’ aloud; the wind’s freshenin’, Billy, an’ as you may have to sit a long spell at the tiller soon, try to go to sleep agin. You’ll need it, my boy.”

In spite of himself, Gaff’s tone contained so much pathos that Billy was roused by it, and would not again try to sleep.

“Do let me pull an oar, daddy,” he said earnestly.

“Not yet, lad, not yet. In a short time I will if the breeze don’t get stiffer.”

“Why don’t *he* pull a bit, daddy?” inquired Billy pointing with a frown at the figure that lay crouched up in the bow of the boat.

Just then a wave sent a wash of spray inboard and drenched the skipper, who rose up and cursed the sea.

“You’d better bale it out than curse it,” said Gaff sternly; for he felt that if there was to be anything attempted he must conquer his desperate companion.

The man drew his knife. Gaff, noticing the movement, leaped up, and catching hold of the tiller, which Billy handed to him with alacrity, faced his opponent.

“Now, Graddy,” he said, in the tone of a man who has thoroughly made up his mind, “we’ll settle this question right off. One of us must submit. If fair means won’t do, foul shall be used. You *may* be bigger than me, but I don’t think ye’re stronger: leastwise ye’ll ha’ to prove it. Now, then, pitch that knife overboard.”

Instead of obeying, Graddy hurled it with all his force into Gaff’s chest. Fortunately the handle and not the point struck him, else had the struggle been brief and decisive. As it was, the captain followed up his assault with a rush at his opponent, who met him with a heavy blow from the tiller, which the other received on his left arm, and both men closed in a deadly struggle. The little boat swayed about violently, and the curling seas came over her edge so frequently that Billy began to fear they would swamp in a few moments. He therefore seized the baling-dish, and began to bale for his life while the men fought.

Gaff soon proved to be the better man, for he finally flung the captain over the middle thwart and almost broke his back.

“Now, do ye give in?” he shouted fiercely, as he compressed the other’s throat with both hands.

Graddy gasped that he did; so Gaff allowed him to rise, and bade him take the baling-dish from the boy and set to work without delay.

The wretched man was so thoroughly cowed that he thereafter yielded instant obedience to his companion.

The wind was blowing furiously by this time, and the waves were running high, so that it required constant baling, and the utmost care in steering, to keep the boat from being swamped. Fortunately the storm was accompanied by heavy rain, so that by catching a little of this in their jackets and caps, they succeeded in quenching their thirst. Hunger they had scarcely felt up to this time, but soon the cravings of nature began to be imperious, and Gaff served out the first ration, on the short allowance scale, which was so small that it served only to whet their appetites. There was no need to row now. It was absolutely necessary to run before the wind, which was so strong that a single oar, set up in the place where the mast should have been, was sufficient to cause the light craft to fly over the waves.

Each took the helm for a couple of hours by turns. Thus employed they spent the day, and still thus employed the dark night found them.

Bad though things looked when there was light enough to enable them to see the rush of the black clouds overhead, the bursts of the driving spray and the tumultuous heavings of the wild sea, it was inconceivably worse when the darkness settled down so thick that they could barely see each other’s faces, and the steering had to be done more by *feeling*, as it were, than sight. Gaff took the helm during the greater part of the night, and the other two baled

incessantly; but the gale increased so much that the water at last came in faster than it could be thrown out, and they expected to be swamped every instant.

“We’re goin’ down, daddy,” said Billy, while a strong inclination to burst into tears almost choked him.

“Here, lad,” shouted Gaff in a loud voice, for the noise of the wind and waves rendered any other sound almost inaudible, “take the helm and keep her right before the wind. Ye used to steer well; do yer best now, my boy.”

While he spoke Billy obeyed, and his father sprang into the middle of the boat, and grasped the three oars and boat-hook with which the boat was supplied. There were two small sails, which he wrapped hastily round these, and then tied them all together tightly with a piece of rope. In this operation he was assisted by Graddy, who seemed to understand what his comrade meant to do.

The boat was now half full of water.

“Down the helm—hard down,” roared Gaff.

“Ay, ay, sir,” responded Billy, with the ready promptitude of a seaman.

The boat flew round; at the same moment Gaff hurled the bundle of sails and spars overboard, and eased off the coil of rope to the end of which it was attached. In a few seconds it was about forty yards away to windward, and formed a sort of floating breakwater, which, slight though it was, proved to be sufficient to check the full force of the seas, so that the little boat found partial shelter to leeward.

The shelter was terribly slight, however; only just sufficient to save them from absolute destruction; and it was still necessary for one of their number to be constantly employed in baling out the water.

During the night the clouds cleared away, but there was no abatement of the wind; and having no water they were obliged to eat their allowance of biscuit either in a dry state or moistened in the sea.

Next day the sun rose in a cloudless sky, and all day it shone upon them fiercely, and the wind moderated enough to render baling unnecessary, but still they did not dare to haul in their floating bulwark.

Extreme thirst now assailed them, and Graddy began in an excited state to drink copiously of salt water.

“Don’t go for to do that, cap’n,” remonstrated Gaff.

A derisive laugh was the only reply.

Presently Graddy arose, and going into the head of the boat, took up the baling-dish and again drank deeply of the sea-water. “Ha! ha!” he laughed, tossing his arms wildly in the air, and gazing at Gaff with the glaring eyes of a maniac, “that’s the nectar for me. Come, boys, I’ll sing you a ditty.”

With that he burst into a roaring bacchanalian song, and continued to shout, and yell, and drink the brine until he was hoarse. But he did not seem to get exhausted; on the contrary, his eyes glared more and more brightly, and his face became scarlet as the fires that were raging within him increased in intensity.

Billy clung to his father, and looked at the captain in speechless horror. Even Gaff himself felt an overpowering sense of dread creep over him, for he now knew that he had to deal with a raving maniac. Not knowing what to do, he sat still and silent in the stern of the boat with the tiller in his hand, and his eyes fixed immovably on those of the madman, who seemed to feel that it was a trial as to which should stare the other down, for he soon gave up singing and drinking, and devoted all his energies of body and soul to glaring at his enemy.

Thus they continued until the sun began to set. Then Gaff’s heart sank within him, for he felt sure that, whenever it was too dark for each to see the other, the madman would summon up courage to make a sudden attack.

The attack, however, was precipitated by Gaff inadvertently glancing over his shoulder to observe how far the sun had yet to descend.

Instantly, with the leap of a panther, Graddy was upon him with both hands grasping tightly at his throat. Down, down, he pressed him, until Gaff lay on his back with his head over the gunwale. His strength now availed him nothing, for unnatural energy nerved the madman’s arm.

Billy sprang up and tried to disengage him from his grasp. As well might the rabbit try to unlock the boa’s deadly coil. Wrenching the tiller from his father’s grasp he hit the madman on the head with all his might; but the poor boy’s might was small. The blow seemed to have no effect at all. Again and again he brought it down in an agony of haste lest his father should be strangled before the other was felled. At last he hit him with all his force behind the ear, and Graddy’s grasp relaxed as he fell prone on the body of his insensible victim.

To pull him off and haul his father into a more convenient position was the work of a few seconds.

“O daddy, daddy, speak to me,” he cried, loosening his father’s neckcloth and unbuttoning his shirt. “Oh, quick! get better before *he* does,” cried Billy wildly, as he shook his father and laved water on his face; “oh! he’ll get well first and kill you.”

In order to do all that lay in his power to prevent this, Billy suddenly sprang up, and, seizing the tiller, dealt the prostrate Graddy several powerful blows on the head. It is not improbable that the frightened boy would have settled the question of his recovery then and there had not his father revived, and told him to stop.

For some minutes Gaff sat swaying about in a confused manner, but he was roused to renewed action by seeing Graddy move.

“We must hold him now, Billy. Is there a bit of rope about?”

“Not a inch, you tied it all round the oars.”

“It’s awkward. However, here’s my necktie. It an’t strong, but it’s better than nothin’.”

Gaff was about to take it off when Graddy recovered suddenly and attempted to rise. The others sprang on him and held him down; but they did so with difficulty, for he was still very strong.

All that night did they sit and hold him, while he raved and sang or struggled as the humour seized him. They did not dare to relax their hold for a moment; because, although he lay sometimes quite still for a lengthened period, he would burst forth again without warning and with increased fury.

And still, while they sat thus holding down the maniac, the wind blew fiercely over the raging sea, and the waves curled over and burst upon their tiny breakwater, sending clouds of spray over their head, insomuch that, ere morning, the boat was nearly half full of water.

When morning at last broke, father and son were so much exhausted that they could scarcely sit up, and their cramped fingers clung, more by necessity than by voluntary effort, to the garments of the now dying man.

Graddy was still active and watchful, however. His face was awful to look upon, and the fire of his restless eyes was unabated. When the sun rose above the horizon both Gaff and Billy turned their weary eyes to look at it. The madman noted the action, and seized the opportunity. He sprang with an unearthly yell, overturned them both, and plunged head foremost into the sea.

Twice he rose and gave vent to a loud gurgling cry, while Gaff and his son seized the rope attached to the oars, intending to pull them in and row to his assistance, for he had leaped so far out that he was beyond their reach. But before they had pulled in half of the cable the wretched man had disappeared from their view for ever.

Slacking off the rope they let the boat drift astern again to its full extent. Then, without a word, without even a look, father and son lay down together in the stern-sheets, and were instantly buried in a profound deathlike slumber.

Chapter Twenty.

The Voyage of the Bottle.

The little fragile craft which Stephen Gaff sent adrift upon the world of waters freighted with its precious document, began its long voyage with no uncertainty as to its course, although to the eye of man it might have appeared to be the sport of uncertain waves and breezes.

When the bottle fell upon the broad bosom of the South Pacific, it sank as if its career were to end at the beginning; but immediately it re-appeared with a leap, as if the imprisoned spirit of the atmosphere were anxious to get out. Then it settled down in its watery bed until nothing but the neck and an inch of the shoulder was visible above the surface. Thus it remained; thus it floated in the deep, in storm and calm, in heat and cold; thus it voyaged more safely, though not more swiftly, than all the proud ships that spread their lofty canvas to the breeze, night and day, for weeks and months, ay, and years together—not irregularly, not at haphazard, but steadily, perseveringly, in strict obedience to the undeviating laws which regulate the currents in the ocean and the air as truly and unchangeably as they do the circulation of the blood in the human frame.

The bottle started from that part of the South Pacific which is known to mariners as the Desolate Region—so called from the circumstance of that part of the sea being almost entirely destitute of animal life. Here it floated slowly, calmly, but surely, to the eastward with the great oceanic current, which, flowing from the regions of the antarctic sea, in that part sweeps round the southern continent of America, and makes for the equator by way of the southern Atlantic Ocean.

Now, reader, allow me to screw up a little philosophy here, and try to show you the why and the wherefore of the particular direction of our bottle’s voyage.

Man has been defined by some lexicographer as a “cooking animal.” I think it would be more appropriate to call him a *learning animal*, for man does not always cook, but he never ceases to learn—also to unlearn.

One of the great errors which we have been called on, of recent years, to unlearn, is the supposed irregularity and uncertainty of the winds and waves. Nothing is more regular, nothing more certain—not even the rising and setting of the sun himself—than the circulation of the waters and the winds of earth. The apparent irregularity and uncertainty lies in our limited power and range of perception. The laws by which God regulates the winds and waves are as fixed as is the law of gravitation, and every atom of air, every drop of water, moves in its appointed course in strict obedience to those laws, just as surely as the apple, when severed from the bough, obeys the law of gravitation, and falls to the ground.

One grand and important fact has been ascertained, namely, that all the waters of the sea flow from the equator to the poles and back again.

Disturbed equilibrium is the great cause of oceanic currents. Heat and cold are the chief agents in creating this

disturbance.

It is obvious that when a portion of water in any vessel sinks, another portion must of necessity flow into the space which it has left, and if the cause which induced the sinking continue, so the flow to fill up will continue, and thus a current will be established.

Heat at the equator warms the sea-water, and makes it light; cold at the poles chills it, and makes it heavy. Hot water, being light, rises; cold water, being heavy, sinks.

Here, then, is a sufficient cause to produce the effect of currents in the sea.

But there are other causes at work. Excessive evaporation at the equator carries off the water of the sea, but leaves the salt behind, thus rendering it denser and heavier; while excessive influx of fresh water at the poles, (from rain and snow and melting ice), renders the sea light;—in addition to which corallines and shell-fish everywhere abstract the lime that is in the sea, by secreting it on their bodies in the form of shells, and thus increase the lightness of those particles of water from which the lime has been abstracted. The other particles of water being generous in their nature, hasten to impart of their lime and salt to those that have little or none.

Here, then, we have perpetual motion rendered absolutely certain, both as to continuance and direction.

But the latter causes which I have named are modifying causes which tend to counteract, or rather to deflect and direct currents in their flow. Besides which, the rotation of the earth, the action of the winds, and the conformation of continents and islands, have a powerful influence on currents, so that some flow at the bottom of ocean, some on the surface, some from east to west or west to east, or aslant in various directions, while, where currents meet there is deflection, modification, or stagnation, but there is no confusion; all goes on with a regularity and harmony which inconceivably excels that of the most complex and beautiful mechanism of man’s constructing, although man cannot perceive this order and harmony by reason of his limited powers.

Now, these are facts, not theories founded on speculation. They have been arrived at by the slow but sure method of induction. Hundreds of thousands of practical men have for many years been observing and recording phenomena of every kind in connexion with the sea. These observations have been gathered together, collated, examined, and deeply studied by philosophers, who have drawn their conclusions therefrom. Ignorance of these facts rendered the navigation of the sea in days of old a matter of uncertainty and great danger. The knowledge of them and of other cognate facts enables man in these days to map out the so-called trackless ocean into districts, and follow its well-known highways with precision and comparative safety.

Our bottle moved along with the slow but majestic flow of one of those mighty currents which are begotten among the hot isles of the Pacific, where the corallines love to build their tiny dwellings and rear their reefs and groves.

In process of time it left the warm regions of the sun, and entered those stormy seas which hold perpetual war around Cape Horn. It passed the straits where Magellan spread his adventurous sails in days of old, and doubled the cape which Byron, Bougainville, and Cook had doubled long before it.

Ah! well would it be for man if the bottle had never doubled anything but that cape! And alas for man when his sight is doubled, and his crimes and woes are doubled, and his life is halved instead of doubled, by—“the bottle!”

Off Cape Horn our adventurous little craft met with the rough usage from winds and waves that marked the passage of its predecessors. Stormy petrels hovered over it and pecked its neck and cork. Albatrosses stooped inquiringly and flapped their gigantic wings above it. South Sea seals came up from Ocean’s caves, and rubbed their furred sides against it. Sea-lions poked it with their grizzly snouts; and penguins sat bolt upright in rows on the sterile islands near the cape, and gazed at it in wonder.

Onward it moved with the north-western drift, and sighted on its left, (on its port bow, to speak nautically), the land of Patagonia, where the early discoverers reported the men to be from six to ten feet high, and the ladies six feet; the latter being addicted to staining their eyelids black, and the former to painting a red circle round their left eyes. These early discoverers failed, however, to tell us why the right eyes of the men were neglected; so we are forced to the conclusion that they were left thus untouched in order that they might wink facetiously with the more freedom. Modern travellers, it would seem, contradict, (as they usually do), many of the statements of ancient voyagers; and there is now reason to believe that the Patagonians are not *much* more outrageous in any respect than ordinary savages elsewhere.

Not long after doubling the Cape, the bottle sailed slowly past the Falkland Islands, whose rugged cliffs and sterile aspect seemed in accordance with their character of penal settlement. Sea-lions, penguins, and seals were more numerous than ever here, as if they were the guardians of the place, ready to devour all hapless criminals who should recklessly attempt to swim away from “durance vile.”

Indeed, it was owing to the curiosity of a sea-lion that at this point in its long voyage the bottle was saved from destruction. A storm had recently swept the southern seas, and the bottle, making bad weather of it in passing the Falklands, was unexpectedly driven on a lee-shore in attempting to double a promontory. Whether promontories are more capable of resisting the bottle than human beings, I know not; but certain it is that the promontory arrested its progress. It began to clink along the foot of the cliffs at the outermost point with alarming violence; and there can be no reasonable doubt that it would have become a miserable wreck there, if it had not chanced to clink right under the nose of a sea-lion which was basking in the sunshine, and sound asleep on a flat rock.

Opening its eyes and ears at the unwonted sound, the lion gazed inquiringly at the bottle, and raised its shaggy front the better to inspect it. Apparently the sight stimulated its curiosity, for, with a roar and a gush of ardent spirit, it plunged into the sea and drove the bottle far down into the deep.

Finding, apparently, that nothing came of this terrific onslaught, the lion did not reappear. It sneaked away, no doubt, into some coral cave. But the force of the push sent the bottle a few yards out to sea, and so it doubled the promontory and continued its voyage.

Shortly after this, however, a check was put to its progress which threatened to be permanent.

In a few places of the ocean there are pools of almost stagnant tracts, of various sizes, which are a sort of eddies caused by the conflicting currents. They are full of seaweed and other drift, which is shoved into them by the currents, and are named Sargasso seas. Some of these are hundreds of miles in extent, others are comparatively small.

They bothered the navigators of old, did those Sargasso seas, uncommonly. They are permanent spots, which shift their position so little with the very slight changes in the currents of the sea, that they may be said to be always in the same place.

Columbus got into one of these Sargassos—the great Atlantic one that lies between Africa and the West Indies,—and his men were alarmed lest this strange weedy sea should turn out to be the end of the world! Columbus was long detained in this region of stagnation and calm, and so were most of the early navigators, who styled it the "Doldrums." Now-a-days, however, our knowledge of the currents of ocean and atmosphere enables us to avoid the Sargasso seas and sail round them, thereby preventing delay, facilitating trade, saving time, and greatly improving the condition of mankind.

Now, our bottle happened to get entangled in the weed of the Sargasso that exists in the neighbourhood of the Falkland Islands, and stuck fast there for many months. It was heaved up and down by the undulations, blown about a little by occasional breezes, embraced constantly by seaweed, and sometimes tossed by waves when the outskirts of a passing gale broke in upon the stagnant spot; but beyond this it did not move or advance a mile on its voyage.

At last a hurricane burst over the sea; its whirling edge tore up the weed and swept the waters, and set the bottle free, at the same time urging it into a north-easterly current, which flowed towards the coast of Africa. On its way it narrowly missed entanglement in another Sargasso,—a little one that lies between the two continents,—but fortunately passed it in safety, and at last made the Cape of Good Hope, and sighted the majestic Table Mountain which terminates the lofty promontory of that celebrated headland.

Here the bottle met with the wild stormy weather that induced its Portuguese discoverer, Bartholomew Diaz, to name it the "Cape of Tempests," and which cost him his life, for, on a succeeding voyage, he perished there. King John the Second of Portugal changed its name into the Cape of Good Hope, and not inappropriately so, as it turned out; for, a few years after its discovery in 1486, Vasco de Gama doubled the Cape of Good Hope and discovered the shores of India, whence he brought the first instalment of that wealth which has flowed from east to west ever since in such copious perennial streams.

There was a perplexing conflict of currents here which seemed to indicate a dispute as to which of them should bear off the bottle. The great Mozambique current, (which, born in the huge caldron of the Indian Ocean, flows down the eastern coast of Africa, and meets and wars with the currents coming from the west), almost got the mastery, and well-nigh swept it into an extensive Sargasso sea which lies in that region; in which case the voyage might have been inconceivably delayed; but an eccentric typhoon, or some such turbulent character, struck in from the eastward, swept the bottle utterly beyond Mozambique influence, and left it in the embrace of a current which flowed northward toward the equator.

Thus the bottle narrowly missed being flung on "India's coral strand," and voyaged slowly northward in a line parallel with that coast where "Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sands,"—where slavers, too, carried off the blacks in days happily gone by, to toil in slavery among the fields of cotton and sugar-cane, and where British cruisers did their best, (but that wasn't much!) to prevent the brutal traffic.

The chief point of interest in this part of the voyage was touching at Saint Helena, touching so sharply on the western promontory of that dreary islet, that the bottle again nearly made ship-wreck.

Admirably well chosen was this prominent, barren, isolated rock to be the prison of "Napoleon the Great," for he was a conspicuous, isolated specimen of humanity, barren of those qualities that constitute real greatness. Great he undoubtedly was in the art of shedding human blood and desolating myriads of hearths and hearts without any object whatever beyond personal ambition; for the First Napoleon being a Corsican, could not even urge the shallow plea of patriotism in justification of his murderous career.

So, let the bottle pass! Its career has not been more deadly, perchance, than was his during the time that the earth was scourged with his presence!

On reaching the hot region of the equator, our little craft was again sadly knocked about by conflicting currents, and performed one or two deep-sea voyages in company with currents which dived a good deal in consequence of their superior density and inferior heat. At one time it seemed as if it would be caught by the drift which flows down the east coast of South America, and thus get back into the seas from which it set out.

But this was not to be. Owing to some cause which is utterly beyond the ken of mortals, the bottle at last got fairly into the great equatorial current which flows westward from the Gulf of Guinea. It reached the north-west corner of South America, and progressing now at a more rapid and steady rate, progressed along the northern shore of that continent—passed the mouth of the mighty Amazon and the Orinoco, and, pushing its way among the West India Islands, crossed the Carribean Sea, sighted the Isthmus of Darien, coasted the Bay of Honduras, and swept round the Gulf of Mexico.

Here the great current is diverted from its westward course, and, passing through the Gulf of Florida, rushes across the Atlantic in a north-easterly direction, under the well-known name of the Gulf Stream. Men of old fancied that this great current had its origin in the Gulf of Mexico; hence its name; but we now know that, like many another stream, it has many heads or sources, the streams flowing from which converge in the Gulf of Mexico, and receive new and united direction there.

With the Gulf Stream the bottle pursued its voyage until it was finally cast ashore on the west of Ireland. Many a waif of the sea has been cast there before it by the same cause, and doubtless many another shall be cast there in time to come.

An Irishman with a jovial countenance chanced to be walking on the beach at the moment when, after a voyage of two years, our bottle touched the strand.

He picked it up and eyed it curiously.

“Musha! but it’s potheen.”

A more careful inspection caused him to shake his head.

“Ah, then, it’s impty.”

Getting the bottle between his eyes and the morning sun, he screwed his visage up into myriads of wrinkles, and exclaimed—

“Sure there *is* something in it.”

Straightway the Irishman hurried up to his own cabin, where his own wife, a stout pretty woman in a red cloak, assisted him to reach the conclusion that there was something mysterious in the bottle, which was at all events not drinkable.

“Oh, then, I’ll smash it.”

“Do, darlint.”

No sooner said than done, for Pat brought it down on the hearthstone with such force that it was shivered to atoms.

Of course his wife seized the bit of paper, and tried to read it, unsuccessfully. Then Pat tried to read it, also unsuccessfully. Then they both tried to read it, turning it in every conceivable direction, and holding it at every possible distance from their eyes, but still without success. Then they came to the conclusion that they could “make nothing of it at all at all,” which was not surprising, for neither of them could read a word.

They wisely resolved at length to take it to their priest, who not only read it, but had it inserted in the *Times* on the week following, and also in the local papers of Wreckumoft.

Thus did Mrs Gaff, at long last, come to learn something of her husband and son. Her friends kindly told her she need not entertain any hope whatever, but she heeded them not; and only regarding the message from the sea as in some degree a confirmation of her hopes and expectations, she continued her preparations for the reception of the long absent ones with more energy than ever.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Fortunes of Gaff and Billy continued.

Now, while the bottle was making its long voyage, Stephen Gaff and his son Billy were exposed to the vicissitudes of strange and varied fortune.

We left them sound asleep in the stern of the little boat, tossed on the troubled breast of the Pacific.

They never knew how long they slept on that occasion, but when they awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and the breeze had considerably abated.

Gaff was the first to shake off the lethargy that had oppressed him. Gazing round for some time, he seemed to hesitate whether he should lie down again, and looked earnestly once or twice in the face of his slumbering boy.

“’Tis pity to rouse him,” he muttered, “but I think we must ha’ had a long sleep, for I feel rested like. Hallo, Billy boy, how are ’ee?”

Billy did not respond to the greeting. Indeed, he refused to be moved by means of shouts of any kind, and only consented to wake up when his father took him by the coat-collar with both hands, and shook him so violently that it seemed as if his head were about to fall off.

“Hallo! faither,” he cried in a sleepy voice, “wot’s up?”

“Ha! you’re roused at last, lad, come, it’s time to have a bit breakfast. It ain’t a heavy un you’ll git, poor boy, but ’tis better than nothin’, and bigger men have throve upon less at times.”

Billy was awake and fully alive to his position by this time. He was much depressed. He would have been more than

mortal had he been otherwise, but he resolved to shake off the feeling, and face his fortune like a man.

“Come along, daddy, let’s have a spell at the oars before breakfast.”

“No, lad, take a bit first,” said Gaff, opening the sack which contained the biscuit, and carefully measuring out two small portions of the crumbs. One of the portions was rather larger than the other. Billy observed this, and stoutly refused to take his share when Stephen pushed the larger portion towards him.

“No, daddy,” said he, “you’re not a fair divider.”

“Am I not, lad?” said Stephen meekly. “I thought I’d done it pretty eekal.”

“No, my half is the biggest, so you’ll have to take some of it back.”

Gaff refused, but Billy insisted, and a small piece of the precious biscuit was finally put back into the bag. The meal was then eaten with much display of satisfaction by father and son, (a blessing having been first asked on it), and it was prolonged as much as possible in order to encourage the idea that it was not such a small one after all.

Billy had not been particular as to his crusts and fragments of victuals in days of yore, but it was wonderful how sharp his eye was on this occasion to note and pick up every minute crumb, and transfer it to his hungry mouth.

“Now, daddy, I’m ready.”

He swelled out his little chest, and gave it a sounding thump as he rose, and, rolling up his shirt-sleeves to the shoulder, seized an oar. Gaff took the other, and both sat down to the slow, dreary, monotonous toil of another day.

At first the Bu’ster was chatty, but by degrees his tongue flagged, and ere long it became quite silent.

For six or eight hours they pulled without intermission, except for a few minutes at a time, every hour or so, and Gaff directed the boat’s head in the direction to which the captain had pointed when he said the land might be about five hundred miles off.

When the sun was getting low on the horizon, Billy stopped with a sigh—

“Ain’t it time for dinner, daddy, d’ye think?”

“Hold on a bit, lad, I’m goin’ to let ye tak’ a sleep soon, an’ it’ll be best to eat just afore lyin’ down.”

No more was said, and the rowing was continued until the sun had set, and the shades of night were beginning to descend on the sea.

“Now, lad, we’ll sup,” said Stephen, with a hearty air, as he pulled in his oar.

“Hooray!” cried Billy faintly, as he jumped up and went to the stern, where his father soon produced the biscuit-bag and measured out the two small portions.

“Cheatin’ again, daddy,” cried the Bu’ster with a remonstrative tone and look.

“No, I ain’t,” said Gaff sharply, “eat yer supper, you scamp.”

Billy obeyed with alacrity, and disposed of his portion in three mouthfuls. There was a small quantity of rain-water—about half a pint—which had been collected and carefully husbanded in the baling-dish. It was mingled with a little spray, and was altogether a brackish and dirty mixture, nevertheless they drank it with as much relish as if it had been clear spring water.

“Now, boy, turn in,” said Gaff earnestly; “you’ll need all the sleep ye can git, for, if I know the signs of the sky, we’ll have more wind afore long.”

Poor Billy was too tired to make any objection to this order, so he laid his head on a fold of the wet sail, and almost immediately fell asleep.

Gaff was right in his expectation of more wind. About two hours after sunset it came on to blow so stiffly that he was obliged to awaken Billy and set him to bale out the sprays that kept constantly washing over the gunwale. Towards midnight a gale was blowing, and Gaff put the boat before the wind, and drove with it.

Hour after hour passed away; still there was no abatement in the violence of the storm, and no relaxation from baling and steering, which the father and son took alternately every half hour.

At last Billy’s strength was fairly exhausted. He flung down the baling-dish, and, sitting down beside his father, laid his head on his breast, and burst into tears. The weakness, (for such Billy deemed it), only lasted a few moments however. He soon repressed his sobs.

“My poor boy,” said Gaff, patting his son’s head, “it’ll be soon over wi’ us, I fear. May the good Lord help us! The boat can’t float long wi’ such sprays washin’ over her.”

Billy said nothing, but clung closer to his father, while his heart was filled with solemn, rather than fearful, thoughts of death.

Their danger of swamping now became so imminent that Gaff endeavoured to prepare his mind to face the last

struggle manfully. He was naturally courageous, and in the heat of action or of battle could have faced death with a smile and an unblanched cheek; but he found it much more difficult to sit calmly in the stern of that little boat hour after hour, and await the blow that seemed inevitable. He felt a wild, almost irresistible, desire to leap up and vent his feelings in action of some kind, but this was not possible, for it required careful attention to the helm to prevent the little craft from broaching-to and upsetting. In his extremity he raised his heart to God in prayer.

While he was thus engaged the roar of the storm increased to such a degree that both father and son started up in expectation of instantaneous destruction. A vivid flash of lightning glared over the angry sea at the moment, and revealed to their horrified gaze a reef of rocks close ahead, on which the waves were breaking with the utmost fury. Instant darkness followed the flash, and a deafening peal of thunder joined in the roar of breakers, intensifying, if possible, the terrors of the situation.

Gaff knew now that the crisis had certainly arrived, and for the next few moments he exerted every power of eye and ear in order to guide the boat into a channel between the breakers—if such existed.

“Jump for’ard, lad,” he shouted, “and keep yer eye sharp ahead.”

Billy obeyed at once, with the seamanlike “Ay, ay, sir,” which he had acquired on board the whaler.

“Port, port! hard-a-port!” shouted the boy a moment after taking his place in the bow.

“Port it is,” answered Gaff.

Before the boat had time, however, to answer the helm, she was caught on the crest of a breaker, whirled round like a piece of cork, and, balancing for one moment on the foam, capsized.

The moment of hesitation was enough to enable Gaff to spring to his son’s side and seize him. Next instant they were buffeting the waves together.

It is not necessary to remind the reader that Gaff was an expert swimmer. Billy was also first-rate. He was known among his companions as The Cork, because of his floating powers, and these stood him in good stead at this time, enabling him to cling to his father much more lightly than would have been the case had he not been able to swim.

At first they found it impossible to do more than endeavour to keep afloat, for the surging of the breakers was so great, and the darkness so intense, that they could not give direction to their energies. But the increasing roar of the surf soon told them that they were near the rocks, and in a few seconds they were launched with tremendous force amongst them.

Well was it for them at that moment that the wave which bore them on its crest swept them through a gap in the reef, else had they been inevitably dashed to pieces. As it was, they were nearly torn asunder, and Gaff’s shoulder just grazed a rock as he was whirled past it; but in a few seconds they found themselves in comparatively still water, and felt assured that they had been swept through an opening in the reef. Presently Gaff touched a rock and grasped it.

“Hold on, Billy my lad!” he exclaimed breathlessly, “we’ll be safe ashore, please God, in a short bit.”

“All right, daddy,” gasped the boy; for to say truth, the whirling in the foam had well-nigh exhausted him.

Soon the two were out of the reach of the waves, clinging to what appeared to be the face of a precipice. Here, although safe from the actual billows, they were constantly drenched by spray, and exposed to the full fury of the gale. At first they attempted to scale the cliff, supposing that if once at the top they should find shelter; but this proved to be impossible. Equally impossible was it to get round the promontory on which they had been cast. They were therefore compelled to shelter themselves as they best might, in the crevices of the exposed point, and cling to each other for warmth.

It was a long long night to those castaways. Minutes appeared to pass like hours, and it seemed to them as if night had finally and for ever settled down on the dreary world. The wind too, although not very cold, was sufficiently so to chill them, and long before day began to break they were so much benumbed as to be scarcely able to maintain their position.

During all this time they were harassed by uncertainty as to the nature of the rock on which they were cast. It might be a mere barren islet, perhaps one which the sea covered at high-water, in which case there was the possibility of their being swept away before morning.

When morning came, however, it revealed to them the fact that they were upon a small promontory, which was connected by a narrow neck of sand with the land.

As soon as the light rendered this apparent, Gaff put his hand on Billy’s head and spoke softly to him—

“Now then, lad, look up—ye an’t sleepin’, sure, are ye?”

“No, daddy, only dozin’ and dreamin’,” said Billy, rousing himself.

“Well, we must stop dreamin’, and git ashore as fast as we can. I think there’s dry land all the way to the beach; if not, it’ll only be a short swim. Whether it’s an island or what, I don’t know; but let’s be thankful, boy, that it looks big enough to hold us. Come, cheer up!”

To this Billy replied that he was quite jolly, and ready for anything; and, by way of proving his fitness for exertion,

began to crawl over the rocks like a snail!

“That’ll never do,” said Gaff with a short laugh; “come, wrestle with me, youngster.”

The Bu’ster accepted the challenge at once by throwing his arms round his father’s waist, and endeavouring to throw him. Gaff resisted, and the result was that, in ten minutes or so, they were comparatively warm, and capable of active exertion.

Then they clambered over the rocks, traversed the neck of sand, and quickly gained the shore.

Ascending the cliffs with eager haste, they reached the summit just as the sun rose and tinged the topmost pinnacles with a golden hue. Pushing on towards an elevated ridge of rock, they climbed to the top of a mound, from which they could obtain a view of the surrounding country, and then they discovered that their place of refuge was a small solitary island, in the midst of the boundless sea.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Island-Home Examined.

For a long time father and son stood on the elevated rock gazing in silence on the little spot of earth that was to be their home, it might be, for months, or even years.

The island, as I have said, was a solitary one, and very small—not more than a mile broad, by about three miles long; but it was covered from summit to shore with the richest tropical verdure, and the trees and underwood were so thick that the cliffs could only be seen in places where gaps in the foliage occurred, or where an aspiring peak of rock shot up above the trees. In order to reach the ridge on which they stood, the castaways had passed beneath the shade of mangrove, banana, cocoa-nut, and a variety of other trees and plants. The land on which these grew was undulating and varied in form, presenting in one direction dense foliage, which not only filled the little valleys, but clung in heavy masses to rocks and ridges; while in other places there were meadows of rich grass, with here and there a reedy pond, whose surface was alive with wild ducks and other water-fowl. Only near the top of the island—which might almost be styled a mountain ridge—was there any appearance of uncovered rock. There were two principal peaks, one of which, from its appearance, was a volcano, but whether an active one or not Gaff could not at that time determine. Unlike the most of the South Sea islands, this one was destitute of a surrounding coral reef, so that the great waves caused by the recent storm burst with thunderous roar on the beach.

At one point only was there a projecting point or low promontory, which formed a natural harbour; and it was on the outer rocks of this point that the father and son had been providentially cast. The whole scene was pre-eminently beautiful; and as the wind had gone quite down, it was, with the exception of the solemn, regular, intermittent roar of the breakers on the weather side, quiet and peaceful. As he sat down on a rock, and raised his heart to God in gratitude for his deliverance, Gaff felt the spot to be a sweet haven of rest after the toils and horrors of the storm.

A single glance was sufficient to show that the island was uninhabited.

The silence was first broken by Billy, who, in his wonted sudden and bursting manner, gave vent to a resonant cheer.

“Hallo! ho! hooray!” he shouted, while a blaze of delight lit up his face; “there’s the boat, daddy!”

“Where away, lad?” demanded Gaff, rising and shading his eyes from the sun, as he looked in the direction indicated.

“There, down i’ the cove; bottom up among the rocks; stove in, I daresay. Don’t ’ee see’d, faither?”

“Ay, lad; and mayhap it bean’t stove in; leastwise we’ll go see.”

As the two hastened down to the beach to ascertain this important point, Gaff took a more leisurely survey of things on the island, and Billy commented freely on things in general.

“Now, daddy,” said the Bu’ster, with a face of beaming joy, “this is the very jolliest thing that ever could have happened to us—ain’t it?”

“Well, I’m not so sure o’ that, lad. To be cast away on a lone desert island in the middle o’ the Pacific, with little or no chance o’ gittin’ away for a long bit, ain’t quite the jolliest thing in the world, to my mind.”

“Wot’s a *desert* island, daddy?”

“One as ain’t peopled or cultivated.”

“Then *that’s* no objection to it,” said Billy, “because we two are people enough, and we’ll cultivate it up to the mast-head afore long.”

“But what shall we do for victuals, lad?” inquired Gaff, with a smile.

The Bu’ster was posed. He had never thought of food, so his countenance fell.

“And drink?” added Gaff.

The Bu’ster was *not* posed at this, for he remembered, and reminded his father of, the pond which they had seen from the ridge.

“Aha!” he added, “an’ there was lots o’ ducks on it too. We can eat them, you know, daddy, even though we han’t got green peas or taties to ’em.”

“We can have other things to ’em though,” said Gaff, pointing to a tall palm-tree; “for there are cocoa-nuts; and farther on, to this side o’ the hollow there, I see banana-trees; and here are yams, which are nearly as good as taties.”

“I told ye it would be jolly,” cried Billy, recovering his delight, “an’ no doubt we’ll find lots of other things; and then we’ll have it all to ourselves—you and me. You’ll be king, daddy, or emperor, and I’ll be prince. Won’t that be grand? —Prince of a South Sea island! What would Tottie and mother say? And then the boat, you know—even if it do be stove in, we can patch it up somehow, and go fishin’.”

“Without hooks or lines?” said Gaff.

Billy was posed again, and his father laughed at the perplexed expression on his countenance, as he said, “Never mind, boy, we’ll find somethin’ or other that will do instead o’ hooks an’ lines.”

“To be sure we will,” assented the other encouragingly; “an’ that’ll be one of the jolliest bits of it all, that we’ll spend lots of our time in tryin’ to find out things that’ll do instead o’ other things, won’t we? And then—hallo! was that a grump?”

“It sounded uncommon like one.”

“An’ that’s a squeal,” said Billy.

In another moment both “grump” and “squeal” were repeated in full chorus by a drove of wild pigs that burst suddenly out of a thick bush, and, rushing in mad haste past the intruders on their domain, disappeared, yelling, into a neighbouring thicket.

“Pork for our ducks, daddy!” shouted Billy, when the first burst of his surprise was over; “we’ll have plenty of grub now; but how are we to catch them?”

“Ha! we must find that out,” replied Gaff cheerfully; “it’ll give us summat to think about, d’ye see? Now then, here we are at the beach, an’ as far as I can see we have bright prospects in regard to victuals of another sort, for here be crabs an’ oysters an’ no end o’ cockles. Come, we’ll not be badly off, if we only had a hut o’ some sort to sleep in; but, after all, we can manage to be comfortable enough under a tree. It will be better than the housin’ we’ve had for the last few nights, anyhow.”

To their great delight they found that the boat had been cast ashore on a sandy place, and that it was uninjured. A short way beyond it, too, the oars were found stranded between two rocks.

This was a piece of great good fortune, because it placed within their reach the means of an immediate circumnavigation of their island. But before entering on this voyage of discovery they resolved to explore the woods near the place where they had landed, in search of a cavern, or some suitable place in which to fix their home.

Acting on this resolve they pulled the boat up the beach, placed the oars within it, and returned to the woods. As they went they picked up a few shell-fish, and ate them raw. Thus they breakfasted; but although the meal was a poor one it was unusually pleasant, because of the hunger which had previously oppressed them, and which Billy, in a fit of confidential talk with his father, compared to having his “interior gnawed out by rats!”

Passing through the woods they found a quantity of ripe berries, of various kinds, of which they ate heartily, and then came to a spring of clear cold water. Gaff also climbed a cocoa-nut tree and brought down two nuts, which were clothed in such thick hard shells that they well-nigh broke their hearts before they succeeded in getting at the kernels. However, they got at them in course of time, and feasted sumptuously on them.

It was half an hour, or perhaps three-quarters of an hour, after the gathering of the cocoa-nuts, that they came suddenly on a spring of water above which there was a cloud of vapour resembling steam.

“It’s bilin’,” exclaimed Billy, as he ran forward and eagerly thrust his hand into the water.

Billy had said this in joke, for he had never conceived of such a thing as a spring of hot water, but he found that his jest might have been said in earnest, for the spring was almost “bilin’,” and caused the Bu’ster to pull his hand out again with a roar of surprise and pain.

Just beyond the hot spring they found a small cavern in the face of a cliff, which appeared to them to be quite dry.

“Here’s the very thing we want, daddy,” cried Billy in gleeful surprise.

“Don’t be too sure, lad; p’raps it’s damp.”

“No, it’s dry as bone,” said the boy, running in and placing his hands on the floor; “it’s wide inside too, and the entrance is small, so we can put a door to it; and look there! see—an’t that a hole leadin’ to some other place?”

Billy was right. A small hole, not much larger than was sufficient to admit of a man passing through, conducted them into a larger cave than the first one, and here they found another hole leading into a third, which was so large and dark that they dared not venture to explore it without a light. They saw enough, however, to be convinced that the caverns were well ventilated and free from damp, so they returned to the entrance cave and examined it carefully with a view to making it their home.

Billy’s romantic spirit was filled to overflowing with joy while thus engaged, insomuch that Gaff himself became excited as well as interested in the investigation. They little knew at the time how familiar each rock and crevice of that cave was to become, and how long it was destined to be their island-home!

Chapter Twenty Three.

Relating to Improvements in the Hut, and Mrs Gaff’s Perplexities.

While Stephen Gaff and his son were busy preparing their residence in the South Sea island, Mrs Gaff was equally busy in preparing her residence for their reception on their return to Cove.

The little cottage had undergone so many changes during the past few months that it is doubtful whether its rightful owner would have recognised his own property,—internally at least; externally it remained unaltered.

Having, with much pains, ascertained that she might venture to launch out pretty freely in the way of expenditure without becoming absolutely bankrupt, Mrs Gaff had supplied herself with a handsome new grate, a large proportion of which was of polished brass, that cost herself and Tottie much of their time to keep clean and brilliant; there were also fender and fire-irons to match, adorned with brass knobs and points, which latter were the special admiration of Tottie. There was a carpet, too, straight from the looms of Turkey—as the man who sold it informed Mrs Gaff—which was the admiration of all Cove, for it was divided into squares of brilliant colours, with huge red roses in the centre of each. It was positively a superb, a resplendent, carpet, and rejoiced the hearts and eyes of Mrs Gaff and her child every time they looked at it, which you may be sure was pretty often. It kept them indeed in a constant state of nervous dread lest they should spill or capsize anything upon it, and in this respect might almost be said to have rendered their lives a burden, but they bore up under it with surprising cheerfulness.

There was also a new eight-day clock, with a polished mahogany case and a really white face, which by contrast made the old Dutch clock more yellow and bilious than ever, and if possible more horrified in its expression. Mrs Gaff had allowed the old clock to retain its corner, wisely concluding that it would be a pleasantly familiar sight and sound to her husband and son when they returned. It was quite apparent to the meanest capacity that there was a rivalry between the two timepieces; for, being both rather good timekeepers, they invariably struck the hours at the same time, but the new clock struck with such a loud overbearing ring that the old one was quite overpowered. The latter had the advantage, however, of getting the first two strokes before the other began, besides which it prefaced its remarks every hour with a mysterious hissing and whirring sound that the new clock could not have got up to save its life.

There were also half-a-dozen new cane chairs. The shopman who had sold Mrs Gaff the carpet told her that they would look more elegant and drawing-room-like than the six heavy second-hand mahogany ones, with the hair-cloth seats, on which she had set her heart. Mrs Gaff would not at first agree to take the cane chairs, observing truly that they “was too slim,” but she was shaken in her mind when the shopman said they were quite the thing for a lady’s boudoir.

She immediately demanded to know what a “boodwar” was. The shopman told her that it was an elegant apartment in which young ladies were wont to sit and read poetry, and think of their absent lovers.

On hearing this she retired into a corner of the shop, taking refuge behind a chest of drawers, and held a long whispered conversation with Tottie, after which she came forth and asked the shopman if married ladies ever used boodwars where they might sit and think of their absent husbands.

The shopman smiled, and said he had no doubt they did—indeed, he was sure of it; for, said he, there was a certain apartment in his own house in which his own wife was wont to sit up at night, when he chanced to be absent, and think of *him*.

The uncandid man did not add that in the same apartment he was in the habit of being taken pretty sharply to task as to what had kept him out so late; but, after all, what had Mrs Gaff to do with that? The result was that the six cane chairs were ordered by Mrs Gaff, who remarked that she never read “poitry,” but that that wouldn’t matter much. Thenceforth she styled the cottage at Cove the Boodwar.

It is worthy of remark that Mrs Gaff, being a heavy woman, went through the bottom of the first of the cane chairs she sat down on after they were placed in the boudoir, and that her fisher-friends, being all more or less heavy, went successively through the bottoms of all the rest until none were left, and they were finally replaced by the six heavy mahogany chairs, with the hair seats, which ever afterwards stood every test to which they were subjected, that of Haco Barepoles’ weight included.

But the chief ornament of the cottage was a magnificent old mahogany four-poster, which was so large that it took up at least a third of the apartment, and so solidly dark and heavy that visitors were invariably, on their first entrance, impressed with the belief that a hearse had been set up in a corner of the boudoir. The posts of this bed were richly carved, and the top of each was ornamented with an imposing ball. The whole was tastefully draped with red damask so dark with age as to be almost black. Altogether this piece of furniture was so grand that words cannot fully describe it, and it stood so high on its carved legs that Mrs Gaff and Tottie were obliged to climb into it each night by a flight of three steps, which were richly carpeted, and which folded into a square box, which was extremely convenient as a seat or ottoman during the day, and quite in keeping with the rest of the furniture of the “boodwar.”

In addition to all these beautiful and expensive articles, Mrs Gaff displayed her love for the fine arts in the selection and purchase of four engravings in black frames with gold slips, one for each wall of the cottage. The largest of these was the portrait of a first-rate line-of-battle ship in full sail, with the yards manned, and dressed from deck to trucks

with all the flags of the navy. Another was a head of Lord Nelson, said to be a speaking likeness!

This head had the astonishing property of always looking at you, no matter what part of the room you looked at it from! Tottie had expressed a wish that it might be hung opposite the new clock, in order that it might have something, as it were, to look at; but although the eyes looked straight out of the picture, they refused to look at the clock, and pertinaciously looked at living beings instead. Mrs Gaff asserted that it had a squint, and that it was really looking at the Dutch clock, and on going to the corner where that timepiece stood she found that Lord Nelson *was* gazing in that direction! But Tottie, who went to the opposite corner of the room, roundly asseverated that the head looked at *her*.

There was no getting over this difficulty, so Mrs Gaff gave it up as an unsolvable riddle; but Tottie, who was fond of riddles, pondered the matter, and at length came to the conclusion that as Lord Nelson was a great man, it must be because of his greatness that he could look in two directions at the same moment.

Mrs Gaff furthermore displayed her taste for articles of *vertu* in her selection of chimney-piece ornaments. She had completely covered every inch of available space with shells of a brilliant and foreign aspect, and articles of chinaware, such as parrots and shepherds, besides various creatures which the designer had evidently failed to represent correctly, as they resembled none of the known animals of modern times.

From this abode of elegance and luxury Mrs Gaff issued one forenoon in her gay cotton visiting dress and the huge bonnet with the pink bows and ribbons. Tottie accompanied her, for the two were seldom apart for any lengthened period since the time when Stephen and Billy went away. Mother and daughter seemed from that date to have been united by a new and stronger bond than heretofore; they walked, worked, ate, slept, and almost thought together. On the present occasion they meant to pay a business visit at the house of Mr Stuart.

While they were on their way thither, Miss Penelope Stuart was engaged in the difficult and harassing work of preparing for a journey. She was assisted by Mrs Niven, who was particularly anxious to know the cause of the intended journey, to the great annoyance of Miss Peppy, who did not wish to reveal the cause, but who was so incapable of concealing anything that she found it absolutely necessary to take the housekeeper into her confidence.

“Niven,” she said, sitting down on a portmanteau, which was packed, beside one which was packing.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I may as well tell you why it is that I am going to visit my brother-in-law—”

“Oh, it’s to your brother-in-law you’re goin’, is it?”

“Yes, I forgot that you did not know, but to be sure I might have known that you could not know unless you were told, although it’s difficult to understand why people shouldn’t know what others are thinking of, as well as what they are looking at. We can see them looking, but we can’t hear them thinking—really it is very perplexing—dear me, where can they be?”

“What, ma’am?”

“My thick walking-shoes. I’m quite sure that I had them in my hand a minute ago.”

“Ho! ma’am,” exclaimed Mrs Niven suddenly, “if you aren’t bin an’ put ’em into your bonnet-box among the caps.”

“Well now, that *is* odd. Put them into the bag, Niven. Well, as I was saying—where was I?”

“You was goin’ to tell me why you are goin’ to your brother, ma’am,” observed the housekeeper.

“Ah! to be sure; well then—. But you must never mention it, Niven.”

Miss Peppy said this with much solemnity, as if she were administering an oath.

“On my honour, ma’am; trust me. I never mentions hanythink.”

Mrs Niven said this as though she wondered that the supposition could have entered into Miss Peppy’s head for a moment, that she, (Mrs Niven), could, would, or should tell anything to anybody.

“Well then, you must know,” resumed Miss Peppy, with a cautious glance round the room, “my brother-in-law, Colonel Crusty, who lives in the town of Athenbury, is a military man—”

“So I should suppose, ma’am,” observed Mrs Niven, “he being called Kurnel, w’ich is an army name.”

“Ah, yes, to be sure, I forgot that; well, it is two hours by train to Athenbury, which is a dirty place, as all seaports are —full of fishy and sailory smells, though I’ve never heard that such smells are bad for the health; at least the Sanitary Commissioners say that if all the filth were cleaned away the effluvia would be less offensive, and—and—. But, as I was saying, for those reasons I mean to pay my brother-in-law a short visit.”

“Beg parding, ma’am,” said Mrs Niven, “but, if I may remark so, you ’ave not mentioned your reasons as yet.”

“Oh, to be sure,” said the baffled Miss Peppy, who had weakly hoped that she could escape with an indefinite explanation; “I meant to say, (and you’ll be sure not to tell, Niven), that the Colonel has a remarkably pretty daughter, with *such* a sweet temper, and heiress to all her father’s property; though I never knew rightly how much it was, for the Crustys are very close, and since their mother died—”

“Whose mother, ma’am? the Colonel’s or his daughter’s?”

“His daughter’s, of course—Bella, she is called. Since she died, (not Bella, but her mother), since then I’ve never heard anything about the family; but now that Bella is grown up, I mean to get her and Kenneth to see each other, and I have no doubt that they will fall in love, which would be very nice, for you know Kenneth will have a good income one of those days, and it’s as well that the young people should be—be married if they can, and indeed I see nothing in the way; though, after all, they would probably be happier if they were *not* to marry, for I don’t believe the state to be a happy one, and that’s the reason, Niven, that I never entered into it myself; but it’s too late now, though I cannot conceive why it should ever be too late, for if people can be happy at all, any time, what’s to hinder?”

Miss Peppy paused abruptly here, and Mrs Niven, supposing that she awaited a reply, said—

“Nothing whatever, ma’am.”

“Exactly so, Niven, that’s just what I think. Kenneth is young and tall and handsome, Bella is young and small and pretty, and that’s the reason the match is so suitable, though, to be sure, there are many people similarly situated whose union would not be suitable; dear me, this world of perplexities! No one can read the riddle, for this world is no better than a big round riddle, flattened a little at the poles, to be sure, like an orange, though to *my* eyes it seems as flat as a pancake, except in the Scotch Highlands, where it’s very irregular, and the people wear kilts; still, upon the whole, I think the match will be a good one, so I am going to try to bring it about.”

“But are you sure, ma’am, that Master Kenneth will go to visit Colonel Crusty?”

“O yes, he has promised to escort me there, and then he’ll see Bella, and, of course, he won’t wish to leave after that.”

Mrs Niven shook her head, and observed that she rather feared Miss Lizzie Gordon’s image was already indelibly impressed on Master Kenneth’s heart, but Miss Peppy replied that that was all nonsense, and that, at all events, her brother, Mr Stuart, would never permit it. She did not find it difficult to gain over Mrs Niven to her views, for that worthy woman, (like many other worthy women in this world), held the opinion that a “good match” meant a match where money existed on one or both sides, and that love was a mere boyish and girlish idea, which should not be taken into consideration at all.

The two were still discussing this important subject when Mrs Gaff laid violent hands on the door-bell.

On being admitted to the presence of Miss Peppy, Mrs Gaff sat down on the packed trunk, and all but stove in the lid; whereupon she rose hastily with many apologies, and afterwards in her confusion sat down on the bonnet-box, which she stove in so completely as to render it *hors-de-combat* for all future time.

“I’m awful sorry,” she began.

“Oh, no harm; at least no matter,” said Miss Peppy, “it’s quite a useless sort of thing,” (this was literally true), “and I mean to get a new one immediately.”

Mrs Gaff became suddenly comforted, and said, with a bland smile, that, having heard only that morning of her intention to visit the town of Athenbury, she had called to ask her to do her a great favour.

“With the greatest pleasure; what can I do for you?” said Miss Peppy, who was the essence of good-nature.

“Thank ’ee, ma’am, it’s to take charge o’ a bit parcel, about the size of my head, or thereaway, and give it to a poor relation o’ mine as lives there when he an’t afloat.”

“A seaman?” said Miss Peppy.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Very well; but,” continued Miss Peppy, “you say the parcel is the size of your head: do you mean your head with or without the bonnet? Excuse me for—”

“La! ma’am, *without* the bonnet, of course. It may perhaps be rather heavy, but I an’t quite sure yet. I’ll let you know in an hour or so.”

Mrs Gaff rose abruptly, left the house, with Tottie, precipitately, and made her way to the bank, where she presented herself with a defiant air to the teller who had originally supplied her with a hundred pounds in gold. She always became and looked defiant, worthy woman, on entering the bank, having become unalterably impressed with the idea that all the clerks, tellers, and directors had entered into an agreement to throw every possible difficulty in the way of her drawing out money, and having resolved in her own determined way that she wouldn’t give in as long as, (to borrow one of her husband’s phrases), “there was a shot in the locker!”

“Now, sir,” she said to the elderly teller, “I wants twenty pounds, if there’s as much in the shop.”

The elderly teller smiled, and bade her sit down while he should write out the cheque for her. She sat down, gazing defiance all round her, and becoming painfully aware that there were a number of young men behind various screened rails whose noses were acting as safety-valves to their suppressed feelings.

When the cheque was drawn out and duly signed, Mrs Gaff went to the rails and shook it as she might have shaken in the face of her enemies the flag under which she meant to conquer or to die. On receiving it back she returned and presented it to the elderly teller with a look that said plainly—“There! refuse to cash that at your peril;” but she said

nothing, she only snorted.

“How will you have it?” inquired the teller blandly.

“In coppers,” said Mrs Gaff stoutly.

“Coppers!” exclaimed the teller in amazement.

“Yes, coppers.”

“My good woman, are you aware that you could scarcely lift such a sum in coppers.”

“How many would it make?” she inquired with an air of indecision.

“Four thousand eight hundred pence.”

Mrs Gaff’s resolution was shaken; after a few moments’ consideration she said she would take it in silver, and begged to have it mixed—with a good number of sixpences amongst it.

“You see, my lamb,” she whispered to Tottie, while the teller was getting the money, “my poor cousin George is a’most too old to go to sea now, and he han’t got a penny to live on, an’ so I wants to gladden his heart and astonish his eyes wi’ a sight o’ such a heap o’ silver. Mix it all together, sir,” she said to the teller.

He obeyed, and pushed the pile towards Mrs Gaff, who surveyed it first with unmixed delight; but gradually her face was clouded with a look of concern as she thought of the counting of it.

If the counting of the gold was terrible to her, the counting of the silver was absolutely appalling, for the latter, consisting as it did of half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences, numbered nearly five hundred pieces.

The poor woman applied herself to the task with commendable energy, but in ten minutes she perceived that the thing was utterly beyond her powers, so she suddenly exclaimed to Tottie, who stood looking on with tears in her eyes,—“Surely the elderly teller must be an honest man, and would never cheat me;” having come to which conclusion she swept the silver into the bag previously prepared for it, and consigned that to the basket which was the inseparable companion of her left arm. Thereafter she left the bank and hastened to a grocer in the town with whom she was acquainted, and from whom she obtained brown paper and twine with which she made the money up into a parcel. Her next act was to purchase a new bonnet-box, which she presented to Miss Peppy with many earnest protestations that she would have got a better if she could, but a better was not to be had in town for love or money.

Having executed all her commissions, Mrs Gaff returned to Cove and spent an hour or two with Tottie in the four-poster—not by any means because she was lazy, but because it afforded her peculiar and inexpressible pleasure to stare at the damask curtains and wonder how Gaff would like it, and think of the surprise that he would receive on first beholding *such* a bed. So anxious did the good woman become in her desire to make the most of the new bed, that she once or twice contemplated the propriety of Stephen and herself, and the Bu’ster and Tottie, spending the first night, “after their return,” all together in it, but on mature consideration she dismissed the idea as untenable.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Miss Peppy undertakes a Journey.

The scene is changed now to the railway station at Wreckumoft, where there is the usual amount of bustle and noise. The engines are shrieking and snorting as if nothing on earth could relieve their feelings but bursting. Bells are ringing; porters are hurrying to and fro with luggage on trucks, to the risk of passengers’ shins and toes; men, women, and children, young and old, high and low, rich and poor, are mixed in confusion on the platform, some insanely attempting to force their way into a train that is moving off, under the impression that it is *their* train, and they are too late “after all!” Others are wildly searching for lost luggage. Many are endeavouring to calm their own spirits, some are attempting to calm the spirits of others. Timid old ladies, who *cannot* get reconciled to railways at all, are convinced that “something is going to happen,” and testy old gentlemen are stumping about in search of wives and daughters, wishing that railways had never been invented, while a good many self-possessed individuals of both sexes are regarding the scene with serene composure.

When Miss Peppy made her appearance she was evidently not among the latter class. She was accompanied by Kenneth, and attended by Mrs Niven.

Neither mistress nor maid had ever been in a railway station before. They belonged to that class of females who are not addicted to travelling, and who prefer stage-coaches of the olden times to railways. They entered the station, therefore, with some curiosity and much trepidation—for it chanced to be an excursion day, and several of the “trades” of Athenbury were besieging the ticket-windows.

“It is very good of you to go with me, Kennie,” said Miss Peppy, hugging her nephew’s arm.

“My dear aunt, it is a pleasure, I assure you,” replied Kenneth; “I am quite anxious to make the acquaintance of Colonel Crusty and his pretty daughter.”

“O dear! what a shriek! Is anything wrong, Kennie?”

“Nothing, dear aunt; it is only a train about to start.”

“What’s the matter with you, Niven?” inquired Miss Peppy with some anxiety, on observing that the housekeeper’s face was ashy pale.

“Nothink, ma’am; only I feels assured that *everythink* is a-goin’ to bu’st, ma’am.”

She looked round hastily, as if in search of some way of escape, but no such way presented itself.

“Look-out for your legs, ma’am,” shouted a porter, as he tried to stop his truck of luggage.

Mrs Niven of course did not hear him, and if she had heard him, she would not have believed it possible that he referred to *her* legs, for she wore a very long dress, and was always scrupulously particular in the matter of concealing her ankles. Fortunately Kenneth observed her danger, and pulled her out of the way with unavoidable violence.

“It can’t ’old on much longer,” observed Niven with a sigh, referring to an engine which stood directly opposite to her in tremulous and apparently tremendous anxiety to start.

The driver vented his impatience just then by causing the whistle to give three sharp yelps, which produced three agonising leaps in the bosoms of Miss Peppy and Mrs Niven.

“*Couldn’t* it all be done with a little less noise,” said Miss Peppy to Kenneth, “it seems to me so aw— oh! look! surely that old gentleman has gone mad!”

“Not he,” said Kenneth with a smile; “he has only lost his wife in the crowd, and thinks the train will start before he finds her; see, she is under the same impression, don’t you see her rushing wildly about looking for her husband, they’ll meet in a moment or two if they keep going in the same direction, unless that luggage-truck should interfere.”

“Look-out, sir!” shouted the porter at that moment. The old gentleman started back, and all but knocked over his wife, who screamed, recognised him, and clung to his arm with thankful tenacity.

A bell rang.

The crowd swayed to and fro; agitated people became apparently insane; timid people collapsed; strong people pushed, and weak folk gave way. If any man should be sceptical in regard to the doctrine of the thorough depravity of the human heart, he can have his unbelief removed by going into and observing the conduct of an eager crowd!

“What a hinfamous state of things!” observed Mrs Niven.

“Yell!—shriek!” went the engine whistle, drowning Miss Peppy’s reply.

“Take your seats!” roared the guard.

The engine gave a sudden snort, as if to say, “You’d better, else I’m off without you.”

“Now aunt,” said Kenneth, “come along.”

In another moment Miss Peppy was seated in a carriage, with her head out of the window, talking earnestly and rapidly to Mrs Niven.

It seemed as if she had reserved all the household directions which she had to give to that last inopportune moment!

“Now, take good care of Emmie, Niven, and don’t forget to get her—”

The remainder was drowned by “that irritating whistle.”

“Get her what, ma’am?”

“Get her shoes mended before Sunday, and remember that her petticoat was torn when she—bless me! has that thing burst at last?”

“No, ma’am, not yet,” said Niven.

“Now then, keep back; show your tickets, please,” said the inspector, pushing Niven aside.

“Imperence!” muttered the offended housekeeper, again advancing to the window when the man had passed.

As the train was evidently about to start, Miss Peppy’s memory became suddenly very acute, and a rush of forgotten directions almost choked her as she leaned out of the window.

“Oh! Niven, I forgot—the—the—dear me, what is it? I know it so well when I’m not in a flurry. It’s awful to be subjected so constantly to—the Child’s History of England! that’s it—on the top of my—my—which trunk *can* it be? I know, oh yes, the leather one. Emmie is to read—well now, that is too bad—”

As Miss Peppy stopped and fumbled in her pocket inquiringly, Mrs Niven asked, in some concern, if it was her purse.

“No, it’s my thimble; ah! here it is, there’s a corner in that pocket where everything seems to—well,” (shriek from the whistle), “oh! and—and—the baker’s book—it must be—by the bye, that’s well remembered, you must get money from Mr Stuart—”

“What *now*, ma’am,” inquired Mrs Niven, as Miss Peppy again paused and grew pale.

“The key!”

“Of the press?” inquired Niven.

“Yes—no; that is, it’s the key of the press, and not the key of my trunk. Here, take it,” (she thrust the key into the housekeeper’s hand, just as the engine gave a violent snort.) “What shall I do? My trunk won’t open without, at least I suppose it won’t, and it’s a new lock! what shall—”

“Make a parcel of the key, Niven,” said Kenneth, coming to the rescue, “and send it by the guard of next train.”

“And oh!” shrieked Miss Peppy, as the train began to move, “I forgot the—the—”

“Yes, yes, quick, ma’am,” cried Niven eagerly, as she followed.

“Oh! can’t they stop the train for a moment? It’s the—it’s—dear me—the pie—pie!”

“What pie, ma’am?”

“There’s three of them—for my brother’s dinner—I forgot to tell cook—it’ll put him out so—there’s three of ’em. It’s not the—the—two but the—the—*other* one, the what-d’ye-call-it pie.” Miss Peppy fell back on her seat, and gave it up with a groan. Suddenly she sprang up, and thrust out her head—“The *deer* pie,” she yelled.

“The dear pie!” echoed the astonished Mrs Niven interrogatively.

Another moment and Miss Peppy vanished from the scene, leaving the housekeeper to return home in despair, from which condition she was relieved by the cook, who at once concluded that the “dear pie” must mean the venison pasty, and forthwith prepared the dish for dinner.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Perplexities and Musical Charms.

My son Gildart, with his hands in his pockets and his cap very much on one side of his head, entered my drawing-room one morning with a perplexed air.

“What troubles you to-day?” asked Lizzie Gordon, who was seated at the window winding up a ball of worsted, the skein of which was being held by Miss Puff, who was at that time residing with us.

“What troubles me?—everything troubles me,” said the middy with a stern air, as he turned his back to the fire; “the world troubles me, circumstances trouble me, my heart troubles me, my pocket troubles me, my friends and relations trouble me, and so do my enemies; in fact, it would be difficult to name the sublunary creature or thing that does *not* trouble me. It blows trouble from every point of the compass, a peculiarity in moral gales that is never observed in physical breezes.”

“How philosophically you talk this morning,” observed Lizzie with a laugh. “May it not be just possible that the trouble, instead of flowing from all points to you as a centre, wells up within and flows out in all directions, and that a warped mind inverts the process?”

“Perhaps you are right, sweet cousin! Anyhow we can’t be both wrong, which is a comfort.”

“May I ask what is the heart-trouble you complain of?” said Lizzie.

“Love and hatred,” replied Gildart with a sigh and a frown.

“Indeed! Is the name of the beloved object a secret?”

“Of course,” said the middy with a pointed glance at Miss Puff, who blushed scarlet from the roots of her hair to the edge of her dress, (perhaps to the points of her toes—I am inclined to think so); “of course it is; but the hated object’s name is no secret. It is Haco Barepoles.”

“The mad skipper!” exclaimed Lizzie in surprise. “I thought he was the most amiable man in existence. Every one speaks well of him.”

“It may be so, but I hate him. The hatred is peculiar, though I believe not incurable, but at present it is powerful. That preposterous giant, that fathom and four inches of conceit, that insufferable disgrace to his cloth, that huge mass of human bones in a pig-skin—he—he bothers me.”

“But how does he bother you?”

“Well, in the first place, he positively refuses to let his daughter Susan marry Dan Horsey, and I have set my heart on that match, for Susan is a favourite of mine, and Dan is a capital fellow, though he is a groom and a scoundrel—and nothing would delight me more than to bother our cook, who is a perfect vixen, and would naturally die of vexation if these two were spliced; besides, I want a dance at a wedding, or a shindy of some sort, before setting sail for the land of spices and niggers. Haco puts a stop to all that; but, worse still, when I was down at the Sailors’ Home the other day, I heard him telling some wonderful stories to the men there, in one of which he boasted that he had never

been taken by surprise, nor got a start in his life; that a twenty-four pounder had once burst at his side and cut the head clean off a comrade, without causing his nerves to shake or his pulse to increase a bit. I laid him a bet of ten pounds on the spot that I could give him a fright, and he took it at once. Now I can't for the life of me think how to give him a fright, yet I *must* do it somehow, for it will never do to be beat."

"Couldn't you shoot off a pistol at his ear?" suggested Lizzie.

Miss Puff sniggered, and Gildart said he might as well try to startle him with a sneeze.

"Get up a ghost, then," said Lizzie; "I have known a ghost act with great effect on a dark night in an out-of-the-way place."

"No use," returned Gildart, shaking his head. "Haco has seen ghosts enough to frighten a squadron of horse-marines."

Miss Puff sniggered again, and continued to do so until her puffy face and neck became extremely pink and dangerously inflated, insomuch that Gildart asked her somewhat abruptly what in the world she was laughing at. Miss Puff said she wouldn't tell, and Gildart insisted that she would; but she positively declined, until Gildart dragged her forcibly from her chair into a window-recess, where she was prevailed on to whisper the ideas that made her laugh.

"Capital!" exclaimed the middy, chuckling as he issued from the recess; "I'll try it. You're a charming creature, Puff, with an imagination worthy the owner of a better name. There, don't pout. You know my sentiments. Adieu, fair cousin! Puff, good-bye."

So saying, the volatile youth left the room.

That afternoon Gildart sauntered down to the Sailors' Home and entered the public hall, in which a dozen or two of sailors were engaged in playing draughts or chatting together. He glanced round, but, not finding the object of his search, was about to leave, when Dan Horsey came up, and, touching his hat, asked if he were looking for Haco Barepoles.

"I am," said Gildart.

"So is meself," said Dan; "but the mad skipper an't aisy to git howld of, an' not aisy to kape howld of when ye've got him. He's goin' to Cove this afternoon, I believe, an'll be here before startin', so I'm towld, so I'm waitin' for him."

As he spoke Haco entered, and Dan delivered a letter to him.

"Who from?" inquired the skipper sternly.

"Mr Stuart, *alias* the guv'nor," replied Dan with extreme affability; "an' as no answer is required, I'll take my leave with your highness's permission."

Haco deigned no reply, but turned to Gildart and held out his hand.

"You've not gone to stay at Cove yet, I see," said Gildart.

"Not yet, lad, but I go to-night at nine o'clock. You see Mrs Gaff is a-goin' to visit a relation for a week, an' wants me to take care o' the house, the boodwar, as she calls it, though why she calls it by that name is more than I can tell. However I'll be here for a week yet, as the 'Coffin' wants a few repairs, (I wonder if it ever didn't want repairs), an' I may as well be there as in the Home, though I'm bound to say the Home is as good a lodgin' as ever I was in at home or abroad, and cheap too, an' they looks arter you so well. The only thing I an't sure of is whether the repairs is to be done here or in Athenbury."

"The letter from Mr Stuart may bear on that point," suggested Gildart.

"True," replied the skipper, opening the letter.

"Ha! sure enough the repairs *is* to be done there, so I'll have to cut my visit to Cove short by four days."

"But you'll sleep there to-night, I suppose?" asked Gildart, with more anxiety than the subject seemed to warrant.

"Ay, no doubt o' that, for Mrs G and Tottie left this mornin', trustin' to my comin' down in the evenin'; but I can't get before nine o'clock."

"Well, good-day to you," said Gildart; "I hope you'll enjoy yourself at Cove."

The middy hastened away from the Sailors' Home with the air of a man who had business on hand. Turning the corner of a street he came upon a brass band, the tones of which were rendering all the bilious people within hearing almost unable to support existence. There was one irascible old gentleman, (a lawyer), under whose window it was braying, who sat at his desk with a finger in each ear trying to make sense out of a legal document. This was a difficult task at any time, for the legal document was compounded chiefly of nonsense, with the smallest possible modicum of sense scattered through it. In the circumstances the thing was impossible, so the lawyer rose and stamped about the floor, and wished he were the Emperor of Russia with a cannon charged with grape-shot loaded to the muzzle and pointed at the centre of that brass band, in which case he would—. Well, the old gentleman never thought out the sentence, but he stamped on and raved a little as the band brayed below his window.

There was a sick man in a room not far from the old lawyer's office. He had spent two days and two nights in the

delirium of fever. At last the doctor succeeded in getting him to fall into a slumber. It was not a very sound one; but such as it was it was of inestimable value to the sick man. The brass band, however, brayed the slumber away to the strains of “Rule Britannia,” and effectually restored the delirium with “God Save the Queen.”

There were many other interesting little scenes enacted in that street in consequence of the harmonious music of that brass band, but I shall refrain from entering into farther particulars. Suffice it to say that Gildart stood listening to it for some time with evident delight.

“Splendid,” he muttered, as an absolutely appalling burst of discord rent the surrounding air and left it in tatters. “Magnificent! I think that will do.”

“You seem fond of bad music, sir,” observed an elderly gentleman, who had been standing near a doorway looking at the middy with a quiet smile.

“Yes, on the present occasion I am,” replied Gildart; “discord suits my taste just now, and noise is pleasant to my ear.”

The band ceased to play at that moment, and Gildart, stepping up to the man who appeared to be the leader, inasmuch as he performed on the clarionet, asked him to turn aside with him for a few minutes.

The man obeyed with a look of surprise, not unmingled with suspicion.

“You are leader of this band?”

“Yes, sir, I ham.”

“Have you any objection to earn a sovereign or two?”

“No, sir, I han’t.”

“It’s a goodish band,” observed Gildart.

“A fus’-rater,” replied the clarionet. “No doubt the trombone is a little cracked and brassy, so to speak, because of a hinfluenza as has wonted him for some weeks; but there’s good stuff in ’im, sir, and plenty o’ lungs. The key-bugle is a noo ’and, but ’e’s capital, ’ticklerly in the ’igh notes an’ flats; besides, bein’ young, ’e’ll improve. As to the French ’orn, there ain’t his ekal in the country; w’en he does the pathetic it would make a banker weep. You like pathetic music, sir?”

“Not much,” replied the middy.

“No! now that’s hodd. *I* do. It ’armonises so with the usual state o’ my feelin’s. My feelin’s is a’most always pathetic, sir.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, ’cept at meal-times, w’en I do manage to git a little jolly. Ah! sir, music ain’t wot it used to be. There’s a general flatness about it now, sir, an’ people don’t seem to admire it ’alf so much as w’en I first began. But if you don’t like the pathetic, p’raps you like the bravoory style?”

“I doat on it,” said Gildart. “Come, let’s have a touch of the ‘bravoory.’”

“I’ve got a piece,” said the clarionet slowly, looking at the sky with a pathetic air, “a piece as I composed myself. I don’t often play it, ’cause, you know, sir, one doesn’t ’xactly like to shove one’s-self too prominently afore the public. I calls it the ‘Banging-smash Polka.’ But I generally charge hextra for it, for it’s dreadful hard on the lungs, and the trombone he gets cross when I mention it, for it nearly bu’sts the hinstrument; besides, it kicks up sich a row that it puts the French ’orn’s nose out o’ jint—you can’t ’ear a note of him. I flatter myself that the key-bugle plays his part to parfection, but the piece was written chiefly for the trombone and clarionet; the one being deep and crashing, the other shrill and high. I had the battle o’ Waterloo in my mind w’en I wrote it.”

“Will that do?” said Gildart, putting half-a-crown into the man’s hand.

The clarionet nodded, and, turning to his comrades, winked gravely as he pronounced the magic word—“Banging-smash.”

Next moment there was a burst as if a bomb-shell had torn up the street, and this was followed up by a series of crashes so rapid, violent, and wildly intermingled, that the middy’s heart almost leapt out of him with delight!

In a few seconds three doors burst open, and three servant-girls rushed at the band with three sixpences to beseech it to go away.

“Couldn’t go under a shillin’ a head,” said the clarionet gravely.

A word from Gildart, however, induced him to accept of the bribe and depart.

As they went along the street Gildart walked with the clarionet and held earnest converse with him—apparently of a persuasive nature, for the clarionet frequently shook his head and appeared to remonstrate. Presently he called on his comrades to stop, and held with them a long palaver, in which the French horn seemed to be an objector, and the trombone an assenter, while the key-bugle didn’t seem to care. At last they all came to an agreement.

“Now,” said the middy, taking out his purse, “that’s all fixed; here is five shillings in advance, and twenty shillings will follow when the performance is over. Don’t forget the time and place: the village of Cove, the rear of Stephen Gaff’s cottage—everybody knows it—and eight o’clock precisely.”

Chapter Twenty Six.

Mad Haco startled at last.

That evening Haco Barepoles was seen on the road to Cove, with his coat-skirts, his cravat-ends, and his hair streaming in the breeze.

An hour previously, however, a brass band was seen walking towards the same place, and, half an hour after that, a young midshipman was observed posting rapidly in the same direction.

It was dark when Gildart entered the village, and all the inhabitants were in their dwellings, so that he reached Gaff’s cottage unperceived.

The village was a primitive one. Locks were deemed unnecessary in most of the cottages, probably because there was nothing worth stealing within them. Gildart lifted the latch and entered. A fire, nearly out, with a large piece of coal on it, burned in the grate. The flicker of this was sufficient to illuminate the boudoir faintly.

Having surveyed the apartment, examined the closet, and looked under the bed, he went out, and, going to the back of the cottage, found the band waiting in some anxiety.

“Now, lads, come this way,” said Gildart; “and there’s only one piece of advice I’ve got to give you: don’t stir hand or foot after Haco enters the cottage. He’s as big as an elephant, and strong as a lion. If you stir, and he finds you out, he won’t spare you.”

“But you promise to come to the rescue, master,” said the French horn in some alarm.

“Ay, that will I; but he’ll have two of you floored, another strangled, and the fourth half-skinned before I can get him to stop.”

“I don’t half like it,” said the clarionet anxiously.

“Pooh! pooh!” exclaimed the key-bugle, “we’ll be more than a match for him; come on; it’s worth riskin’ for twenty-five bob.”

“Hear! hear!” cried the trombone.

“Well, then, enter,” said Gildart, pushing open the door, and holding it while the band filed into the passage. He followed them and closed the door.

In a short time Haco Barepoles made his appearance. He also passed through the village unobserved, and, entering the cottage, closed the door. Thereafter he proceeded to make himself comfortable. The “boodwar” was empty—at least of human beings, though there was the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance in the corner, and the new clock near it, and the portraits and the great four-poster, and all the other articles of elegance and luxury with which Mrs Gaff had filled her humble dwelling.

“A queer place,” muttered the mad skipper in a soft voice to himself, as he moved about the room, poked up the fire, and made preparations for spending the night. “Gaff wouldn’t know the old cabin—humph! but it’s all done out o’ kindness; well, well, there’s no accountin’ for women, they’re paridoxies. Hallo! this here closet didn’t use to be bolted, but it’s bolted now. Hows’ever here’s the loaf and the tea-pot an’ the kettle. Now, Mrs Gaff, you’re an attentive creetur, nevertheless you’ve forgot bilin’ water, an’, moreover, there an’t no water in the house. Ah, here’s a bucket; that’ll do; I’ll go to the well an’ help myself; it’s *well* that I can do it,” said Haco, chuckling at his own pun with great satisfaction as he went out to the back of the house.

There was a sudden, though not loud, sound of hollow brass chinking under the four-post bed.

“Now then, *can’t* you keep still?” said the clarionet in a hoarse whisper.

“It’s cramp in my leg,” growled the trombone. “I’d have had to come out if he hadn’t guv me this chance.”

“*Won’t* you hold your tongues?” whispered Gildart from the closet, the door of which he opened slightly.

He shut it with a sudden clap, and there was another clanking of brass as Haco’s footsteps were heard outside, but dead silence reigned within the hut when the skipper re-entered, and set down on the floor a large bucket full of water.

“Now then for tea,” said Haco, rubbing his hands, as he set about the preparation of that meal. Being acquainted with the ways and localities of the cottage, he speedily had the board spread, and the tea smoking thereon, while the fire flared cheerfully on the walls, casting fine effects of light and shade on the pictures, and sprinkling the prominences of the clocks, bed, and furniture with ruddy gleams.

Having devoured his meal with an appetite and gusto worthy of his size, Haco filled his much-loved German pipe, and, selecting the strongest chair in the room, sat cautiously down on it beside the fire to enjoy a smoke.

Meanwhile the brass band endured agonies unutterable. The trombone afterwards vowed that he “wouldn’t for fifty sovs” again go through what he had suffered during the hour that the mad skipper sat by that fire enjoying his evening pipe!

At last the pipe was smoked out, and Haco began to divest himself of his upper garments. Being an active man, he was soon undressed and in bed, where he lay for a long time perfectly still. Presently he gave vent to a deep sigh, and turned on his back, in which position he lay quite still for at least five minutes. At last he gave a soft puff with his lips, and followed it up with a mild snort from his nose.

This was immediately followed by a light single tap at the closet door.

Instantly the first bar of the Banging-Smash Polka burst from beneath the bed with such startling suddenness and energy that Gildart was himself rendered almost breathless. Haco awoke with a yell so dreadful that the brass band stopped for a single instant, but it burst forth again with a degree of fury that almost rent the trombone in twain!

The appalled skipper uttered another yell, and sprang up into the air. The four-poster could not stand the test. Haco went crashing through the bottom of the bed, flattened the French horn, and almost killed the trombone, while the broken ends of the planking of the bed pinned them to the floor. Escape was impossible.

Haco perceived the joke, and instantly recovered his self-possession. Springing from the bed, he seized the bucket of water which he had recently drawn, and dashed its contents on the struggling band. Thereafter he hauled the trombone out of the *débris* by the neck, flattened his instrument on his head, and twisted it round his neck. The key-bugle, who had struggled to his feet, fell before a well-aimed backhander, and the French horn was about to perish, when Gildart succeeded in restraining and pacifying the giant by stoutly asserting that he had won his bet, and insisted on having payment on the spot!

Haco burst into a loud laugh, flung the key-bugle from his grasp, and pulled on his nether garments.

“I confess that you’ve won it, lad, so now I’ll have another pipe.”

He proceeded to fill the German pipe, and stirred up the fire while the band made good its retreat. Gildart paid the clarionet the stipulated sum of twenty shillings outside the door, after which he returned and seated himself beside the mad skipper.

Haco’s laugh had changed into a good-humoured smile as he gazed into the fire and puffed volumes of smoke from his lips.

“It was a risky thing to do, lad,” he observed, as Gildart sat down; “it’s well for that feller wi’ the long trumpet that the brass was so thin and his head so hard, for my blood was up, bein’ taken by surprise, you see, an’ I didn’t measure my blows. Hows’ever, ‘it’s all well that ends well,’ as I once heard a play-actor say.”

“But it’s not ended yet,” said Gildart with decision.

“How so, lad?”

“You’ve got to pay up your bet.”

Haco’s brow became a little clouded. The bet had been taken more than half in joke, for he was not given to betting in earnest; but he was too proud to admit this on finding that Gildart took it in earnest.

“You’ll not want it for a short while, I daresay?” he asked.

“Captain Barepoles—”

“Skipper, lad, I don’t like to be cap’ned.”

“Well, Skipper Barepoles,” said the middy with much solemnity, “I always pay my debts of honour on the spot, and I expect gentlemen who bet with me to do the same.”

Haco grinned. “But I an’t a gentleman,” said he, “an’ I don’t set up for one.”

“Still, as a man of honour you must feel bound—”

“No, lad, not as a man of honour,” interrupted the skipper, “but as a British seaman I’ll hold the debt due; only, not bein’ in the habit o’ carrying the Bank of England in my weskit-pocket, you see, I must ask you to wait till to-morrow mornin’.”

Haco said this with a slightly disappointed look, for he thought the middy rather sharp, and had formed a better opinion of him than his conduct on this occasion seemed to bear out.

“Now, skipper, I’ll tell you what it is. I am not fond of betting, and this bet of mine was taken in jest; in fact my usual bet is ten thousand pounds, sometimes a million! Nevertheless, you have admitted the debt as due, and although I do not mean to claim payment in the usual way, I don’t intend to forego my rights altogether. I’ll only ask you to do me a favour.”

“What may it be, lad?”

“Will you grant it?”

“Well, that depends—”

“No, it doesn’t; say Yes, or I’ll claim the ten pounds.”

“Well, yes, if it’s right and proper for me to do it. Now, what d’ye want?”

“Humph! Well then,” said Gildart, “I want you to let your daughter Susan get spliced to Dan Horsey.”

Haco frowned, and said, “Unpossible.”

“Come now, don’t be hard on them, skipper; Dan is a good fellow and a first-rate groom.”

“He’s an Irish blackguard,” said Haco, “and not worth a pinch of his namesake.”

“You’re quite mistaken,” said Gildart, who went on to speak so highly of the groom, that Haco, if not made to change his opinion, was so much impressed as to agree at least to take the whole subject once again into consideration.

“Another thing I wish you to do, skipper, which is to give me a passage in your sloop to Athenbury. You spoke of running round there for repairs soon, and I would rather go by sea than by that snorting railway. Will you do it?”

“With pleasure, lad.”

“Thank’ee; now I’ll bid you good-night. You may depend upon it that you won’t be disturbed again by a band,” said Gildart, laughing.

“I know that,” replied Haco with a grin; “it’s my opinion they’ve had enough of me for one night. But won’t ye stop an’ share the four-poster, lad? It’s big enough, an’ we’ll soon repair the damage to its bottom-timbers. There’s a knuckle o’ ham too, an’ a flask o’ claret. I brought it with me, ’cause I never drink nothin’ stronger than claret—vang ordinair they calls it in France. What say you; you’ll stop?”

“No, thank’ee, skipper, much obliged, but I’ve business on hand elsewhere. Good-night, old boy.”

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Plot and Counterplot, ending in a Long Chase.

One day, not long after his arrival at Athenbury, Kenneth Stuart was seated in Colonel Crusty’s drawing-room, awaiting the summons to dinner.

Pretty Bella sat beside him, endeavouring to get up a flirtation—for Bella was an inveterate flirt. Besides being pretty, she was sprightly and full of life—a giddy gay thing, much addicted to that dangerous practice of fluttering round improprieties with cheerful recklessness. She was one of those human moths whose wings, alas! are being constantly singed, sometimes burned off altogether.

Kenneth was not so stern as to object to a little of what the world calls innocent flirtation, but he did not like Bella’s style of procedure; for that charming piece of wickedness made it her aim in life to bring as many lovers to her feet as she could, and keep them there. She never had too many of them, never tired of conquering them. In the language of pugilists, “One down another come on,” was her motto.

She had just floored a captain of dragoons, who was expected that day to dinner, and was now engaged at her fortieth round with Kenneth; but he was too strong for her—at least she began to suspect so, and felt nettled.

“I never met with such a provoking man as you,” said Bella, pouting; “you *promised* to go round by Simpson’s and bring me a bouquet, and now you tell me you had not time. That is not what I would have expected of *you*. Sir Kenneth.”

Bella had knighted him with the poker the evening before!

“Well, really, I am sorry,” said Kenneth in a deprecating tone, “but I’m sure you will forgive me when I tell you that—”

“I won’t forgive you,” interrupted Bella pettishly. “You are a false man. *Nothing* should have prevented you from walking round by Simpson’s, as you said you would do.”

“Indeed!” said Kenneth, smiling, “suppose I had broken my leg, now, would that not have—”

“No, it wouldn’t have been any excuse at all. You would have hopped there if you had been a good and true man, like the knights of the olden time. Oh! how I love that olden time, and wish that I had been born in it.”

Captain Bowels was announced at this moment. He was a tall handsome man, with a heavy dark moustache and a set of brilliant teeth. Bella instantly put the question to him whether, in the event of his being interrupted in the fulfilment of a promise to a lady by the accident of having his leg broken, he would not deem it his duty, as a man of honour, to *hop* out the engagement.

The captain expressed his earnest belief that that would be his duty, and added that if both legs happened to be broken, he would deem it his duty to walk out the engagement on his hands and knees, always assuming that the lady to whom the promise was made should be young and beautiful, and that the engagement did not involve dancing!

From this point Bella and the captain of dragoons cantered off into a region of small-talk whither it is not necessary that we should follow them. They were interrupted by the entrance of Colonel Crusty and Miss Peppy.

The former shook hands with the captain somewhat stiffly, and introduced him to Miss Peppy.

“Dinner late as usual, Bella,” said the colonel, taking out his watch.

“Now, papa, don’t begin,” cried Bella, running up to her father and kissing his cheek, “because when you do begin to scold you never stop, and it takes away your appetite. Dinners were meant to be late—it’s the nature of such meals. No dinner that is ready at the appointed time *can* be good; it *must* be underdone.”

The colonel was prevented from replying by the entrance of the footman with a letter, which he presented to Kenneth.

“No letters for me!” cried Miss Peppy, with a slight look of disappointment; “but, to be sure, I’m not at home, though, after all, letters might come to me when I’m away if they were only rightly addressed, but letters are never legible on the back; it is a perfect mystery to me how the postmen ever find out where to go to with letters, and they are such illiterate men too! But what can one expect in a world of inconsistencies, where things are all topsy-turvy, so to speak, though I don’t like slang, and never use it except when there is a want of a proper what-d’ye-call-it to express one’s thingumy-jigs. Don’t you think so, Captain Bowels?”

“Certainly; I think your observations are very just, and much to the point.”

Kenneth Stuart retired to a window and read his letter, which ran as follows:—

“Wreckumoft, *etcetera*.

“My Dear Kenneth—Since you left I have been thinking over your affairs, and our last conversation, (which you must allow me to style disagreeable), in regard to Miss Gordon. I trust that you have now seen the impropriety of thinking of that portionless girl as your wife. At all events, you may rest assured that on the day you marry her you shall be disinherited. You know me well enough to be aware that this is not an idle threat.

“In the hope and expectation that you will agree with me in this matter, I venture to suggest to you the propriety of trying to win the affections of Miss Crusty. You already know that her fortune will be a large one. I recommend this subject to your earnest consideration.

“Your affectionate father, George Stuart.”

“Deary me, Kennie,” said Miss Peppy, in some alarm, “I hope that nothing has happened! You seem so troubled that —”

“Oh! nothing of any consequence,” said Kenneth with a laugh, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

“Ha! your lady-love is unkind,” cried Bella; “I know it is from *her*.”

“The writing is not lady-like,” replied Kenneth, holding up the back of the letter for inspection. “It is a gentleman’s hand, you see.”

“Ladies sometimes write what I may call a masculine hand,” observed the captain.

“You are quite right, Captain Bowels,” said Miss Peppy; “some write all angles and some all rounds. One never knows how one is to expect one’s correspondents to write. Not that I have many, but one of them writes square, a most extraordinary hand, and quite illegible. Most people seem to be proud of not being able to write, except schoolboys and girls. There is no accounting for the surprising things that are scratched on paper with a pen and called writing. But in a world of things of that sort what is one to expect? It is just like all the rest, and I have given up thinking about it altogether. I hope *you* have, Captain Bowels?”

“Not quite, but very nearly,” replied the gallant captain.

“Dinner at last,” said Colonel Crusty, as the gong sounded its hideous though welcome alarm. “Captain Bowels, will you take my daughter? Miss Stuart, allow me. Sorry we’ve got no one for *you*, Mr Stuart.”

Kenneth fancied there was a touch of irony in the last observation, but he did not feel jealous, for two reasons—first, he knew, (from Miss Peppy), that the captain was no favourite with Colonel Crusty, and was only tolerated because of having been introduced by an intimate friend and old school companion of the former; and, second, being already in love with another, he did not wish to have the honour of handing Bella down to dinner at all.

During dinner Miss Peppy reminded Kenneth that he had promised to go to the Sailors’ Home that evening with the parcel which Mrs Gaff wished to be delivered to her cousin George Dollins. Bella remarked, in a sweet voice, that Sir Kenneth’s promises were not to be relied on, and that it would be wiser to transfer the trust to Captain Bowels, a proposal which the gallant captain received with a laugh and a *sotto voce* remark to Bella that his fidelity to promises depended on the youth and beauty of the lady to whom they were made.

Soon after the ladies retired Kenneth rose, and, apologising for leaving the table so early, set forth on his mission.

The night was calm and pleasant, but dark—a few stars alone rendering the darkness visible. Kenneth had to pass through the garden of the colonel’s house before reaching the road that led to the heart of the town where the Sailors’ Home was situated. He felt sad that evening, unusually so, and wandered in the grounds for some time in a

meditative mood.

There was a bower at the extremity of the garden to which, during the few days of his visit, he had frequently repaired with the volatile Bella. He entered it now, and sat down. Presently there was a rustle among the leaves behind him, and a light hand was laid on his shoulder.

“Faithless man!” said Bella in a tremulous voice, “I have been expecting you for half-an-hour at least. My portmanteau is packed, and I only await the word from you, dearest Charles—”

“Charles!” exclaimed Kenneth, starting up.

Bella uttered a suppressed scream.

“Oh! Mr Stuart, you won’t tell my father? I mistook you for capt—.”

“Hold, Miss Crusty; do not speak hastily. I know nothing of that of which you seem desirous that I should not speak. Pray be calm.”

“Of course I know that you don’t know,” cried Bella passionately, “but you are capable of guessing, and—and—”

The poor girl burst into a flood of tears, and rushed from the bower, leaving Kenneth in a most unenviable state of perplexity.

The words that she had uttered, coupled with what he had seen of the intimacy subsisting between her and Captain Bowels, and the fact that the name of the captain was Charles, were quite sufficient to convince him that an immediate elopement was intended. He entertained a strong dislike to the captain, and therefore somewhat hastily concluded that he was a villain. Impressed with this conviction, his first impulse was to return to the house, and warn the colonel of his daughter’s danger; but then he felt that he might be mistaken, and that, instead of doing good, he might lay himself open to severe rebuke for interfering in matters with which he had nothing to do. After vacillating therefore, a few minutes, he at last made up his mind first to execute his errand to the cousin of Mrs Gaff, and then consider what should next be done. He resolved on this course all the more readily that he was sure the mistake Bella had made would frustrate the elopement, at least on that night.

Kenneth carried the parcel, which Mrs Gaff had put up with so much care and anxiety, under his arm, and a thick stick in his right hand. He was so passionately fond of the sea and all connected with it, that he liked to dress in semi-sailor costume, and mingle with seamen. Consequently he went out on this occasion clad in a rough pea-jacket and a sailor’s cap. He looked more like a respectable skipper or first-mate than a country gentleman.

Passing rapidly through the streets of Athenbury, he soon reached the docks, where he made inquiry for the Sailors’ Home. He found it in a retired street, near the principal wharf.

A group of seamen were collected round the door, smoking their pipes and spinning yarns. The glare of a street-lamp shone full upon them, enabling Kenneth to observe their faces. He went up to one, and asked if a sailor of the name of Dollins was in the Home at the time.

The man said Dollins had been there that day, but he was not within at the present time. He was usually to be found at the tavern of the “Two Bottles.”

Kenneth being directed to the “Two Bottles,” made his way thither without delay.

It was a low public-house in one of the dirtiest localities of the town,—a place to which seamen were usually tempted when they came off a voyage, and where they were soon fleeced of all their hardly-earned money. Sounds of dancing, fiddling, and drinking were heard to issue from the doorway as Kenneth approached, and, as he descended the stair, he could not help wondering that any man should prefer such a place of entertainment to the comfortable, clean, and respectable Home he had just left.

He was met by the landlord, a large, powerful, and somewhat jovial man, whose countenance betrayed the fact that he indulged freely in his own beverages.

“Is there a sailor here of the name of Dollins?” inquired Kenneth.

The landlord surveyed the questioner with a look of suspicion. Being apparently satisfied that he might be trusted, he replied that Dollins was not in the house at that moment, but he was expected in a few minutes. Meanwhile he advised that the visitor should wait and enjoy himself over “a pot o’ beer, or a glass o’ brandy and water, ’ot.”

Kenneth said he would wait, and for this purpose entered one of the numerous drinking-stalls, and ordered a pot of porter, which he had no intention whatever of drinking.

Seated in the dirty stall of that disreputable public-house, he leaned his head on his hand, and began to meditate how he should act in regard to Bella Crusty on his return to the colonel’s house.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of three men into the adjoining stall. Two of them belonged to the class of men who are styled roughs; one being red-haired, the other bearded; the third was a gentlemanly sort of man, about forty years of age, with a dissipated aspect.

They did not observe Kenneth, who had placed himself in the darkest corner of his stall.

“Now, lads, we’ll talk it over here, and settle what’s to be done; for whatever we do it must be done to-night.”

This much he heard of the conversation, and then his mind wandered away to its former channel. How long he might have meditated is uncertain, but he was suddenly aroused by the sound of his own name.

“We’ll have to do it to-night,” said a voice which Kenneth knew belonged to the gentlemanly man of dissipated aspect; “the young fellow won’t likely go back for a day or two, and the old ’un an’t over stout. There’s only one man in the house besides him, and he ain’t much worth speakin’ of; a groom, not very big, sleeps in the lower part o’ the house. Old Stuart himself sleeps in a wing, a good bit off from the servants. In fact, there’s nothing easier than to get into the house, and there’s no end of silver plate. Now, what say you to start by the nine o’clock train to-night? We’ll get there by eleven, and have supper before goin’ to work. You see, I think it’s always well to feed before goin’ at this sort o’ thing. It don’t pay on an empty stomach. Shall we go?”

Kenneth’s heart beat fast as he listened for the reply.

“Wall, I doan’t much loik it,” said one of the roughs, in a coarse Yorkshire dialect; “but I’m hard oop for tin, so I says Yes.”

“Agreed,” said the other rough, who was evidently not a man of many words.

For some time Kenneth sat listening to the plans of the burglars, and considering how he should best frustrate their designs. He at length made up his mind to return the parcel to his aunt, say that unexpected and pressing business called him home, and start by the same train with the burglars for Wreckumoft. His intentions, however, were interfered with by the abrupt entrance of Dollins, who was drunk, and who, on being told that a friend wanted to see him within, came forward to Kenneth, and asked, “Wot it wos ’e wanted?”

Kenneth explained that he had been sent by a lady to deliver a parcel, which he presented, and, having fulfilled his mission, was about to return when the man caught him by the sleeve—

“Wot, are you Mister Stuart? Jess Gaff wrote me a letter a day or two ago, tellin’ me you and yer aunt, Miss Peppy, as they calls her, wos a-comin’ here, and would send me a parcel.”

“Never mind, my good fellow, who I am,” said Kenneth sharply; “I’ve delivered the parcel, so now I’ll bid ye good-night.”

“It’s just him!” said one of the burglars in a hoarse whisper, as Kenneth reached the door. The latter could not avoid turning round at this.

“Yes,” he cried sternly; “and I’ll spoil your game for you to-night.”

“Will you?” shouted the gentlemanly house-breaker, as Kenneth sprang into the street, closely followed by the three men.

Kenneth regretted deeply that he had so hastily uttered the threat, for it showed that he knew all, and set the men upon their guard.

He looked over his shoulder, and observed that they had stopped as if to consult, so he pushed on, and, soon reaching one of the principal thoroughfares, walked at a more leisurely pace. As he went along he was deeply perplexed as to what course he ought to pursue, and while meditating on the subject, he stopped almost unintentionally in front of a brilliantly lighted window, in which were hanging a rich assortment of watches, gold chains, and specimens of jewellery.

The gentlemanly house-breaker, who had followed him up, observed this. A sudden thought flashed across his mind, and he at once acted upon it. Stepping quickly up to Kenneth’s side he stumbled violently against him, at the same time smashed a pane of glass in the shop-window with his gloved hand, turned quickly round, seized Kenneth by the collar, and shouted “Thief! help!” at the full pitch of his voice.

The red-haired and bearded accomplices at once responded to the call, came up behind, and also collared him, while a policeman, who chanced to be passing at the moment, seized him in front. The shopman ran out in a frantic state, and at once swore that he was the man, for he had seen him looking through the window a moment before. The whole scene passed in a few seconds, and Kenneth, thoroughly taken by surprise, stood in motionless and speechless amazement.

It is said, and apparently with truth, that thought flashes through the mind more rapidly than lightning darts through the sky. Kenneth had only a few moments to think, for the policeman was applying that gentle force to his collar which was meant as a polite hint to “come along” quietly, else stronger force should be applied; yet, before he had taken the first step towards the police-office, the extreme awkwardness of his position was fully impressed on him.

He perceived that he should certainly be locked up for the night and brought before a magistrate next morning, and that, although his accusers would of course not appear against him, and his friends would be there to testify to his character and get him off, the consequence would be that the burglars would be able to start by the nine o’clock train and accomplish their purpose while he was in jail. It did occur to him that he could warn the authorities, but he feared that they might refuse to believe or act upon the statements of a supposed thief.

The occasion was not a favourable one to correct or clear reasoning however, and as the policeman had applied a second persuasive pull to his collar, he suddenly made up his mind what he would do. Grasping the gentlemanly house-breaker by the waist, he suddenly hurled that unfortunate heels over head into the kennel, tripped up the policeman, knocked the bearded accomplice into the arms of the jeweller, the red-haired one into the broken window, and bolted!

Instantly a wild chase began. The crowd that had assembled on the first sound of the smash ran yelling after him, headed by the gentlemanly house-breaker, whose fall had been partially broken by a little boy. The accomplices were too much damaged to do more than keep up with the tail of the crowd.

At first Kenneth ran without regard to direction, and with the simple view of escaping, but as he neared the head of the main street he determined to make for the house of Colonel Crusty. Being fleet of foot he soon left behind the mass of the crowd that followed in full cry, with the exception of a few young men who were more of a match for him. Ahead of all these ran the gentlemanly house-breaker and the policeman, both of whom were strong and supple.

The roar of the augmenting crowd, however, soon became so great that people in advance of him heard it, and some of these made demonstrations of a wish to try to stop him as he passed, but most of them wisely concluded that it would be nearly as safe to place themselves in the way of a runaway locomotive engine. One man proved an exception. He was a butcher, of great size and strength, who, being accustomed to knock down horned cattle with a hammer, naturally enough thought it not impossible to knock down a man with his fist, so he tried it.

Standing in the doorway of his own shop when Kenneth came tearing along, he waited until he was within four yards of him, and darted out. Kenneth had fortunately observed the man. He stooped, without slackening his pace, to let the blow delivered by his opponent pass over his head, and drove his right shoulder into the butcher's broad chest. The shock was so great as to completely check his career, while it sent the butcher back into his shop, over his own bench, and prostrated him on the carcase of a slaughtered ox which had been carried in just two minutes before, as if to form a bloody and congenial bed for its owner.

Kenneth instantly started off again and doubled suddenly down a by-street which led to the colonel's residence. Here he was smitten with a feeling of shame at the idea of appearing before his friends in such a plight, so, changing his mind, he doubled again into another by-street.

This chanced to be an unfortunate turn, for the policeman saw him take it, and, knowing every intricacy of the town, he was enabled to take a cross cut by a lane, accompanied by several of his brother constables, who had joined him by this time, and by such of the crowd as were good runners.

The worst runners now came in for an unexpected share of the sport in consequence of this new turn of affairs, for the by-road conducted Kenneth back to the main street, and when he debouched into it he ran into and overturned a number of those who had just made up their minds that it was useless for them to run any farther.

The tide was now turned. The head of the crowd came rushing back, led by the policeman and the gentlemanly burglar. Kenneth thus found himself between two fires, so, like a wise general, he made a flank movement, crossed the street, and darted down a dark lane. Here the crowd gave in, but the policeman and the burglar continued the pursuit.

The lane led to the suburbs of the town, and the fugitive soon gained the open country, which in that part was a sort of uncultivated moorland.

The excitement of the chase and the suddenness of it had told upon the youth at first so much that he had been somewhat distressed while running; but this feeling now began to wear off. Like a true thoroughbred, he improved in condition the longer he ran, and when at last the perspiration began to pour over his cheeks he felt as if he could have run on for ever!

To some extent this feeling was also experienced by a few of his pursuers, who kept him well in view.

On passing over a rising ground which for some minutes concealed him, Kenneth suddenly resolved to strike aside from the high road and cross the moor. It was sufficiently light, he thought, to enable him to do this with safety. He was wrong, however, for he had not run a hundred yards when he went splashing into a boggy place, and his pursuers, who had again caught sight of him, instantly followed.

The running now became very severe, and tested Kenneth's powers to the utmost. Of course it also proved as hard on the others, and he had at least the satisfaction of hearing them shout and gasp as they tumbled over stones and into hollows. Still they held on with unflagging vigour, until they were almost exhausted and quite covered with mud.

To Kenneth's relief he unexpectedly stumbled on the high road again. Here he sat down for a few seconds to recover breath on one of the grey boulder stones with which the whole country was covered, and while wiping the perspiration from his brow his thoughts were busy. Having left his pursuers far behind, he felt sure that he could afford to rest for a few moments.

It occurred to him that even although he should succeed in escaping, there was no chance of his being able to get away by the train from Athenbury, for the burglars and police would certainly be at the station on the look-out for him. He remembered suddenly that there was a station twenty miles from Athenbury at which the ten o'clock train usually stopped. It was two hours yet to the starting of the train, so that he might count on nearly three to get to the station.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, starting up with animation, and looking in the direction of the moor. The pursuers were now pretty close to him. They panted much and ran very heavily. A quiet smile lit up Kenneth's countenance, for he felt his strength recruited even with the few minutes' rest he had obtained.

"Now, then, let the memory of Eton days come over me," he muttered, as he tied his pocket-handkerchief tightly round his waist.

Pulling his hat firmly down over his brows, he prepared to start, just as the policemen and the gentlemanly burglar

stumbled on to the road, in a state of complete exhaustion, and covered from head to foot with mud!

Kenneth could not repress a cheer as he waved his hat to them and shouted farewell.

He then turned, and, stooping low, sped over the country like a greyhound.

He had not gone above four miles when he overtook a stout countryman in a smock-frock and slouch-hat plodding heavily along the road.

A new idea flashed into Kenneth's mind. He resolved to change costumes with this man; but felt that he had no time to waste in talking over the subject or explaining why he wanted to do so. He therefore stopped abruptly when close to him, and said—

"My man, I've a fancy for your clothes."

"You'll ha' to foight for 'em then."

"Very well, begin at once," said Kenneth, buttoning his coat, and suddenly seizing the countryman by the throat with a grip that made his eyes almost start out of their sockets. "How shall it be, wrestling or fisticuffs? But let me advise you to do it at once without fighting, for I *don't* want to hurt you, and I *do* mean to have your clothes. Besides, I'll give you mine in exchange. There now, strip!"

There was a fiery vehemence about Kenneth's manner and look, and a tone of command in his voice that there was no resisting, especially when it was coupled with such physical strength, so the countryman heaved a sigh and took off his smock-frock and hob-nailed boots, while the supposed highwayman took off his coat and shoes.

"That'll do, you needn't mind the stockings," said Kenneth, as he pulled on his new garments. "You'll find that you gain considerably by the exchange. That's it; now here's a sovereign for you, my fine fellow, and many thanks."

He finished by lifting the slouch-hat off the countryman's head and placing his own thereon in its stead.

"Now, good-night."

"Good-noight," replied the man, from the sheer force of innate politeness, for he stood in such a condition of open-mouthed amazement that it was quite plain he did not very well know what he said or did.

In another minute Kenneth was again coursing along the road at full speed.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Plotters Counterplotted.

Meanwhile the gentlemanly house-breaker, returning to Athenbury, rejoined his rude colleagues, and these three choice spirits, after partaking of some refreshment, and treating the policeman who first came to their aid to a glass of gin, betook themselves to the railway station.

"He won't come here, you may depend on't," observed the policeman to the gentlemanly burglar, when he had taken his ticket, "he's too wide-awake for that."

"Perhaps not; but it's as well to watch."

"Yes, it's as well to watch," assented the policeman.

"Besides, wide-awake fellows over-reach themselves sometimes," continued the other. "I shouldn't wonder, now, if he had the impudence to come straight here and denounce *me* as a thief, just by way o' stoppin' me from goin' by the train, and so having some sort o' revenge."

"Ha!" exclaimed the policeman, in a tone and with a slight but peculiar look that made the gentlemanly man feel a little uneasy.

The fugitive did not appear, however. Every face that came on the platform was carefully scrutinised without any result, and at length the bell rang.

"Good-night, friend," said the burglar, slipping a half-crown into the policeman's hand as he was about to jump into the carriage. "It was no fault of yours that we didn't catch him. You did your best."

"Yes, I did my best."

"Hallo! are *you* going by this train?" exclaimed the burglar.

"Yes, I've got business in Wreckumoft, so we'll have the pleasure o' travellin' together."

The gentlemanly man felt that the pleasure would be entirely confined to one side. However, he expressed much joy at the prospect of such good company, as the policeman sat down beside him.

The train gave a pant, then a snort, then an impatient whistle. Then the bell rang a second time, the whistle sounded a single note, and the carriages moved slowly away. A moment more, and they were sweeping out of the station; a

moment more and they were rushing over the moor; another moment, and they were dashing through space, setting all terrestrial things at naught, until a station came in view; then the whistle uttered a prolonged shriek, and the train began to slow. Up to this point the policeman and his friends had sat together in comparative silence.

The former put his head out of the window, and remarked that, “there was a feller as would be too late for the train.”

The moonlight enabled him to perceive that the late man was a labourer of some sort.

The train ran into the station and stopped.

“Tickets ready!” shouted the guard.

“That’ll give him a chance,” observed the gentlemanly burglar.

“All right?” inquired the guard.

“All right,” replied the ticket-inspector. The bell rang, the guard whistled, so did the engine; it puffed too, and the train began to move.

“Look sharp now,” cried the station-master eagerly to some one outside the office. “Athenbury? Here you are—four shillings; run!”

The guard knew that it was a late passenger, and, being a good-hearted fellow, held the door of a carriage open, even although the train was on the move.

A man in a smock-frock and slouch-hat rushed across the platform at this moment, and made for the door which the guard held open.

“Jump!” said the guard.

The gentlemanly burglar and the policeman lent their aid to pull the man into the train; the door banged, and they were away.

“You’ve all but missed it,” said the burglar.

The man in the smock-frock pulled his slouch-hat well over his eyes, and admitted that it was a “close shave.” Then he laid his head on the side of the carriage and breathed hard.

“Take a drop o’ gin,” said the burglar in a patronising way, “it’ll bring you to in a minute.”

Kenneth knew by his manner that he did not guess who it was that sat beside him, so he resolved to accept the offer.

“Thank’ee, I loik gin. It waarms the cockles o’ yer ’art, it do,” said Kenneth.

“Goin’ far?” inquired the policeman.

“To Wreckumoft.”

“You seems to have got on yer Sunday trousers?” observed the policeman.

“Wall, there an’t no sin in that,” replied the supposed labourer, somewhat sharply.

“Certainly not,” said the policeman. “It’s a fine night, an’t it?”

“It *is* a foine night,” responded the labourer, putting his head out of the window.

“Yes, a very fine night,” repeated the policeman, also thrusting his head out at the same window, and holding a *sotto voce* conversation with Kenneth, the result of which was that he became very merry and confidential, and was particularly polite to the burglars, insomuch that they thought him one of the jolliest policemen they had ever had to do with—and this was not the first they had had to do with by any means!

In course of time the train ran into the station at Wreckumoft, and the occupants poured out on the platform, and took their several ways. The three friends kept together, and observed that the policeman, after bidding them good-bye, went away alone, as if he had urgent business on hand, and was soon lost to view. This was a great relief to them, because they could not feel quite at ease in his presence, and his going off so promptly showed, (so they thought), that he had not the remotest suspicion of their errand.

As for the country fellow in the smock-frock, they took no further notice of him after quitting the carriage. Had they known his business in Wreckumoft that night, they might, perchance, have bestowed upon him very earnest attention. As it was, they went off to the Blue Boar Tavern and ordered three Welsh rabbits and three pots of porter.

Meanwhile Kenneth took the road to Seaside Villa. On the way he had to pass Bingley Hall, and rang the bell. The door was opened by Susan Barepoles.

“Is Maister Gildart to hoam?”

Susan said he was, and Kenneth was delighted to find that his change of voice and costume disguised him so completely that Susan did not recognise him.

“I wants to see him.”

Susan bade him wait in the lobby. In a few minutes Gildart came down, and the country fellow asked to have a word with him in private!

The result of this word was that the two sallied forth immediately after, and went towards Seaside Villa.

Here, strange to say, they found the policeman standing at the outer gate. Kenneth accosted him as if he had expected to meet him.

“They ain’t abed yet,” observed the policeman.

“No; I see that my groom is up, and there is a light in my father’s study. I’ll tap at the groom’s window.”

“Come in av yer feet’s clean,” was Dan’s response to the tap, as he opened the shutters and flattened his nose against a pane of glass in order to observe the intruder.

“Dan, open the back door and let me in!”

“Hallo! Mister Kenneth!”

Dan vanished at once, and opened the door.

“Hush, Dan; is my father at home?”

“He is, sur.”

“Come in, Gildart. Take care of that constable, Dan; give him his supper. There’s work both for him and you to-night. He will explain it to you.”

Saying this Kenneth took Gildart to the drawing-room, and left him there while he went to his father’s study.

At first Mr Stuart was alarmed by the abrupt entrance of the big labourer; then he was nettled and disgusted at what he deemed a silly practical joke of his son. Ultimately he was astonished and somewhat incredulous in regard to the prospects of housebreaking which his son held out to him. He was so far convinced, however, as to allow Kenneth to make what preparations he pleased, and then retired to rest, coolly observing that if the burglars did come it was evident they would be well taken care of without his aid, and that if they did *not* come there was no occasion for his losing a night’s rest.

Between two and three o’clock that morning three men climbed over the garden wall of Seaside Villa, and, having deposited their shoes in a convenient spot, went on tiptoe to the dining-room window. Here they paused to consult in low whispers.

While they were thus engaged, three other men watched their movements with earnest solicitude from a neighbouring bush behind which they lay concealed.

After a few moments one of the first three went to the window and began to cut out part of a pane of glass with a glazier’s diamond. At the same time, one of the second three—a tall stout man in a smock-frock—advanced on tiptoe to watch the operation.

When the piece of glass was cut out the first three put their heads together for farther consultation. Immediately their respective throats were seized and compressed by three strong pair of hands, and the heads were knocked violently together!

Gildart addressed himself to the red-haired man; the policeman devoted himself to the one with the beard; and Kenneth paid particular attention to the gentlemanly burglar, whose expression of countenance on beholding into whose hands he had fallen, may be conceived, but cannot be described.

Dan Horsey, who had also been on the watch, suddenly appeared with three pair of handcuffs, and applied them with a degree of prompt facility that surprised himself and quite charmed the policeman.

Thereafter the three astounded burglars were led in triumph into Mr Stuart’s study, where that sceptical individual received them in his dressing-gown and slippers, and had his unbelieving mind convinced. Then they were conveyed to the lockup, where we shall now leave them in peace—satisfied that they are safely in the hands of justice.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Dreadful Suspicions aroused in Anxious Bosoms.

When Miss Peppy came down to breakfast next morning she found that she was the first of the household to make her appearance. This, however, was the natural consequence of her commendable desire to be always in good time—a desire which resulted in her being at least a quarter of an hour too soon for everything, except on those occasions, of course, when she over-slept, or was detained by unavoidable circumstances.

On the present occasion Miss Peppy, having had a remarkably good night’s rest, felt placid, and looked serene. She passed the spare quarter of an hour in perambulating the room, looking at the books and pictures, smoothing her cuffs, arranging her cap, and paying marked attention to a beautiful little dog which was Bella’s own particular pet,

and the colonel's particular abhorrence, because of its tendency to bark suddenly, sharply, and continuously at every visitor who entered the house.

Rosebud, (for thus was it misnamed), seemed to be, however, in no mood to receive attentions that morning. It was evidently ill at ease, without apparently knowing why.

"Did it growl, then?" said Miss Peppy in a reproachful tone, as she stooped to pat the head of the spoiled creature. "Ah, it mustn't growl, for that is naughty, you know, darling Rosebud. Eh! doing it again? Oh! bad little snarley-warley, growly-wowly. Doesn't it know that the poet says 'dogs delight to bark and bite?' and that—that—he means that they shouldn't delight to do such naughtinesses, although, after all, why they shouldn't when it's natural to them *I* don't know; and, besides, how does *he* know that they delight to do it? I never saw them look delighted in my life; on the contrary, they're very fierce, are they not, Rosebud? especially the big ones that sometimes try to worry you. How they can ever want to worry such a pitty-itty, dear, naughty growly-wowly, snarley-warley as you, is quite beyond my comprehension; but then, you see, we live in a world of puzzles, you and I, Rosebud, and so it's of no use being puzzled, because that does no good, and only worries one. Don't it, deary sweety petty? Well, you can't answer of course, though I *know* that you understand every word I say."

Miss Peppy suddenly shrieked, for the "sweety petty" bit her with sufficient force to show that he was not in a mood to be played with, and would do it harder next time.

Just then the colonel entered, and Rosebud at once received him with a tornado of maddening yelps, so that for at least five minutes it had the entire monopoly of the conversation, and Miss Peppy was obliged to say good-morning in dumb show. At the same time, the colonel frowned fiercely at Rosebud, and said something which Miss Peppy could not hear because of the noise, but which, from the abrupt motion of the lips, she suspected must be something very wicked indeed.

When the darling creature at last consented to hold its tongue, the colonel said—

"Are you aware, Miss Stuart, that your nephew has been out all night?"

"No, colonel, I was not aware of it," said Miss Peppy with a slight elevation of her eyebrows; "I wonder at it, for although he often goes out all night to ride wild horses into the sea, and save drowned people, and things of that sort, he never goes out without telling Niven, and saying whether or not he's likely to be back soon. Besides, he always has the door-key in his pocket, when he doesn't forget it, which is pretty often. Perhaps he had *your* door-key in his pocket, but after all, even if he had, that wouldn't alter the fact that he's been out all night. But maybe he's in bed—did you look?"

"Yes, I looked, and he has evidently not lain on the bed at all last night."

"Under it?" suggested Miss Peppy.

The colonel smiled slightly, and said that it had not occurred to him to look under the bed.

At that moment the door burst open, and Bella's maid, rushing in, flung herself on her knees at the colonel's feet, and, clasping her hands, cried in piteous tones—

"Oh! sir, please, mercy please."

"Are you mad, girl?" said the colonel, with a look of mingled displeasure and anxiety.

"Oh, sir, no sir, but,"—(sob),—"she's gone."

"Who's gone, girl; speak!"

"Miss Bella, sir; oh sir, run away, sir, with Mr Stuart!"

Colonel Crusty turned pale, and Miss Peppy fell flat down on the rug in a dead faint, crushing Rosebud almost to death in her fall.

Instantly the entire house was in confusion. Every one rushed into every room, up and down every stair, looked into every closet and cupboard, and under every bed, as well as into every hole and crevice that was not large enough to conceal a rabbit, much less a young lady, but without avail. There could be no doubt whatever on the subject: Bella and Kenneth were both gone—utterly and absolutely.

Miss Peppy alone did not participate in the wild search.

That worthy lady lay in a state of insensibility for about five minutes, then she suddenly recovered and arose to a sitting posture, in which position she remained for a few minutes more, and became aware of the fact that her cap was inside the fender, and that her hair was dishevelled. Wondering what could have caused such an unwonted state of things, she gazed pensively round the room, and suddenly remembered all about it!

Up she leaped at once, pulled on her cap with the back to the front, and rushed up to her own room. On her way, and once or twice afterwards she met various members of the household, but they were much too wild and reckless to pay any regard to her. She was therefore left unmolested in her farther proceedings.

Having tied on her bonnet very much awry, and put on her shawl exceedingly askew, Miss Peppy went out into the street, and going straight up to the first man she saw, asked the way to the railway station.

Being directed, she ran thither with a degree of speed that any school-girl might have envied. A train was on the point of starting.

“Ticket to Wreckumoft,” she almost screamed into the face of the ticket-clerk.

“Which class?” demanded the clerk, with the amiable slowness of a man whose interests are not at stake.

“First!” exclaimed Miss Peppy, laying down her purse and telling the calm-spirited clerk to help himself.

He did so, returned the purse, and Miss Peppy rushed to the train and leaped into the first open door. It happened to be that of a third class, which was full of navvies and mechanics.

“You seems to be in a ’urry, ma’am,” said one of the former, making way for her, and wiping the seat beside him with the sleeve of his coat.

Miss Peppy could only exclaim, “Ho, yes!” and cover her face with her handkerchief, in which position she remained immovable until the train arrived at Wreckumoft, despite the kindly efforts at consolation made by the navvy, who arranged her shawl and offered her a glass of gin from his own private bottle; and, finally, seeing that all his efforts were fruitless, wound up by patting her on the shoulder, and advising her to cheer up, for “wotever it was that ailed her, there was sure to be better luck next time.”

Arrived at Wreckumoft, Miss Peppy hastened to her brother’s residence. On the way she had to pass Bingley Hall, and, feeling that it would be an unutterable relief to her feelings to tell somebody something, or, more correctly, to tell anybody anything, she darted in and met my niece Lizzie, to whom she stated wildly that Bella Crusty had run off with Kenneth Stuart, and that in all probability the colonel was mad or dead by that time.

Having thus let off a little steam, the worthy lady rushed out of my house, entered the dining-room of Seaside Villa, where she found Kenneth and his father seated at breakfast, and related to them in wild surprise how that Bella and Kenneth had run away together the night before, and that she had come in hot haste to tell them so, but how it happened that Kenneth was there and Bella not there, she could not understand at all; and concluding that the incomprehensibilities of the world were culminating, and that the sooner she prepared for the final winding up of all terrestrial things the better, she ran to her own room, embraced the wondering Emmie, burst into a flood of tears, rummaged her pocket for her thimble, scissors, and key, and, not finding them there, fell into the arms of Mrs Niven, and fainted dead away for the second time that morning.

Chapter Thirty.

Strange Scenes and Doings far away.

Let us turn, now, to a very different region of the world from that in which the events just narrated took place.

It is an island of the sea. Nature has been bountiful to that island, for there is redundant verdure on every side. Paradise of old may have been something like it,—could not have been much better, physically, although it was so in a moral point of view. Yet, even in that aspect our island is superior to many others, for there are only two human beings upon it, and these are less sinful specimens of humanity than one usually meets with. They are peculiar, too.

One is an athletic middle-aged man, whose clothing is goat-skin, evidently home-made, and cut in sailor fashion. Magnificent shaggy locks fall in heavy masses from his head, lip, and chin. Robinson Crusoe himself could not have looked grander or more savage in outward aspect.

The other is a boy—a lad. He is a stout well-grown fellow, neither so tall nor so muscular as his companion, but giving promise that he will excel him in due time. In the matter of hair, his head exhibited locks if possible more curly and redundant, while the chin and lip are not yet clothed with young manhood’s downy shadow.

Both, the middle-aged man and the youth, have a pensive expression of countenance; but there is a gleam of fire in the eye of the latter, and a spice of fun about the corners of his mouth, which are wanting in his companion.

“Faither,” said the lad, rising from the rock on which they were seated, “what are ’ee thinkin’ on?”

“I’ve bin thinkin’, Billy, that it’s nigh five years sin’ we come here.”

“That’s an old thought, daddy.”

“May be so, lad, but it’s ever with me, and never seems to grow old.”

There was such a tone of melancholy in the remark of our old friend Gaff, that Billy forbore to pursue the subject.

“My heart is set upon pork to-day, daddy,” said the Bu’ster with a knowing smile. “We’ve had none for three weeks, and I’m gettin’ tired o’ yams and cocoa-nuts and crabs. I shall go huntin’ again.”

“You’ve tried it pretty often of late, without much luck.”

“So I have, but I’ve tried it often before now with pretty fair luck, an’ what has happened once may happen again, so I’ll try. My motto is, ‘Never say die.’”

“A good one, Billy; stick to it, lad,” said Gaff, rising. “And now, we’ll go home to supper. To-morrow we’ll have to mend the fence to keep these same wild pigs you’re so anxious to eat, out of our garden. The nets need mendin’ too,

so you'll have to spin a lot more o' the cocoa-nut fibre, an' I'll have to make a fish-hook or two, for the bones out o' which I made the last were too small."

Father and son wended their way down the steep cliffs of the mountain at the foot of which was their cavern home.

"What's that?" exclaimed Gaff in a low whisper, as they passed along the top of a precipice.

"Pigs," said Billy with glee; "hold on now, daddy, and let me go at 'em."

The Bu'ster was no longer the little boy whom I introduced to the reader at the commencement of this narrative. Five years' residence in the desert island had made him such a strapping young fellow that he seemed much more fitted to cope with a lion than a wild pig! He was not indeed tall, but he was unusually strong.

Gaff sat down on a ledge of rock while Billy crept cautiously to the edge of the precipice and looked down.

A smile of satisfaction lit up the lad's countenance as he beheld a big sow and six young pigs busily engaged in digging up roots directly below him. To seize a large stone and drop it into the centre of the group was the work of a moment. The result was in truth deadly, for the heavy stone hit one of the little pigs on the nape of the neck, and it sank to the ground with a melancholy squeak which proved to be its last.

The crash of the stone and the squeak of the pig caused the rest of the family to turn and fly from the fatal spot with porcine haste, filling the air as they ran with shrieks and yells, such as only pigs—and bad babies—know how to utter.

"Got him, daddy—Hooray!" shouted the Bu'ster, as he leaped up and ran by a circuitous route to the foot of the precipice, whence he speedily returned with the pig under his arm.

"A fat 'un, daddy," he observed, holding it up by the tail.

"Capital!" said Gaff, pinching the pig's sides, "we shall grub well for some days to come."

"I should think so, daddy; why, we've more than we know what to do wi'; for, what with the crab-pies you made this mornin', and the cocoa-nut soup and yams and dove-hash left fro' yesterday's dinner, an' this little grumpy, we stand a good chance o' aperplexy or somethin' o' that sort."

"Was there many more o' 'em, lad?"

"Ay, five moloncholly brothers and sisters, an' a hideously fat mother left to mourn the loss o' this chap. I'll be after them to-morrow. They won't go far, for I've noticed that when pigs take a fancy to a spot they don't leave it for a good while. Here we are at home, an' now for a splendid roast. There's nothin' like grub when ye're hungry."

"'Xcept drink when ye're dry," observed Gaff.

"Of coorse, an' a snooze when ye're sleepy; but don't let's git too pheelosophical, daddy; it an't good for digestion to argufy on a empty stummik. An' I see ye wants me to argue, but I won't do it; there now!"

It was one of Billy's devices to keep himself and his father cheery in their prolonged exile, to pretend that he didn't like to argue, and to stoutly assert that he would not do it, while at the same time he led his parent into all sorts of discussions.

On the present occasion, while he was engaged in preparing the pig for the spit, and his father was mending the handle of a fish-spear of his own fabrication, the discussion, or rather the conversation, turned upon the possibility of two people living happily all their days on a desert island.

Billy thought it was quite possible if the grub did not fail, but Gaff shook his head, and said it would be a blue look-out if one of them should get ill, or break his leg. Billy did not agree with this at all; he held that if one should get ill it would be great fun for the other to act the part of nurse and doctor, while the sick one would learn to value his health more when he got it back. As to breaking a leg, why, it was no use speculating how things would feel if that should occur; as well speak of the condition of things if both of them should break their necks.

The discussion diverged, as such discussions usually did, to home and its inmates, long before any satisfactory conclusion was come to, and it was brought to a close in consequence of Billy having to go out of the cave for firewood to roast the pig.

The cavern home had assumed a very different aspect from that which it presented when Gaff and his son took possession of it five years before. It now bore, externally and internally, the appearance of an old much-used dwelling. The entrance, which was an irregular archway of about ten feet in diameter, had been neatly closed up with small trees, over which strong banana leaves were fastened, so as to make it weather-tight. In this screen two holes were left—a small one for a door, and a still smaller one for a window. Both were fastened with a goat-skin curtain, which could be let down and fastened at night. In the daytime both door and window were always left wide-open, for the island on which our friends had been cast was one of a group of uninhabited islets, the climate around which is warm and delightful during the greater part of the year.

The ground outside of the cave was trodden by long use to the hardness of stone. The small vegetable garden, close to the right of the door, was enclosed by a fence, which bore evidence of having been more than once renewed, and frequently repaired. Some of the trees that had been cut down—with stone hatchets made by themselves—when they first arrived, had several tall and sturdy shoots rising from the roots. There was a flat stone deeply hollowed out by constant sharpening of the said hatchet. There was a rustic seat, the handiwork of Billy, that bore symptoms of having been much sat upon. There were sundry footpaths, radiating into the woods, that were beginning to assume

the hardness and dimensions of respectable roads; while all round the place there were signs and symptoms of the busy hand of man having been at work there for years.

High up, on a mighty cliff that overlooked and almost overhung the sea, a rude flagstaff had been raised. This was among the first pieces of work that Gaff and his son had engaged in after landing. It stood on what they termed Signal Cliff, and was meant to attract the attention of any vessel that might chance to pass.

To Signal Cliff did Gaff and Billy repair each morning at daylight, as regularly as clockwork, to hoist their flag, made from cocoa-nut fibre; and, with equal regularity, did Billy go each night at sunset to haul the ensign down.

Many an anxious hour did they spend there together, gazing wistfully at the horizon, and thinking, if not talking, of home. But ships seldom visited that sea. Twice only, during their exile, did they at long intervals descry a sail, but on both occasions their flag failed to attract attention, and the hopes which had suddenly burst up with a fierce flame in their breasts were doomed to sink again in disappointment.

At first they had many false alarms, and frequently mistook a sea-gull in the distance for a sail; but such mistakes became less frequent as their hopes became less sanguine, and their perceptions, from practice, more acute. Sometimes they sat there for hours together. Sometimes, when busy with household arrangements, or equipped for fishing and hunting, they merely ran to hoist the flag; but never once did they fail to pay Signal Cliff a daily visit.

On Sundays, in particular, they were wont to spend the greater part of their time there, reading the New Testament.

It happened that, just before Gaff left Cove in the sloop of Haco Barepoles, Lizzie Gordon had presented him with a Testament. Being a seriously-minded man, he had received the gift with gratitude, and carried it to sea with him. Afterwards, when he and poor Billy were enduring the miseries of the voyage in the whale-ship, Gaff got out the Testament, and, aided by Billy, tried to spell it out, and seek for consolation in it. He thus got into a habit of carrying it in his coat-pocket, and it was there when he was cast on the desert island.

Although, of course, much damaged with water, it was not destroyed, for its clasp happened to be a very tight one, and tended greatly to preserve it. When father and son finally took up their abode in the cavern, the former resolved to devote some time night and morning to reading the Testament. He could spell out the capital letters, and Billy had, before quitting home, got the length of reading words of one syllable. Their united knowledge was thus very slight, but it was quite sufficient to enable them to overcome all difficulties, and in time they became excellent readers.

The story of Christ’s redeeming love wrought its legitimate work on father and son, and, ere long, the former added prayer to the morning and evening reading of the Word. Gradually the broken sentences of prayer for the Holy Spirit, that light might be shed upon what they read, were followed by earnest confessions of sin, and petitions for pardon for Christ’s sake. Friends, too, were remembered; for it is one of the peculiar consequences of the renewal of the human heart that the subjects of this renewal begin to think of the souls of others as well as of their own. Unbelievers deem this presumptuous and hypocritical, forgetting that if they were called upon to act in similar circumstances, they would be necessarily and inevitably quite as presumptuous, and that the insulting manner in which the efforts of believers are often received puts hypocrisy out of the question.

Be this as it may, Gaff prayed for his wife and child at first, and, when his heart began to warm and expand, for his relatives and friends also. He became more earnest, perhaps, when he prayed that a ship might be sent to take them from the island, (and in making this and his other petitions he might have given an instructive lesson to many divines of the present day, showing how wonderfully eloquent a man may be if he will only strive after *nothing* in the way of eloquence, and simply use the tones and language that God has given him); but all his prayers were wound up with “Thy will be done,” and all were put up in the name of Jesus Christ.

To return from this digression. The inside of the cavern bore not less evidence of long-continued occupation than the outside. There was a block of wood which served father and son for a seat, which had two distinct and highly-polished marks on it. There was a rude table, whose cut, scratched, and hacked surface suggested the idea of many a culinary essay, and many a good meal. There was a very simple grate composed of several stones, which were blackened and whitened with soot and fire. There was no chimney, however, for the roof of the cave was so high that all smoke dissipated itself there, and found an exit no one knew how! In a recess there was a sort of small raised platform, covered with soft herbage and blankets of cocoa-nut fibre, on which, every night, father and son lay down together. The entrance to the inner cave, which formed a store-room and pantry, was covered with a curtain, so that the habitation with its rocky walls, earthen floor, and stalactite roof had quite a snug and cosy appearance.

Soon Billy returned with an armful of dry wood.

“Have ye got a light yet, daddy?”

Gaff, who had been endeavouring to produce a light by using his knife on a bit of flint for five or ten minutes, said he had “just got it,” and proved the truth of his assertion by handing his son a mass of smoking material. Billy blew this into a flame, and applied it to the wood, which soon kindled into a roaring fire.

“Now, then,” cried the Bu’ster, “where’s the spit? Ah! that’s it; here you go; oh dear, how you would yell just now, Mister Grumpy, if you were alive! It’s a cruel thought, but I can’t help it. There, now, frizzle away, and I’ll go clean up my dishes while you are roasting.”

No sooner had the pig been put on the spit, and the first fumes arisen, than there was a loud yell in the forest, followed immediately by the pattering of small feet, as if in tremendous haste.

“Aha! Squeaky, I knew *you* would smell out the supper double quick,” cried Billy with a laugh, as he looked towards

the door.

“He never misses it,” said Gaff with a quiet smile. Next moment a small pig came scampering into the cave and rushed up to the fire, where it sat down promptly as if the sole object it had in view were to warm itself!

And this was indeed its only object, for that pig was passionately, ludicrously fond of the fire! It was a pet pig.

One day when Billy was out hunting, he had caught it in a somewhat singular fashion. He usually went out hunting with a bow and arrow of his own making, and was very successful in bringing down white doves, parroquets, and such creatures, but could make nothing of the pigs, whose skins were too tough for his wooden and unshod arrows. He let fly at them, nevertheless, when he got a chance.

Well, on the day referred to, Billy had shot nothing, and was returning home in a somewhat pensive mood when he heard a squeak, and at once fitted an arrow to his bow. A rush followed the squeak, and dreadful yells accompanied the rush—yells which were intensified, if possible, when Billy’s arrow went into an old sow’s ear after glancing off the back of one of her little ones.

Billy ran after them in wild despair, for he knew that the shot was thrown away. One of the pigs had sprained its ankle, apparently, for it could only run on three legs. This pig fell behind; Billy ran after it, overtook it, fell upon it, and almost crushed it to death—a fact which was announced by an appalling shriek.

The mother turned and ran to the rescue. Billy gathered up the pig and ran for his, (and its), life. It was a hard run, and would certainly have terminated in favour of the sow had not the greater part of the chase been kept up among loose stones, over which the lad had the advantage. In a few minutes he descended a steep cliff over which the bereaved mother did not dare to run.

Thus did Billy become possessed of a live pig, which in a few weeks became a remarkably familiar and fearless inmate of the cavern home.

Billy also had a pet parroquet which soon became tame enough to be allowed to move about at will with a cropped wing, and which was named Shrieky. This creature was a mere bundle of impudent feathers, and a source of infinite annoyance to the pig, for, being possessed of considerable powers of mimicry, it sometimes uttered a porcine shriek, exciting poor Squeaky with the vain hope that some of its relations had arrived, and, what was far worse, frequently imitated the sounds of crackling fire and roasting food, which had the effect of causing Squeaky to rush into the cave, to meet with bitter disappointment.

“Now, Squeaky,” said the Bu’ster, hitting the pig on its snout with a bit of firewood, “keep your dirty nose away from yer cousin.”

Squeaky obeyed meekly, and removed to another spot.

“Isn’t it a strange thing, daddy, that you and I should come to feel so homelike here?”

“Ay, it is strange,” responded Gaff with a sigh, as he laid down the hook he was working at and glanced round the cavern. “Your mother would be astonished to see us now, lad.”

“She’ll hear all about it some day,” said Billy. “You’ve no notion what a splendid story I’ll make out of all this when we get back to Cove!”

It was evident that the Bu’ster inherited much of his mother’s sanguine disposition.

“P’raps we’ll never git back to Cove,” said Gaff sadly; “hows’ever, we’ve no reason to complain. Things might ha’ bin worse. You’d better go and haul down the flag, lad. I’ll look arter the roast till ye come back.”

“The roast’ll look after itself, daddy,” said the Bu’ster; “you look after Squeaky, however, for that sly critter’s always up to mischief.”

Billy hastened to the top of Signal Cliff just as the sun was beginning to descend into the sea, and had commenced to pull down the flag when his eye caught sight of a sail—not on the far-off horizon, like a sea-gull’s wing, but close in upon the land!

The shout that he gave was so tremendous that Gaff heard it in the cave, and rushed out in great alarm. He saw Billy waving a shred of cocoa-nut cloth frantically above his head, and his heart bounded wildly as he sprang up the hill like a stag.

On reaching the flagstaff he beheld the vessel, a large full-rigged ship, sailing calmly, and, to his eye, majestically, not far from the signal cliff.

His first impulse was to wave his hand and shout. Then he laid hands on the halliards of the flag and gave it an extra pull to see that it was well up, while Billy continued to stamp, cheer, yell, and wave his arms like a madman!

Only those who have been long separated from their fellow-men can know the wild excitement that is roused in the breast by the prospect of meeting with new faces. Gaff and Billy found it difficult to restrain themselves, and indeed they did not try to do so for at least ten minutes after the discovery of the ship. Then a feeling of dread came suddenly upon the former.

“Surely they’ll never pass without takin’ notice of us.”

“Never!” exclaimed Billy, whose sudden fall of countenance belied the word.

Gaff shook his head.

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” said he; “if she’s a whaler like the one we came south in, lad, she’ll not trouble herself with us.”

Billy looked very grave, and his heart sank.

“My only consolation is that she looks more like a man-o’-war than a whaler.”

“I wish we had a big gun to fire,” exclaimed Billy, looking round in perplexity, as if he half hoped that a carronade would spring up out of the ground. “Could we not make a row somehow?”

“I fear not,” said Gaff despondingly. “Shoutin’ is of no use. She’s too far-off for that. Our only chance is the flag.”

Both father and son stood silent for some moments earnestly gazing at the ship, which was by this time nearly opposite to their flagstaff, and seemed to be passing by without recognising the signal. This was not to be wondered at, for, although the flag was visible enough from landward, being well defined against the bright sky, it was scarce perceptible from seaward, owing to the hills which formed a background to it.

“*I* know what’ll do it!” exclaimed Billy, as he leaped suddenly to one side. “Come along, daddy.”

A few yards to one side of the spot on which the flagstaff was reared there was a part of the precipice which sloped with a steep descent into the sea. Here there had been a landslip, and the entire face of the cliff was laid bare. At the top of this slope there was a great collection of stones and masses of rock of considerable size. At various points, too, down the face of the steep, masses of rock and *débris* had collected in hollows.

Billy now went to work to roll big stones over the edge of this cliff, and he did it with such good-will that in a few minutes masses of a hundred weight were rolling, bounding, and crashing down the steep. These, in many cases, plunged into the collections of *débris*, and dislodged masses of rock that no efforts of which Billy was capable could have otherwise moved.

The rattling roar of the avalanche was far more effective than a salvo of artillery, because, besides being tremendous, it was unceasing, and the result was that the vessel ran up a flag in reply to the strange salute. Then a white puff of smoke from her side preceded the roar of a heavy gun. Immediately after, the vessel’s head came round, and she lay-to.

“It’s a man-o’-war,” cried Billy excitedly.

“Ay, and a British one too,” exclaimed Gaff; “let’s give him a cheer, lad.”

Billy complied with a will! Again and again did they raise their strong voices until the woods and cliffs became alive with full, true, ringing British cheers!

Chapter Thirty One.

Delivered, Wrecked, and Rescued.

It is unnecessary, indeed impossible, to describe the feelings with which Gaff and Billy descended from Signal Cliff to the beach to meet the boat which put off from the man-of-war and made for the little creek just below the cave.

As the boat’s keel grated on the sand, the midshipman in command leaped ashore. He was a particularly small and pert midshipman, a smart conceited vigorous little fellow, who delighted to order his big men about in the voice of a giant; and it was quite interesting to observe how quietly and meekly those big men obeyed him, just as one sometimes sees a huge Newfoundland dog or mastiff obey the orders of a child.

“Why, where on earth did you come from, and what are you doing here?” demanded the little middy, as he approached Gaff, and looked up in that man’s rugged and unshorn countenance.

Poor Gaff could scarce command himself sufficiently to reply—

“We’re Englishmen—bin cast away—five years now—”

He could go no farther, but, seizing the boy’s hand, shook it warmly. The Bu’ster, being equally incapable of speaking, seized the hand of the sailor next him, and also shook it violently. Then he uttered a cheer, and turning suddenly round ran along the beach for half a mile like a greyhound, after which he returned and asserted that his feelings were somewhat relieved!

Meanwhile the middy continued to question Gaff.

“What! d’ye mean to say you’ve been five years here—all alone?”

“Ay, all but a few days,” said Gaff, looking round on the men with a bewildered air. “How strange yer voices sound! Seems as if I’d a’most forgotten what men are like!”

“Well, you *are* a queer fish,” said the boy with a laugh. “Are there no more here but you two?”

“No more; just Billy and me—also Squeaky and Shrieky.”

Gaff said this quite gravely, for nothing was farther from his thoughts at that time than jesting.

“And pray, who may Squeaky and Shrieky be?”

“Squeaky’s a pig, and Shrieky’s a little parrot.”

“Well,” observed the middy with a laugh, “that’s better than no company at all.”

“Yours is an English man-o’-war, I think?” said Gaff.

“You’re right, old fellow; she’s the ‘Blazer,’ 74, Captain Evans, bound for England. Took a run farther south than usual after a piratical-looking craft, but missed her. Gave up the chase, and came to this island to get water. Little thought we should find *you* on it. Astonish the captain rather when we go back. Of course you’ll want us to take you home. Will you go off with me at once?”

Gaff and Billy hesitated, and both looked back with a strange mixture of feelings at their island-home.

“Oh, we won’t hurry you,” said the boy, with a kindly and patronising air; “if there are any traps you want to pack up, we’ll wait for you. It’ll take us some time to get the breakers filled. Can you show me a good spring?”

“Ay, an’ we can show you a hot one,” cried Billy, with a smile. “But come up to the cave with us and have some grub.”

The midshipman expressed his readiness to comply, and ordered one of the men to stay and watch the boat.

“You needn’t leave any one with the boat,” said Gaff; “there’s nobody here to touch it.”

“Nevertheless I will leave a guard. Now, then show us the way.”

It is needless to describe the surprise of the sailors at everything they saw and heard; and the mixed feelings that agitated the breasts of Gaff and his son—anxiety to return to England, with regret to quit the cavern home where they had spent so many quiet and comparatively happy years.

Suffice it to say that they, and the few things they possessed, were speedily transferred to the “Blazer,” on board of which they received the most considerate attention and kindness. And you may be sure, reader, that Billy did not forget to take the pig and the parroquet along with him.

Fair winds sprang up, and for many weeks the “Blazer” bowled along steadily on her course. It seemed as if the elements had agreed to be favourable, and expedite the return of the exiles. But this state of things did not last.

Towards the end of the voyage fogs and gales prevailed, and the “Blazer” was driven considerably out of her course to the northward, insomuch that she finally made the land on the north-western coast of Scotland. This induced the captain to run through the Pentland Firth, after passing through which they were beset by calms.

One day a small steamer passed close alongside the “Blazer.”

“That’s an Aberdeen steamer,” said the captain; “would you like to be put on board, Gaff?”

Gaff said that he would, as it was probable he should reach home sooner by her than if he were to accompany the “Blazer” to London.

Accordingly the steamer was signalled, and Gaff and Billy were put on board.

Scarcely had this been done when a stiff easterly gale set in, and before morning a heavy sea was running, before which the steamer rolled heavily.

It seemed as if Gaff and his son were doomed to be drowned, for disaster by sea followed them wherever they went. At last, however, the morning broke bright and clear, and the wind abated, though the sea was still running very high.

That forenoon the steamer sighted the coast of Aberdeenshire and the tall column of the Girdle-ness lighthouse came into view.

“We’ll be home soon now, daddy,” said Billy, as they walked the quarter-deck together.

“P’raps, but we an’t there yet,” said Gaff; “an’ I never count my chickens before they are hatched.”

Gaff and his son no longer wore the rough skin garments which had clothed them while in their island-home. They had been rigged out in man-o’-war habiliments by the kindness of those on board the “Blazer,” but they had steadily refused to permit the barber to operate upon them, and still wore their locks shaggy and long. They were, perhaps, as fine specimens of a hardy and powerful man and boy as could be found anywhere; for Gaff, although past his prime, was not a whit less vigorous and athletic than he had been in days of yore, though a little less supple; and Billy, owing probably to his hardy and healthy style of life on the island, was unusually broad and manly for his age.

In a few hours the steamer made the harbour of Aberdeen. The passengers, who had been very busy all the morning in packing up the things they had used on the voyage, were now assembled in groups along the side of the vessel trying to make out objects on shore. The captain stood on the bridge between the paddles giving directions to the

steersman, and everything gave promise of a speedy and happy landing.

A heavy sea, however, was still running, filling the bay to the northward of the harbour with foaming breakers, while the pier-head was engulfed in clouds of spray as each billow rolled past it and fell in thunder on the bar.

Every one on board looked on with interest; but on that clear bright day, no one thought of danger.

Just as the steamer came close up to the bar, a heavy sea struck her on the port bow, driving her a little too near the pier. The captain shouted to the steersman, but the man either did not understand him, or did not act with sufficient promptitude, for the next wave sent them crashing on the portion of bulwark or breakwater that juts out from the head of the Aberdeen pier.

The consternation and confusion that ensued is beyond description. The women screamed, the men shouted. The captain ordered the engines to be reversed, and this was done at once, but the force of the next billow was too great. It lifted the vessel up and let her fall heavily again on the pier, where she lay hard and fast with her back broken. Another wave lifted her; the two halves of the vessel separated and sank on each side of the pier, leaving the passengers and crew in the waves.

It would be difficult to say whether the shouts of the multitudes who stood on the pier-head or the shrieks of the wrecked people were loudest.

Instantly every exertion was made to save them. Boats were launched, ropes were thrown, buoys were cast into the sea, and many of the people were saved, but many were also drowned before assistance reached them.

Gaff and Billy, being expert swimmers, seized the persons nearest to them, and took them safe to the pier, where ready hands were stretched out to grasp them. The former saved a lady, the latter a little girl. Then they plunged back into the sea, and saved two more lives.

While this was going on, several of the passengers were swept round into the bay, where they would have perished but for the prompt and able assistance of a man who was known as “The Rescue.”

This man was so named because he undertook the dangerous and trying duty of watching the bathers during the summer months, and rescuing such of them as got out of their depth.

In this arduous work that heroic man had, during five years of service, saved with his own hands between thirty and forty lives—in some cases with a boat, but in most cases by simply swimming out and seizing the drowning persons, and without using corks or floats of any kind. When asked why he did not use a lifebelt, he said that it would only impede his motions and prevent him from diving, which he was often compelled to do when the drowning persons had sunk. His usual method was to swim off when there was a shout for help, and make for the struggling man or boy so as to come up behind him. He then seized him under the armpits, and thus effectually prevented him from grasping him in any way. Drawing him gently upon his breast while he lay over on his back, he then made for the shore, swimming on his back and using his feet only.

On the present occasion the “Rescue” saved four or five of those who were washed into the bay, and then ran out to the end of the pier to render assistance there.

In height he was not above the middle size, but he had a very muscular and well-knit frame. Just as he drew near, Gaff, who was bearing a little boy through the surf in his arms, was hurled against the stones of the pier, rendered insensible, and sucked back by the retreating water. Billy was farther out at the moment, and did not see what had occurred.

The shout of alarm from those in front of the crowd was almost immediately answered by a cry from behind of:

“The Rescue! The Rescue! This way!”

Without checking his speed, the Rescue sprang into the sea, caught Gaff by the hair of the head, and was next moment hurled on the breakwater. He was prepared for the shock, and caught the hands of two men, who, with ropes round their waists, waded into the water as far as they dared. Billy was washed ashore at the same moment, almost in a state of helpless exhaustion, and all were hauled out of the sea amid the wild cheers of the excited crowd.

Gaff, being laid under the lee of the pier-wall, soon recovered, and then he and Billy were led tenderly up to the town, where they were kindly entertained and cared for during several days, by the hospitable Rescue, in whose house they lodged during their stay in the fair city of Aberdeen.

Most of the cattle that happened to be on board the ill-fated steamer were saved, and among them was Squeaky. Shrieky, too, managed to escape. His cage having been smashed in the general confusion he was set free, and flew wildly towards the pier, where he took refuge in the bosom of a sailor, who took care of him. Ultimately he and his companion in distress were restored to their friends.

Chapter Thirty Two.

Home Again.

A few days after the events narrated in the last chapter, Gaff and his son arrived by stage-coach in the town of Wreckumoft, and at once started off for the village of Cove.

It was night. There was no moon, but the stars shone brightly in a clear sky, affording sufficient light to show them their road.

Neither of them spoke. Their minds were filled with anxiety, for the thought that was uppermost and ever-present in each was, “Are they well? are they *alive*?” They did not utter the thought, however.

“It’s a long bit since you an’ I was here, Billy,” observed Gaff in a low voice.

“Ay, very long,” replied the lad.

They walked on again at a smart pace, but in silence.

Presently they heard footsteps approaching, and a man soon came up from the direction of Cove.

“Foine noight,” said the man.

“Fine night it is,” responded Gaff and Billy in the same breath.

Gaff suddenly turned and accosted the stranger just as he had passed them.

“D’ye belong to Cove?”

“No, I doan’t; only stoppin’ there a bit.”

“Ye don’t happen to know a ’ooman o’ the name o’ Gaff, do ye?”

“Gaff—Gaff,” repeated the man, meditating; “no, I niver heern on her.”

“Hm; thought pr’aps ye might—good-night.”

“Good-noight.”

And the man went his way.

“Ah! Billy, my heart misgives me, boy,” said Gaff after a pause.

It was evident that Billy’s heart misgave him too, for he made no reply.

The distance to Cove being only three miles, they were not long in reaching the cottage, although their pace had become slower and slower as they approached the village, and they stopped altogether when they first came in sight of their old home.

A light shone brightly in the little window. They glanced at each other on observing this, but no word escaped them. Silently they approached the cottage-window and looked in.

Gaff started back with a slight exclamation of surprise, for his eye fell on the new and strange furniture of the “boodwar.” Billy looked round with a searching eye.

“There’s nobody in,” he said at length, “but look, daddy, the old clock’s there yet.”

Gaff did not know whether this was a good or a bad omen, for any one who had taken and refurnished the cottage might have bought the old clock and kept it as a sort of curiosity.

While they were gazing, the door of the closet opened and Mrs Gaff came out. She was a little stouter, perhaps, than she had been five years before, but not a whit less hale or good-looking.

“Mother—God bless her!” murmured Billy in a deep earnest voice.

“Where can Tottie be?” whispered Gaff anxiously.

“Maybe she’s out,” said Billy.

The lad’s voice trembled while he spoke, for he could not but reflect that five years was a long long time, and Tottie might be dead.

Before Gaff spoke again, the closet door once more opened, and a slender sprightly girl just budding into womanhood tripped across the room.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Billy, “who can that—surely! impossible! yes it is, it *must* be Tot, for I could never mistake her mouth!”

“D’ye see any sign of—of—a man?” said Gaff in a voice so deep and peculiar, that his son turned and looked at him in surprise.

“No, daddy—why? what d’ye ask that for?”

“’Cause it’s not the first time a sailor has comed home, after bein’ many years away, and found that his wife had guv him up for dead, an’ married again.”

Gaff had often thought of the possibility of such a thing during his prolonged residence on the island, and the thought

had cost him many a bitter pang, but he had never mentioned it to Billy, on whom the idea fell for the first time like a thunderbolt. He almost staggered, and put his hand quickly on the window-sill.

“But come, lad, let’s bear up like men. I’ll go in first. Don’t let on; see if they’ll remember us.”

So saying, Gaff lifted the latch of the door and stood before his wife and child. Billy also entered, and stood a pace behind him.

Mrs Gaff and Tottie, who were both engaged about the fireplace at the time, in the preparation of supper, turned and looked at the intruders in surprise, and, for a few seconds, in silence.

The light that fell upon father and son was not very strong, and the opening of the door had caused it to flicker.

“Come in, if ye wants a word wi’ me,” said Mrs Gaff, who was somewhat uneasy at the rugged appearance of her visitors, but was too proud to show it.

“Hast forgotten me, Jess?”

Mrs Gaff rushed at once into his arms.

“‘Bless the Lord, O my soul,’” murmured Gaff, as he smoothed the head that lay on his shoulder.

Tottie recognised her brother the instant he advanced into the full light of the fire, and exclaiming the single word “Billy,” leaped into his open arms.

“Not lost after all, thank God,” said Gaff, with a deep prolonged sigh, as he led his wife to a chair and sat down beside her.

“Lost, Stephen, what mean ye?”

“Not married again,” said Gaff with a quiet smile.

“Married again! an’ *you* alive! oh, Stephen!”

“Nay, lass, not *believin’* me alive, but ye’ve had good reason to think me dead this many a year.”

“An’ d’ye think I’d ha’ married agin even though ye was dead, lad?” asked the wife, with a look of reproach.

“Well, I believe ye wouldn’t; but it’s common enough, ye must admit, for folk to marry a second time, an’ so, many and many a long day I used to think p’raps Jess’ll ha’ found it hard to keep herself an’ Tottie, an’ mayhap she’ll have married agin arter givin’ me up for dead.”

“Never!” exclaimed Mrs Gaff energetically.

“Well, forgive me for thinkin’ it, lass. I’ve been punished enough, for it’s cost me many a bitter hour when I was on the island.”

“On the island!” exclaimed Tottie in surprise.

“Ay, Tot, but it’s an old story that, an’ a long one.”

“Then you’ll have to tell it to me, daddy, and begin at once,” said Tottie, leaving the Bu’ster—who was more entitled to his nickname on that evening than he had ever been in all his life,—and sitting down beside her father on the floor.

“Come, let’s have fair exchange,” said Gaff, pushing his wife towards Billy, who grasped his mother round her ample waist, and pulled her down upon his knee!

“You’re so big and strong an’ handsome,” said Mrs Gaff, running her fingers through her son’s voluminous locks, while a few tears tumbled over her cheeks.

“Mother,” said Billy with a gleeful look, “give me a slap on the face; do, there’s a good old woman; I want to feel what it’s like now, to see if I remember it!”

“There!” cried Mrs Gaff, giving him a slap, and no light one—a slap that would have floored him in days of yore; “you deserve it for calling me an old woman.”

Mrs Gaff followed up the slap with a hug that almost choked her son.

“Make less noise, won’t you?” cried Tottie. “Don’t you see that daddy’s going to begin his story?”

Silence being with difficulty obtained, Gaff did begin his story, intending to run over a few of the leading facts regarding his life since he disappeared, but, having begun, he found it impossible to stop, all the more so that no one wanted to stop him. He became so excited, too, that he forgot to take note of time, and his audience were so interested that they paid no attention whatever to the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, which, by the way, looked if possible more horrified than it used to do in the Bu’ster’s early days. Its preliminary hissing and frequent ringings were unheeded; so were the more dignified admonitions of the new clock; so was the tea-kettle, which hissed with the utmost fury at being boiled so long, but hissed in vain, for it was allowed to hiss its entire contents into thin air, and then to burn its bottom red hot! In like manner the large pot of potatoes evaporated its water, red-heated its bottom, and burned its contents to charcoal.

This last event it was that aroused Mrs Gaff.

“Lauks! the taties is done for.”

She sprang up and tore the pot off the fire. Tottie did the same to the kettle, while Gaff and Billy looked on and laughed.

“Never mind, here’s another kettle; fill it, Tot, fro’ the pitcher,” said Mrs Gaff; “it’ll bile in a few minutes, an’ we can do without taties for one night.”

On examination, however, it was found that a sufficient quantity of eatable potatoes remained in the heart of the burned mass, so the misfortune did not prove to be so great as at first sight it appeared to be.

“But now, Jess, let me pump *you* a bit. How comes it that ye’ve made such a ’xtraornary affair o’ the cottage?”

Mrs Gaff, instead of answering, hugged herself, and looked unutterably sly. Then she hugged Billy, and laughed. Tottie laughed too, much more energetically than there was any apparent reason for. This caused Billy to laugh from sympathy, which made Mrs Gaff break out afresh, and Gaff himself laughed because he couldn’t help it! So they all laughed heartily for at least two minutes—all the more heartily that half of them did not know what they were laughing at, and the other half knew particularly well what they were laughing at!

“Well, now,” said Gaff, after a time, “this may be uncommonly funny, but I’d like to know what it’s all about.”

Mrs Gaff still looked unutterably sly, and giggled. At length she said—

“You must know, Stephen, that I’m a lady!”

“Well, lass, you an’t ’xactly a lady, but you’re an uncommon good woman, which many a lady never wos, an’ never will be.”

“Ay, but I *am* a lady,” said Mrs Gaff firmly; “at least I’m rich, an’ that’s the same thing, an’t it?”

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” replied Gaff, shaking his head; “seems to me that it takes more than money to make a lady. But what are ye drivin’ at, Jess?”

Mrs Gaff now condescended on explanation. First of all she made Gaff and Billy go round the apartment with her, and expounded to them the signification of the various items, after the manner of a showman.

“Here, you see,” said the good woman, pointing to the floor, “is a splendid carpit strait fro’ the looms o’ Turkey; so the man said as sold it to me, but I’ve reason to believe he told lies. Hows’ever, there it is, an’ it’s a fuss-rater as ye may see. The roses is as fresh as the day it was put down, ’xceptin’ that one where Tottie capsized a saucepan o’ melted butter an’ eggs last Christmas day. This,” (pointing to the bed), “is a four-poster. You’ve often said to me, Stephen, that you’d like to sleep in a four-poster to see how it felt. Well, you’ll git the chance now, *my* man! This here is a noo grate an’ fire-irons, as cost fi’ pun’ ten. The man I got it fro’ said it wos a bargain at that, but some knowin’ friends o’ mine holds a different opinion. Here is a noo clock, as goes eight days of his own accord, an’ strikes the halves an’ quarters, but he’s not so good as he looks, like many other showy critters in this world. That old farmiliar face in the corner does his dooty better, an’ makes less fuss about it. Then this here is a noo set o’ chimbley ornaments. I don’t think much o’ them myself, but Tot says they’re better than nothing. Them six cheers is the best I ever sat on. Nothin’ can smash ’em. Mad Haco even can’t—”

“Ah! is Haco alive still?” interrupted Gaff.

“Alive, I should think so. Nothin’ ’ll kill that man. I don’t believe buryin’ him alive would do it. He’s up at the Sailors’ Home just now. But I’m not done yet. Here’s a portrait o’ Lord Nelson, as can look all round the room. See, now, git into that corner. Now, an’t he lookin’ at ye?”

“That he is, an’ no mistake,” replied Gaff.

“Well, git into this other corner; now, an’t he lookin’ at ye still?”

“To be sure he is!”

“Well, well, don’t go for to puzzle yer brains over it. That pictur’ has nearly druv all the thinkin’ men o’ Cove mad, so we’ll let it alone just now. Here’s a man-o’-war, ye see; an’ this is the steps for mountin’ into the four-poster. It serves for a—a—some sort o’ *man*, I forget—Tot, *you* know—”

“An ottoman,” said Tottie.

“Ay, a ottyman by day, an’ steps-an’-stairs at night. Look there!”

Mrs Gaff opened up the steps and said, “What d’ye think o’ that?”

Gaff said, “Wonderful!” and Billy exclaimed, “Hallo!”

“Yes, Stephen,” resumed Mrs Gaff, going to the cupboard and fetching the tea-caddy, from which she extracted her banker’s book, “all them things was bought for you with your own fortin’, which is ten thousand pound, (an’ more, for I’ve not lived up to the interest by no manner o’ means); an’ that there book’ll show ye it’s all true.”

Having reached this point, Mrs Gaff was seized with a fit of laughter, which she stifled on her husband’s breast, and

then, flinging herself into the four-poster, she burst into a flood of tears.

This was the first time in her life that she had given way to such weakness, and she afterwards said to Tottie, in reference to it, that she couldn't help it, and had made up her mind to have a good cry once for all, and be done with it.

Gaff and his son examined the bank-book, and listened with wonder to Tottie's account of the manner in which their wealth had come to them. Before the recital was completed, Mrs Gaff had had her cry out, and dried her eyes.

"What think ye of that, Stephen?" she said, pointing to the book.

Gaff shook his head slowly, and looked very grave.

"I don't much like it, Jess."

"What, don't like money?"

"Too much of it is dangerous. I hope it won't harm us, lass."

"It's done no harm to me yet, as I knows of," said Mrs Gaff firmly.

"What says the Bible, Tot, about that?" asked Gaff. "Money's the root o' all evil, an't it?"

"No, daddy, it's *the love* o' money that's the root of all evil."

"Ah, to be sure. Well, there's a difference there. Hows'ever, we can't help it, so we must larn to bear it. Come along now, Jess, and let us have supper."

To supper they sat down, and long they sat over it, and a hearty one they ate. It was not till they began to think of retiring for the night that it was remembered that there was no possibility of putting up Billy in the cottage, for Tottie occupied the closet of the "boodwar." The Bu'ster relieved his parents from their difficulty, however, by asserting that he had taken a wild desire to see Mad Haco that night; so, declining the offer of a shake-down made up under the four-poster, he started for Wreckumoft, and took up his quarters in the Sailors' Home.

Chapter Thirty Three.

The Sailors' Home and the New Secretary.

Great changes had taken place in the Sailors' Home at Wreckumoft since Billy Gaff last saw it. A new wing had been added to it, and the original building had been altered and repaired, while every convenience in the way of ventilating and heating had been introduced, so that the sailors who frequented this admirable Home found themselves surrounded by comforts and luxuries such as, in former days, they had never dreamed of.

Fortunately for this valuable institution, Sir Richard Doles, Bart, had not been made a director, consequently the business of the Home was not impeded.

Fortunately, also, the secretary who had been recently appointed to the Home was a man of ability and energy, being none other than our friend Kenneth Stuart.

That incorrigible young man had ventured one day to say to his father that he could not make up his mind to give up the "portionless girl," Lizzie Gordon; that he considered her anything but portionless, seeing that she possessed an earnest, loving, Christian heart, and a wise thoughtful mind; qualities which wealth could not purchase, and compared with which a fortune was not worth a straw.

Mr Stuart, senior, thereupon dismissed Mr Stuart, junior, from his presence for ever, and told him to go and beg his bread where he chose!

Curiously enough, Mr Stuart, senior, happened to dine that day with Colonel Crusty at the club where the latter put up when in town, and the valiant colonel told him that he had that morning dismissed his daughter from his presence for ever, she having returned to the parental home as Mrs Bowels. The two, therefore, felt a peculiar sort of sympathy, being, as it were, in the same boat, and cracked an additional bottle of claret on the strength of the coincidence. When they had finished the extra bottle, they ordered another, and became exceedingly jocose, insomuch that one vowed he would leave his fortune to the Church, but the other preferred to leave his to a Lunatic Asylum.

On receiving his dismissal, Kenneth left his father's house with words of regret and good-will on his lips, and then went to tell Lizzie, and seek his fortune.

He had not to seek long or far. Being a director of the Sailors' Home, I chanced to be in search of a secretary. A better man than Kenneth could not be found, so I proposed him, and he was at once appointed.

The salary being a good one, he was enabled to retain Dan Horsey and Bucephalus. He also obtained permission to remove Emmie to his house, having told his father who the child was, and having been told in return that he, (the father), had become aware of the fact long ago, and that he was welcome to her! Kenneth then set himself earnestly to work to promote the interests of the Sailors' Home, and to prepare his house for the reception of Lizzie, who had agreed to marry him whenever he felt himself in a position to ask her.

Lizzie was a peculiar girl. She had, indeed, permitted Kenneth to visit her as a lover; but she resolutely refused to accept him as long as his father continued adverse to the union. The moment, however, that she heard of his being cast off and disinherited, she agreed, with tears in her eyes, to marry him whenever he pleased.

But to return from this digression: the new secretary of the Sailors' Home of Wreckumoft became the guardian spirit of the place. He advised all the arrangements which the Board made. He drew up all the rules that the Board fixed.

An "Address" which he issued to officers and seamen frequenting the port of Wreckumoft, wound up with the following words:

"The Directors of the Sailors' Home are anxious that seamen should clearly understand that the institution was designed for their sole benefit, and established with the view of protecting them from the systematic extortion of crimps and other snares, to which their circumstances and calling render them peculiarly liable; and, above all, to promote their moral elevation, social improvement, and religious instruction. The rules by which the institution is governed are, as far as practicable, adapted to meet the habits of all who participate in its benefits, and to further their best interests. It is conducted on principles of order, comfort, and liberality; and no restraint is exercised beyond that which common prudence and mutual interest require. In the 'Home' thus provided; which embraces security, freedom of action, and social enjoyment, the Directors desire to create and sustain mutual sympathy, trust, and good-will, and to employ those agencies which tend most to mature habits of frugality, self-respect, and the love of God."

Immediately after the appearance of this address, seamen flocked to the "Home" for lodgings, and those who did so found the place so uncommonly pleasant that they brought their messmates, so that for months afterwards not only was every bed taken, but the very stairs and landings of the building were occupied by men who preferred to sleep there, and enjoy the advantages of the Institution, rather than go back to the dens which they had frequented in former days.

On the night when Billy went to the Home it was very full, and he stumbled over more than one recumbent seaman on the landings before he reached the hall, where, late though it was, a number of men were playing chess, draughts, and bagatelle, or reading books and papers. Here he found Haco Barepoles, as rugged as ever, seated by the fire and deeply engaged in a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress."

"Wonderful book; wonderful book!" exclaimed Haco, laying the volume on the table and scratching his head, as if to stir up the brain inside. Just then Billy came up.

"Hallo, Haco!"

"Hallo, stranger! You've the advantage of me, lad, for I don't know ye."

"Yes, ye do."

"Eh! do I? Let me see."

Here the mad skipper scrutinised the lad's face earnestly.

"Well, I *have* seen ye afore now, but you've 'scaped from me, youngster."

"I'm Billy, *alias* the Bu'ster, *alias* the Cork, *alias* Gaff—"

"What, Billy Gaff? Dead and come alive again!" cried Haco, springing up and seizing the youngster's hand.

Having wrung Billy's arm almost off his shoulder, Haco took him up to his berth, where he made him sit down on the bed and recount all his and his father's adventures from beginning to end.

When Billy had concluded the narrative, which of course he gave only in brief outline, Haco said—

"Now, lad, you and I shall go have a pipe outside, and then we'll turn in."

"Very good; but I have not yet asked you about your daughter Susan. Is she still with Captain Bingley?"

"Ay, still with him, and well," replied Haco, with a look that did not convey the idea of satisfaction.

"Not goin' to get married?" inquired Billy with caution.

Haco snorted, then he grunted, and then he said—

"Yes, she *was* goin' to get married, and he wished she wasn't, that was all."

"Who to?" inquired the other.

"Why, to that Irish scoundrel Dan Horsey, to be sure," said Haco with a huge sigh of resignation, which, coming from any other man, would have been regarded as a groan. "The fact is, lad, that poor Susan's heart is set upon that fellow, an' so it's no use resistin' them no longer. Besides, the blackguard is well spoken of by his master, who's a trump. Moreover, I made a kind o' half promise long ago that I'd not oppose them, to that scapegrace young Lieutenant Bingley, who's on his way home from China just now. An' so it's a-goin' to be; an' they've set their hearts on havin' the weddin' same week as the weddin' o' Master Kenneth and Lizzie Gordon; so the fact is they may all marry each other, through other, down the middle and up again, for all I care, 'cause I'm a-goin' on a whalin' voyage to Novy Zembly or Kumskatchkie—anywheres to git peace o' mind—there!"

Saying this Haco dashed the ashes out of his big German pipe into his left palm, and scattered them to the winds.

“Now, lad,” he said, in conclusion, “we’ll go turn in, and you’ll sleep with me to-night, for ye couldn’t get a bed in the Home for love or money, seein’ that it’s choke full already. Come along.”

Chapter Thirty Four.

Failures and Hopes Deferred, and Consequences.

Now, it chanced that, about the time of which I write, a noted bank failed, and a considerable sum of money which had been temporarily deposited in it by the committee of the Sailors’ Home at Wreckumoft was lost.

This necessitated retrenchment. All the salaries of officials were lowered—among them Kenneth’s, although the directors assured him that it would be again raised as soon as the Institution recovered from the shock of this loss.

Meanwhile, however, the secretary was compelled to postpone his marriage indefinitely.

Perhaps the shortest way to convey a correct idea of the dire effects of this failure to my reader will be to detail several conversations that took place in regard to it by various parties.

Conversation first was held between the head cook and head waiter of the Sailors’ Home. These worthies were seated on one of the dressers in the kitchen of the establishment;—and a wonderful kitchen it was, with culinary implements so huge as to suggest the idea of giant operators. There was a grate that might have roasted an ox whole. There were pots big enough to have boiled entire sheep, caldrons of soup that a little boy might have swum in, rolls and loaves that would, apparently, have made sandwiches for an army, and cups and saucers, plates and dishes that might have set up any reasonable man for life in the crockery line. But the most astounding vessels in that amazing place were the tea-pot and coffee-pot of the establishment. They stood side by side like giant twins; each being five feet high by a yard in diameter, and the pounds of tea and gallons of water put into these pots night and morning for tea and breakfast seemed almost fabulous. (See note 1.)

“It’s werry unfortinet, werry,” said the presiding spirit of this region.

“So ’tis,” observed the head waiter.

“Werry hard, too,” said the cook, “on a man like me, with a wife and six childer, to have his wages docked.”

“So ’tis—even for a man with a wife and four child’n like me,” said the head waiter; “but it comes hardest on the secretary, poor feller. He was just a-goin’ to get spliced, an’ there he’s ’bliged to put it off. He’s such a good feller too.”

“Ah—it’s werry hard,” said the cook.

“Werry,” said the head waiter.

Having shaken their heads in concert, these worthies dropped the subject as being an unpleasant one.

In Mr Stuart’s drawing-room, referring to the same subject, Miss Penelope Stuart said to Mr George Stuart—

“Well, I’m sure, George, it seems to me that it would be only right and proper to forgive poor Kenneth, not that he’s done anything exactly wrong, but forgiveness is a Christian duty, whether it’s an enemy you’ve hurt, or a friend who has hurt you, that—that, how could he help it, you know, brother, now do be reasonable, and only think of the poor boy having to part with that great cart-horse—though it’ll be the death of him some day whether he parts with it or not, for it’s a dreadful creature, and Dan too—I’m sure the perplexities people are put to by banks failing. Why don’t people prevent them from failing? But the worst is his marriage being put off, and it so near. I do think, brother, you might take him back and—”

“Pray hold your tongue, Peppy,” said Mr Stuart, who was attempting to read the *Times*, “I’m not listening to you, and if you are pleading for my son Kenneth, let me say to you, once for all, that I have done with him for ever. I would not give him a sixpence if he were starving.”

“Well, but,” persevered the earnest Miss Peppy, “if he were to repent, you know, and come and ask pardon, (dear me, where are those scissors? ah, here they are), surely you would not refuse, (the thimble next—what a world of worries!) to—to give him—”

“Peppy, I have stated my sentiments, pray do not trouble me further in regard to this matter. *Nothing* can move me.”

Miss Peppy sighed, and retired to pour her regrets into the sympathetic ear of Mrs Niven.

Gaff sat in the chimney-corner of the “Boodwar” smoking his pipe and staring at Shrieky, which, having survived the voyage home, had been hung up in a cage in the little window, and was at that time engaged in calling loudly for Squeaky, who, having also survived the voyage, was grubbing up stones and mud at the front door. Mrs Gaff was seated opposite to him, with Tottie’s head in her lap; for she still solaced herself by smoothing her hair. Billy was sitting on one of the six chairs whittling a piece of wood.

“It’s a bad business,” said Gaff; “bad for everybody consarned; but wust for Mr Stuart.”

“An’ his man,” said Billy.

“And Susan,” said Tottie.

“Gaff,” said Mrs Gaff, “it’s my advice to you to go up to the bank, ask them for a thousand pounds, (if they have as much in the shop at the time, if not, ye can take what they have, and call again for the rest), give it all to Miss Lizzie Gordon, and tell her to go and get married right off. We won’t miss it, Gaff. In fact it seems to me that the more we give away the more we have to give. It’s an *awful* big fortin’ we’ve comed into. But that’s what I advise.”

“I doubt she wouldn’t take it,” said Gaff.

“Oh yes, she would,” cried his better half.

Billy and Tottie being of the same opinion, Gaff laid aside his pipe, got out the tea-caddy, from which he took his cheque-book, and made Tottie write out a cheque for 1000 pounds, payable to Miss Lizzie Gordon.

“She deserves it well o’ me,” observed Gaff, as he slowly printed his signature on the cheque, “for she gave me the Noo Testament, that’s bin o’ more valley to me than thousands o’ gold an’ silver—God bless her.”

The cheque was taken up and presented by Gaff on the following morning, but to the honest man’s dismay, Lizzie declined it positively, though she accompanied her refusal with many earnest expressions of gratitude, and kissed the seaman’s hard hand at parting.

Gaff returned to the “Boodwar,” lit his German pipe with the cheque, and said, “I *knowed* she wouldn’t tak’ it—dear girl.”

Kenneth was standing in the bower at the foot of my garden, looking pensively on the distant landscape, which was bathed in the rich glow of the setting sun. His right arm embraced the slender waist of Lizzie—his left encircled the shoulder of Emmie Graham.

“We must have patience, darling,” said Kenneth, with an effort at cheerfulness.

“Our hopes were as bright as that lovely sky some days ago,” said Lizzie.

While she was speaking the sun descended behind a bank of heavy clouds.

“And thus have our hopes gone down,” murmured Kenneth sadly.

“But, uncle,” observed Emmie, “the sun is still shining behind the clouds.”

“Thank you, Emmie, for the comforting word,” said Lizzie, “and our sun is indeed shining still.”

The trio left off contemplating the sky, and returned in improved spirits to Bingley Hall, where my strong-minded wife had just delivered herself of the following oration:—

“It’s of no use talking to me,” (she was right; I never found it to be of the least use to talk to her.) “Old Stuart is a monster—nobody will convince me to the contrary. I only wish I had the making of the laws, and I would have powerful cures got up for such as he. And his brother-in-law is no better—Crusty indeed, bad though it is, the name is too good for him. Don’t interrupt me. He is *not* like many of his neighbours, for he has had no provocation. The captain of dragoons has turned out a very good husband, and poor Bella is as happy with him as such a flirt could expect to be.”

I ventured to remark at this point that my wife was wandering from the subject from which she started, but she became extremely angry, and finally put me down and snuffed me out by assuring me that I had been born at least a generation before my time.

Dan Horsey sat on the dresser of my kitchen, switching his boot with a riding-whip, and looking at Susan with an extremely melancholy expression of countenance. Susan was cleaning a silver tea-pot—her usual occupation when Dan was present. Cook—now resigned to her fate—was sighing and peeling potatoes in the scullery.

“Och! darlint, me heart’s heavier than a cart o’ coals,” said Dan. “Bucephalus is to be sowld next week, and I’m to quit in a month!”

Susan sighed.

“To be sure, I’d aisy git another place, but in the meantime that’ll put off our weddin’, jewel, till I don’ know when.”

Susan sighed again, and Dan hit his boot somewhat smartly, as if he were indignant with Fate.

“But it’s wus,” continued Dan, “for masther an’ Miss Gordon than for us, darlint—there, now, don’t toss yer head, mavourneen, ye know we can git spliced av we like whenever I git a noo sitiwation; but masther can’t well throw up the wan he’s got, an’ yit it won’t kape him an’ his wife. Och! worse luck! Av we could only diskiver a goold mine now, or somethin’ o’ that sort.”

“Well, I *am* sorry for them,” said Susan, with another sigh; “an’ I’m sure I hope that we’ll get over our troubles, all of us, though I don’t see very well how.”

“Arrah! now, don’t look so blue, me angel,” said Dan, rising and putting his arm round Susan. “Me heart is lighter since I comed here and saw yer sweet face. Sure there’s midcine in the glance o’ yer purty blue eye. Come now, cheer up, an’ I’ll ventur a prophecy.”

“What may that be?” asked Susan with a smile.

“That you and I shall be spliced before two months is out. See if we won’t.”

Susan laughed; but Dan stoutly asserted that his prophecies always came true, and then, saying that he was the bearer of a letter to Miss Peppy, he bade Susan adieu, and took himself off.

I turn now to Miss Puff, who happened about this time to be on a visit to us. She was seated one forenoon alone in the dining-room of Bingley Hall, when a loud ring came to the door-bell; a quick step was heard on the stair, and next moment the dining-room door burst open, and my son Gildart rushed into the room.

Gildart was wonderfully changed since the day he had sailed for China. He had grown tall and stout. Moreover he had whiskers—not very bushy, perhaps, but, undeniable whiskers.

“Hallo! Puff!” he exclaimed, rushing towards his old friend with the intention of kissing her; but when Miss Puff rose to receive him, he felt constrained to check himself.

“Why, how you are grown, and *so* changed!” he said, shaking her hand warmly.

Miss Puff was indeed changed, so much so that her old friends who had not seen her for some time could scarcely have known her. She was no longer fat and inane. Her figure had become slim and graceful; her face had become expressive and remarkably pretty, and her manners were those of a well-bred and self-possessed lady. Gildart felt that he could no more have taken the liberties he had ventured on in former years than he could have flown.

He soon became very chatty, however, and speedily began to question her in regard to his father and mother, (who, she told him, were not at home), and old friends.

“And what of my friend Kenneth Stuart?” said he.

“He is well, poor fellow,” replied Miss Puff; “but he is in unhappy circumstances just now.”

Here she related the circumstances of the bank failure, and the evil consequences that followed, and were still pending over Kenneth and many of their other friends in Wreckumoft.

“That’s a sad business,” said Gildart; “but I don’t see how it can be mended. I fear me it is a case of ‘grin and bear it.’ And your aunt, Miss Puff, what of the adorable Miss Flouncer?”

“She is now Lady Doles.”

“You *don’t* say so! Well, I had given Sir Richard credit for more sense. How long is it since they married?”

“About two years.”

“Is Sir Richard dead?”

“No, why should you think so?”

“Because if it had been me, I should have succumbed in three months. It’s an awful thing to think of being married to a she-griffin.”

“She is my aunt, Mr Bingley,” said Miss Puff.

“Ah, to be sure, forgive me. But now I must go and search for my father. Adieu. Miss Puff—*au revoir*.”

Gildart left the room with a strange sensation of emptiness in his breast.

“Why, surely—it *cannot* be that I—I—am in love with that girl, that stupid, fat—but she’s not stupid and not fat *now*. She’s graceful and intelligent and pretty—absolutely beautiful; why, botheration, I *am* in love or insane, perhaps both!”

Thus soliloquising my son entered my study.

The last conversation that I shall record, took place between Mr Stuart senior and Colonel Crusty. It occurred about two weeks after those conversations that have just been narrated. The colonel had been suddenly summoned to see his brother-in-law, “on his death-bed,”—so the epistle that summoned him had been worded by Miss Peppy.

That dinner at which these two friends had enjoyed themselves so much happened to disagree with Mr George Stuart, insomuch that he was thrown into a bilious fever—turned as yellow as a guinea and as thin as a skeleton. He grew worse and worse. Wealth was at his command—so was everything that wealth can purchase; but although wealth procured the best of doctors in any number that the patient chose to order them, it could not purchase health. So Mr Stuart pined away. The doctors shook their heads and gave him up, recommending him to send for his clergyman.

Mr Stuart scorned the recommendation at first; but as he grew worse he became filled with an undefinable dread, and at last did send for his pastor. As a big cowardly boy at school tyrannises over little boys and scoffs at fear until a bigger than he comes and causes his cheek to blanch, so Mr Stuart bullied and scorned the small troubles of life, and scoffed at the anxieties of religious folk until death came and shook his fist in his face; then he succumbed and trembled, and confessed himself, (to himself), to be a coward. One result of the clergyman’s visit was that Mr Stuart sent for Colonel Crusty.

“My dear Stuart,” said the colonel, entering the sick man’s room and gently taking his wasted hand which lay outside the counterpane, “I am distressed to find you so ill; bless me, how thin you are! But don’t lose heart. I am quite sure you have no reason to despond. A man with a constitution like yours can pull through a worse illness than this. Come, cheer up and look at the bright side of things. I have seen men in hospital ten times worse than you are, and get better.”

Mr Stuart shook, or rather rolled, his head slowly on the pillow, and said in a weak voice—

“No, colonel, I am dying—at least the doctors say so, and I think they are right.”

“Nonsense, my dear fellow,” returned the colonel kindly, “doctors are often mistaken, and many a man recovers after they have given him up.”

“Well, that may be or it may not be,” said Mr Stuart with a sudden access of energy, “nevertheless I believe that I am a dying man, and I have sent for you on purpose to tell you that I am an ass—a consummate ass.”

“My dear Stuart,” remonstrated the colonel, “really, you are taking a very warped view of—”

“I—am—an—ass,” repeated the sick man, interrupting his friend; “more than that, *you* are an ass too, colonel.”

The colonel was a very pompous and stately man. He had not been honoured with his true title since he left school, and was therefore a good deal taken aback by the plain-speaking of his friend. He attributed the words, however, to the weak condition of Mr Stuart’s mind, and attempted to quiet him, but he would not be quieted.

“No, no, colonel; it’s of no use trying to shut our eyes to the fact. You and I have set our hearts on the things of this world, and *I* have now come to see that the man who does that is a fool.”

“My dear fellow,” said the colonel soothingly, “it is bodily weakness that induces you to think so. Most people speak thus when they are seriously ill; but they invariably change their opinion when they get well again.”

“You are wrong, colonel. I am now convinced that they do *not* change their opinions. They may change their *wills*, but their opinions *must* remain the same. The conclusion which I have now come to has been forced upon me by cool, logical reasoning; and, moreover, it has more than once flashed upon me in the course of my life, but I shut my eyes to it. The approach of death has only opened them to see *very* clearly what I was more than half aware of before. Do not suppose that I make this confession of my folly to you in order to propitiate the Deity. I do not for a moment expect that the God whom I have neglected all my life can be humbugged in this way. No, I have deliberately cast Him off in time past, and I recognise it as my due that He should cast *me* off now. It is too late to repent, so I suppose that there is no hope for me.”

Mr Stuart paused here a few minutes. The shade of doubt expressed in his last words was occasioned by the recollection of the clergyman’s assurance that it was *never* too late to repent; that the finished work of Jesus Christ, (which leaves nothing for a man to do but to “believe and live”), would avail the sinner at the latest hour.

The colonel sat gazing at his friend in silence. Presently the sick man resumed as though he had not paused:—

“Therefore what I say to you now is not intended as a propitiatory offering, but is the result of clear and calm conviction. Now listen to me, for I feel getting weak. Let me entreat you to forgive your daughter. Will you take that entreaty into earnest consideration? I do not ask you to promise. It is folly to make men promise what they don’t want to do. The chances are that they’ll break the promise. I only ask you to take this subject into your serious consideration. It is the request of a dying man. Will you grant it?”

The colonel coughed, and looked troubled.

“Colonel,” said Mr Stuart, “I have forgiven Kenneth—that is to say, we are reconciled; for I can scarcely be said to forgive one who never offended me. The gladness that has ensued on that reconciliation is worth more to me than all the gold I ever made.”

“Stuart,” said the colonel, somewhat suddenly, “I’ll do what you ask.”

“Thank you; you’re a good fellow. Squeeze my hand—there now, go away; I’ll sleep for a little. Stay, perhaps, I may never waken; if so, farewell. You’ll find a fire in the library if you choose to wait till it’s over. God bless you.”

The sick man turned on his side with a sigh, and fell into a sleep so deep and quiet that the colonel left the room with some uncertainty as to whether his friend were still in the land of the living.

Note 1. If the reader would see a somewhat similar kitchen, let him visit the Sailors’ Home, Well Street, London Docks.

Chapter Thirty Five.

Conclusion.

Gladness is a source of life. It is probable that the joy which filled Mr Stuart’s heart, in consequence of being reconciled to Kenneth, and having induced his brother-in-law to promise to consider the possibility of forgiving Bella, was the cause of a favourable turn in his malady. At all events he did recover, to the surprise of every one, and the

utter discomfiture of the doctors who had given him up!

The sentiments which Mr Stuart had expressed when, as was supposed, in a dying state, did not forsake him when he was restored to health, for, whereas in former days all his time, health, and wealth, were dedicated to himself, now they were all devoted to God. Mr Stuart's face, so to speak, had been turned south before his illness; after his illness it was turned north. There was no other change than this. He did not change his nature, nor did he change his pursuits. Even those of them which were sinful were not changed—they were given up. He did not cease to be an irascible man, but he fought against his temper, (which he had never done before), and so became less irascible. He did not give up his profession, but he gave up the evils which he had before permitted to cling to it. He did not cease to make money, but he ceased to hoard it, and devoted the money made to higher ends than heretofore. He did not think of the world and its affairs less, but he thought of his Maker more, and in so doing became a better man of the world than ever! Gloom and asceticism began to forsake him, because the Bible told him to "rejoice evermore." Philanthropy began to grow, because the Bible told him to "look not upon his own things, but upon the things of others." He had always been an energetic man, but he became more so now, because the Bible told him that "whatever his hand found to do, he ought to do it with his might."

In short, Mr Stuart became a converted man, and there was no mystery whatever in his conversion. Great though its effects were, it was simply this,—that the Holy Spirit had enabled him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many results followed from this change in the old man. One of the first was that Kenneth and Lizzie Gordon were married, Bucephalus was not sold, and Dan Horsey was retained in the service of his young master.

Miss Peppy came out very strong on that occasion of Kenneth's marriage. She laughed, and then she wept, and then, by way of variety, she did both at once. She kissed everybody that came within arm's-length of her, partly because her heart was very full, partly because her tears blinded her, so that she could not easily distinguish who was who. She made an effort once or twice to skip, and really, considering her age and infirmities, the efforts were wonderfully successful. She also sang a little; attempted to whistle, but failed, and talked straight on for several days without cessation, (except when asleep and at meals), the most extraordinary amount of nonsense that ever came from the lips of woman.

True to their resolve, Dan Horsey and Susan Barepoles were married at the end of the same week. And it is worthy of remark that mad Haco danced at their wedding, and by so doing, shook to its foundation the building in which it occurred.

Strange to say, my son, Lieutenant Bingley, arrived from China on the morning of the wedding, so that he had the unexpected pleasure of dancing at it too, and of chaffing Haco on being "done out of his daughter!"

The "Boodwar" was the scene of the festivities at Dan's wedding. It was more; it was also the locality in which the honeymoon was spent. Mrs Gaff had insisted on taking a little jaunt to Ramsgate, with her husband, son, and daughter, in order that she might give up her abode to Dan and Susan, who were favourites with her.

Thus it came to pass that when the festivities of the wedding drew to a close, the bride and bridegroom, instead of leaving their friends, were left by their friends in possession of the "Boodwar."

It now remains for me, reader, to draw this veracious narrative to a close.

My son Gildart married Miss Puff, and ultimately became a commander in the navy. My wife's strength of mind gave way before increasing years, and she finally became as gentle as she was when I first paid my addresses to her!

Emmie Graham became a permanent inmate of Kenneth's home. The shock that she had sustained when Gaff saved her life told upon her constitution so severely that she fell into bad health, but there was a sunny cheerfulness of disposition about her which induced those with whom she came in contact to regard her as a sunbeam. Lady Doles became stronger-minded day by day, and finally reduced Sir Richard to the condition of a mere human machine, with just enough spirit left to enable him to live and do her bidding.

Colonel Crusty forgave Bella, and, as is not infrequently the case in similar circumstances, he and his son-in-law the major, (for he rose to that rank), became bosom friends. When the latter retired on half-pay they all took up their abode in Wreckumoft.

Kenneth retained his old post, for, although independent of its salary, he would not eat the bread of idleness. As Secretary to the Sailors' Home he frequently met me while I was going about in my capacity of honorary agent of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society.

Billy Gaff went to sea, and ultimately became captain of an East Indiaman, to his mother's unspeakable delight.

Gaff and his wife and Tottie remained in the "Boodwar" for many years. They did not find their fortune too much for them, being guided in the use thereof by the Bible.

In regard to the state of things that had come about, Miss Peppy used to say confidentially, to Mrs Niven, that she never knew anything like it. It beat all the novels she had ever read, not that she had read novels much, although some of them were good as well as bad, but she felt that too many of them were hurtful; of course, she meant if taken immoderately, but people were always taking things *so* immoderately. How could it be otherwise in a world where surprise was the chronic condition of the mind, and events were always happening in a way that led one to expect that everything would likely turn out in a manner that was most improbable, if not impossible, which she wouldn't wonder at, for it was enough to fill the lower animals themselves with amazement to see the way in which scissors and thimbles and keys worried people whose whole beings ought to be bent on far higher matters—not to mention people being left at other people's doors by people whom one didn't know at the time, but came to know

afterwards, as well as—dear! dear! it was of no use talking; for things had gone on so, no doubt, ever since Adam and Eve walked about in Eden, and doubtless things would continue to go on so, more or less, to the end of time.

The End.

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