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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A TERRIBLE COWARD ***

George Manville Fenn

"A Terrible Coward"

Chapter One.

The Diver's Rock.

Boom! with a noise like thunder.

Flash! directly after; but the sounds those two words express, multiplied and squared if you like, till the effect upon the senses is, on the first hearing, one of dread mingled with awe at the mightiness of the power of the sea.

For this is not "how the waters come down at Lodore," but how they come in at Carn Du, a little fishing town on the Cornish coast.

There's a black mass of rock standing out like a buttress just to the west of the little harbour, running right into the sea, and going down straight like a wall into the deep clear water at its foot, as if to say to the waves, "Thus far may you come, and no farther." For hundreds upon hundreds of years the winds and tides have combined to rid themselves of this obstacle to their progress, the winds urging the waves that come rolling in from the vast Atlantic, gathering force as they increase in speed, like one rushing at a leap; and at last leap they do, upon the great black mass of shale, tons upon tons in weight, seeming as if they would sweep it clear away, and rush on in mad ruin to tumble the fishing luggers together and shatter them like eggs as they lie softly rubbing together in the harbour.

But no; it is only another of the countless millions of failures on the part of those Atlantic billows. They leap and fall with a mighty boom upon that rock, but only to break up with a hissing splash into a mass of foam, defeated, churned up with froth that runs hissing back, ready to give way to another wave advancing to the charge.

They have worn the rock smooth, so that it glistens like glass in the morning sun, for, as if aware of the folly of urging on its regiments of well-mounted cavalry to come dashing in upon the wild white-maned sea-horses, or the more sober lines of heavy infantry in uniforms of green and blue, the sea has for countless ages bombarded Carn Du with stone-shot in the shape of great boulders. These have ground and polished off every scrap of seaweed, every barnacle, limpet, and sea-anemone, leaving the rock all smooth and bare, while the boulders lie piled to the east in a heap, where the waves that try to take the rock in flank leap amongst them, and roll them over higher and higher, to come rumbling down as if they were tiny pebbles instead of rounded masses of granite and spar-veined stone a quarter, half, and a hundredweight each.

It was an awful place in a storm—Carn Du. It was there that the great Austrian full-rigged ship came on, during one black and raging night; when one minute from the harbour, and off the cliff, the fishermen in their oilskins could see the lights of a vessel—the next minute, nothing.

There were the remains of a few timbers, though, in the morning—torn, twisted, gnawed, as it were, into fibres and splintering rags. That was all.

It was an awful place in a storm, where the spray, broken up into feathery froth by the battle on the rocks, came flying over the town, and then away landward, like a fine misty rain; but it was a grand place in a calm. It has been said that there was always deep water, even at low tide, at the foot of the Carn, and here for generations had been the training place of the swimmers of Carn Du, who were famous for their prowess all round the coast.

It was too much for the boys, but the performance of the big dive was looked upon as the passing of a lad from boyhood into the manly stage, upon which he entered through the Shangles Gate, and then swam back, coming, as it were, of age amidst the shouts of his companions to swim ashore and land upon the big boulders, where the boys bathed and learned to swim in the calm weather, gazing the while in admiration at their older companions.

For there was something very stirring in the act, and a stranger to the place would hold his breath in dread as he saw Mark Penelly, who was the finest swimmer at the port of Carn Du, climb up the side of the great black rock upon some fine summer evening, then go round along the narrow shelf of shaley stone, till he stood alone there forty feet above the sea, his white figure as he rested against the black rock, every muscle standing out from his well-knit frame, and his arms crossed, looking like some antique statue in its niche.

There were plenty of young men who could perform the feat, but Mark Penelly was acknowledged to be the master.

Dotted about the swelling surface there would be the heads of plenty of swimmers—men and lads—some going smoothly along, mounting the rollers as they came in, and descending softly into the hollows; others again swimming to meet each wave, then rising a little, and with a plunge like a duck or one of the great bronze-black shags, or cormorants, that sat upon the rock-shelves, diving right through the mass of water, to come out fairly on the other side.

Some would swim out to the little buoys, rest by them for a time, and swim back. Others would make for one of the cinnamon-sailed luggers lying at anchor, to go round and back, or would get into one of the boats; while some, more venturesome, or really more confident in their powers over the water, would go boldly out, perhaps a mile, to meet some lugger coming in from the fishing-ground, sure of being taken aboard and riding back abreast of the boulders where they had left their clothes.

To be a good swimmer was everything at Carn Du. They looked upon it as a business—as part of their education—for no boy or man was counted fit to go out in a boat who could not leap overboard and swim alongside, or, during a capsizing, keep himself afloat, and help to turn the boat and bale her out.

But from the meanest to the best swimmer there, every one paused to watch Mark Penelly standing statue-like up against the black rock, waiting till a great ninth wave came majestically rolling in, sweeping over the outer rocks—the Shangles—and then with a boom leaping at Carn Du, running up it, as it were, in a mighty column of water, some twenty feet even on a calm day.

Now was the time, calculated by practised eyes to the moment.

As the wave struck, Mark could be seen to grow suddenly less statuesque. His arms would drop to his side, and then as it rushed up towards where he stood, like some mighty sea-monster seeking to make him its prey, Mark's hands joined above his head, he bent forward slightly, and then with one tremendous leap seemed to leave the rocky ledge, and plunge down head foremost into the wave.

The effect was electric, but its daring seemed to savour of madness. There one moment stood the statuesque figure, white as a cameo cut in the black rock, the next moment there was a gleam of something flashing through the air, and passing into the deep blue wave, which, as if by the contact of the figure, broke into silvery foam, rushing back like a vast cascade towards the Shangles.

Where all before was smooth heaving water all was now rushing foam, as the broken wave raced back, as if to pass between two narrow jagged pieces of rock rising up like a gateway some fifty yards away before the next wave came in.

The breath of the person who saw it for the first time was held as he looked in vain for the brave diver, or wondered whether the act he had seen was not some mad effort to destroy life. There was the foaming water, there the black rocks, that were swept over by the roaring wave, but now showing plainly amidst a sheet of white surf, with beyond them a comparatively smooth surface, through which a current seems to run.

But there was no diver to be seen, nothing but the racing, hissing foam.

Yes: there he was—that was his head, rising out of the foam thirty or forty yards away, and being carried to inevitable destruction against those terrible jagged rocks.

No man could swim against the furious, racing torrent which was now passing between them. No one could get out of such a current when once in. It was horrible to look at, for the helpless swimmer seemed as if he would be dashed against the crags and then float, stunned, wounded, and helpless, out to sea.

That seemed to be Mark Penelly's fate; but no—as he neared the gate in the Shangles he could be seen to turn over upon his back, keeping his head well out of the water, paddling with his hands, and feet foremost, showing from time to time amongst the foam, literally shooting like a canoe right between the rocks, to float directly after in smooth water, and calmly swim round towards the shore.

The feat had been seen hundreds of times; every swimmer who had attained manhood could do it; and at times it was hard work to keep back the venturesome boys. But no matter when it was done there was always a cheer for the brave young fellow who took the leap, and who was now seen to alter his mind, and make for a fishing lugger a quarter of a mile away—one which was just coming in from the fishing-ground miles away.

"Huh, Harry Paul," said one of a group of dark, weather-tanned fishermen, to a fair-haired, clear-skinned young fellow of two or three and twenty; who had just thrown his straw-hat upon the rocks, showing his crisp, short, yellowish hair, and broad, white forehead. "Going to have a swim?"

"Yes," said the young man quietly, as he proceeded to divest himself of his neckerchief and let loose his thick white throat; "nice night for it."

"Where are you going, lad?" said another, for somehow they took a great interest in his proceedings.

"Oh, I thought of swimming out to James's boat and back, or else coming back in her. She seems to have plenty of fish."

"Ay, lad, plenty," said another; "they've been signalling that they're 'most full. But when are you going to take the jump, lad, eh?"

"I don't know," said Harry quietly, as he went on preparing for his bathe; "perhaps never."

"I wonder at you, Master Harry," said another, a grey-headed old fisherman. "Here's you, son of the biggest owner here in Carn Du, a young chap as can swim like a seal, and yet never had the pluck to take the big leap."

"Yes," said the first speaker, "a dive as there's dozens of boys o' fifteen and sixteen ready to do if they'd let 'em."

"Ay," said the grey-haired old fellow, "that they would. Why, I done it when I was fourteen and a half."

"Mark. Penelly says as you're the biggest coward as ever stepped," said another maliciously.

"Oh! never you mind what Mark Penelly says, Master Harry," said the grey-haired man. "He's jealous; that's about what he is. He's 'feared you'll go and do the dive better than him. And it's my opinion, seeing what a swimmer you are, as you would beat him all to fits."

"So I think," said another, who had not yet spoken; and he winked at his companions as he thrust his hands a little farther down into his capacious pockets.

"Go on, and do it to-night, Master Harry," said the old fellow. "Don't you be bet. The tide's just right for it, and if I was you I'd just show Mark Penelly as he knows nothing about it."

The young man went on calmly divesting himself of his outer clothing while this talk went on, and though there was a slight flush on his cheeks he did not speak a word.

"He'll do it," said the man with his hands in his pockets. "He'll do it; you see if he don't. Mas'r Harry's made up his mind. He's just made up his mind, he have, and he's going to do it."

"I'll lay a ounce o' baccy he does it better than Mark Penelly. I wish he was here to see him do it."

"Ay, to be sure," said the old grey-haired man. "He's going to do it—now aren't you, Mas'r Harry? I feel kinder quite glad of it, lad, for I taught you to swim."

"To be sure you did, Tom Genna," said the young man, smiling, "and I hope I haven't disgraced my master."

"Not you, lad; there is not a finer swimmer nowhere," said the old man enthusiastically; "and I'm glad you've made up your mind at last to take the dive."

"I've not made up my mind," said the young man coolly.

"Not made up your mind!" cried several.

"No," replied the bather.

"Why, you said just now as you would do it!" cried the man with his hands in his pockets.

"Ay, so he did," was chorused.

"Not I," said Harry quietly; "and if you will all clear off, and let me have my swim in peace, I shall be much obliged."

"Why, you are a coward, then," said the man with his hands in his pockets, and to show his disgust he began to sprinkle the boulders about with tobacco-juice.

"I suppose I am," said Harry Paul, smiling. "I can't help it. I suppose it is my nature."

"Bah!" growled the grey-haired man, who, as one of the oldest fishermen, was looked up to as an authority. "You aren't a coward, Master Harry; it's only 'cause you want to make a plucky effort, don't you? Just you make up your mind to do it, and you'd do it like a shot."

"I daresay I could," replied the young man; "but why should I?"

"Why should you!" sneered the man with his hands in his pockets; "why, 'cause every one does."

"Because everyone goes and risks his life just for the sake of gratifying his vanity," replied Harry Paul, "I don't see why I should go and do the same."

"Ah, now you're beginning to talk fine," growled the old fisherman, "and a-shoving your book-larning at us. Look here, young 'un; a lad as can't swim ain't—'cordin' to my ideas—hardly worth the snuff of a candle."

"I don't go so far as you do, Tom," said the young man, smiling; "but I do hold that every young fellow should be able to swim well, and so I learned."

"Yes, but you can't do the dive," said the man with his hands in his pockets mockingly.

"Oh, he's going to do it," said the old fisherman. "The water's just right, Master Harry. You go. Take my advice: you go. Just wait till the wave's coming well up, then fall into her, and out you come, and the current'll carry you out through the Shangles."

"And what the better shall I be if I do?" said the young man warmly.

"What the better, my lad!" said the old fellow, looking aghast. "Why, you'll ha' made quite a man o' yourself."

"But I shall have done no good whatever."

"Oh, yes, you would; oh, yes, you would," said the party, sagely shaking their heads and looking at one another.

"I don't see it," said Harry Paul. "If it was to do any one good, or to be of any benefit, perhaps I might try it; but I cannot see the common-sense of risking my life just because you people have made it a custom to jump off Carn Du."

As he spoke he ran down over the boulders, and plunged off a rock into the clear sea, his white figure being traceable against the olive brown sea-wrack waving far below, as he swam for some distance below the surface, and then rose, shook the water from his eyes, and struck out for the lugger lying becalmed in the offing.

The party of fishermen on shore stood growling together, and making unpleasant remarks about Harry Paul, whom they declared to be a terrible coward—all but old Tom Genna, who angrily took his part.

"He's not a bad 'un at heart, and I believe he's no coward," growled the old fellow.

"Then why don't he show as he ar'n't?" said the man with his hands in his pockets, places they never seemed to leave.

"Ah, that's what no one can't say!" growled old Tom, and sooner than hear his favourite swimming pupil condemned, he walked away, muttering that, "he'd give a half-crown silver piece any day to see Mas'r Harry do that theer dive better than Mark Penelly."

Meanwhile the latter had swum right out to the fishing lugger, where he was taken on board, and it being one of his father's boats, he was soon furnished with a blue jersey and a pair of rough flannel trousers, for he did not care about swimming back. Then seating himself on the side, he began talking and chatting to the men, who were shaking mackerel out of their dark-brown nets, where they hung caught by the gills, which acted like the barbs to their arrow-like flight through the sea against the drift-net, and prevented their return.

They were in no hurry to get in, for there was no means of sending their fish off till morning, hence they took matters coolly enough.

"Did you do the dive to-night, Master Mark?" said the master of the boat.

"Yes, to be sure," said Mark conceitedly. "Bah! it's mere child's play."

"And yet Mas'r Harry Paul never does it," said another, in the sing-song tone peculiar to the district.

"He! a miserable coward!" cried Penelly, contemptuously. "He hasn't the spirit of a fly. Such a fellow ought to be hounded out of the place. Why, I could pick out a dozen boys of twelve who would do it."

"Yes," said the master of the lugger maliciously, "but he's a beautiful swimmer."

"Tchah! I'd swim twice as far," said Penelly. "He's a wretched coward, and I hate him."

"What! because he can swim better than you, sir?" said the master.

"I tell you I'm the better swimmer," said Penelly sharply.

"Then it must be because he thrashed you for behaving ill to poor old Tom Genna?"

"He thrash me!" cried Penelly contemptuously. "I should like to see him do it."

"Here's your chance, then," said the master maliciously. "He's swimming straight for the boat."

Mark Penelly's face grew a shade more sallow, but he said nothing, only knelt down by a pile of loose net, and watched the young man, whom he looked upon as his rival, till Harry, swimming gracefully and well, came right up and answered the hail of the fishermen with a cheery shout.

"Come aboard, Mas'r Harry; we're going to have the sweeps out soon, and we'll take you in."

"No, thank you," was the reply. "I am going round you, and then back."

Mark Penelly had gone over to the other side of the lugger while the conversation was going on, and he did not face the man he looked upon as his rival; while Harry, unnoticed by the busy fishers as he swam round, went on, touching the sides of the lugger as he lightly swam, but only the next moment to find himself entangled in a quantity of the thin mackerel net, which seemed somehow to descend upon him like a cloud, and before he could realise the fact he was under water, hopelessly fettered by the net, and feeling that if he could not extricate himself directly he should be a dead man.

Chapter Two.

Zekle makes Hay.

At first sight nothing seems more frail than a herring or mackerel net, one of those slight pieces of mesh-work that, in a continuation of lengths perhaps half-a-mile long, is let down into the sea to float with the tide, ready for the shoals of fish that dart against it as it forms a filmy wall across their way. The wonder always is that it does not break with even a few pounds of fish therein, but it rarely does, for co-operation is power, and it is in the multiplicity of crossing threads that the strength consists.

Harry Paul, as he struggled in the water, was like a fly in the web of a spider, for every effort seemed only to increase the tangle. He could not break that which yielded on every side, but with fresh lengths coming over the lugger's side to tangle him the more. Even if he had had an open sharp knife in his hand he could hardly have cut himself free, and in the horror of those brief moments he found that his struggles were sending him deeper and deeper, and that unconsciously he had wound himself still farther in the net, till his arms and legs were pinioned in the cold, slimy bonds, which clung to and wrapped round him more and more.

A plunge deep down into the sea is confusing at the best of times. The water thunders in the ears, and a feeling of helplessness and awe sometimes comes over the best of swimmers. In this case, then, tangled and helpless as he was, Harry Paul could only think for a few moments of the time when he swam into the sea-cave at Pen Point at high tide, and felt the long strands of the bladder wrack curl and twist round his limbs like the tentacles of some sea-monster; and he realised once more the chilling sense of helpless horror that seemed to numb his faculties. He made an effort again and again, but each time it was weaker, and at last, with the noise of many waters in his ears, and a bewildering rush of memories through his brain, all seemed to be growing very dark around him, and then he knew no more.

On board the lugger the fishermen were busily running the net from one compartment of the vessel into the other, still shaking the fish out as they went on, for a sudden squall at the fishing-ground had compelled them to haul in their nets hastily and run for home. The slimy net grew into a large brown heap on one side, and the little hill of brilliantly-tinted mackerel bigger on the other, and in the evening light it seemed as if the wondrous colours with which the water shone in ripples far and near had been caught and dyed upon the sides of the fish.

Mark Penelly came over from the other side of the lugger, where he seemed to have been busy for a moment or two, while the men were bending over their work, and seated himself upon the low bulwark close to the master.

"Has he got round?" said the latter, looking up for a moment.

"Whom do you mean?" said Penelly, who was rather pale.

"Young Mas'r Harry. Didn't you see him?"

"See him?—no. I thought he had swum back."

"Went round the other side," said the master quietly. "Here, you Zekle, don't throw a fish like that on to the heap; the head's half off."

The man advanced, picked the torn mackerel off the heap, where he had inadvertently thrown it, and the work went on, till as the master raised his eyes to where Penelly sat, he saw how pale and strange he looked.

"Why, lad," he exclaimed, "you've been too long in the water. You look quite cold and blue. I'd lay hold of one of the sweeps if I were you. It will warm you to help pullin'. Here, hallo!" he shouted, "who's let all that net go trailing overboard? Here's a mess! we shall have to run it all through our hands again."

Mark Penelly's eyes seemed starting out of his head as, with a convulsive gasp, he seized hold of the net, along with the master and another, and they began to haul in fathom after fathom, which came up slowly, and as if a great deal of it were sunk.

"Why, there's half the net overboard!" cried the master angrily. "How did you manage it? What have you been about?"

"There can't be much over," said the man who was helping; "she was all right just now. There's a fish in it, and a big one."

"Don't talk such foolery, Zekle Wynn," said the master. "I tell 'ee half the net's overboard."

"How can she be overboard when she's nigh all in the boat?" said the man savagely.

"Zekle's right," cried Mark Penelly, who was hauling away excitedly; "there's a big fish in it. Look! you can see the gleam of it down below."

"Well, don't pull a man's nets in like that, Mas'r Mark!" said the other, now growing interested and hauling steadily in; "nets cost money to breed." (Note. Cornish. Making nets is termed "breeding.") "Why, it's a porpoise, and a good big 'un too! Steady, lads; steady! She's swum into the net that trailed overboard. Steady, or we shall lose her! Here, hold on, lads, and I'll get down into the boat and—haul away!" he roared excitedly, as he had made out clearly what was entangled in the net. "Quick, lads! quick! It's a man! It's—my word if it ar'n't young Harry Paul!"

The net was drawn in steadily over the roller at the lugger's side, till Penelly and the master could lean down and

grasp the arms of the drowning or drowned man, whom they dragged on board, and then, not without some difficulty, freed from the net that clung to his limbs. He had struggled so hard that he had wound it round and round him, and so tight was it in places that, without hesitation, the master pulled out his great jack-knife and cut the meshes in three or four places.

"You can get new nets," he said hoarsely, "but you couldn't get a new Harry Paul. There's some spirit down in the cabin, Zekle. Quick, lad, and bring the blanket out of the locker, and my oilskin. Poor dear lad! he must have got tangled as he was swimming round. I'll break that Zekle's head with a boat-hook for this job; see if I don't."

The threatened man, however, came just then with the blanket and spirits, when everything else was forgotten in the effort to restore the apparently drowned man. Mark Penelly worked with all his might, and after wrapping Paul in the blanket and covering him with coats and oilskins, some of the spirit was trickled between his clenched teeth, and the men then rubbed his feet and hands.

"Get out the sweeps, lads. There's no wind, and we must get him ashore. Poor dear lad! If he's a drowned man, Zekle Wynn, you've murdered him!"

"I tell 'ee I didn't let no net trail overboard," cried the man angrily, as he seized a long oar and began to tug at it, dropping it into the water every time with a heavy splash.

"Don't stand talking back at me!" roared the master, seizing another oar and dragging at it with all his might, "pull, will 'ee? pull!"

"I am a-pulling, ar'n't I?" shouted back the other, as the man and lad, who formed the rest of the crew, each got an oar overboard and began to pull.

"Yes, you're a-pulling, but not half pulling!" roared the master, as if his man were half a mile away instead of close beside him.

Plenty more angry recrimination went on as all tugged at the long oars, and the lugger began to move slowly through the water towards the little harbour; but if Harry Paul's life had depended upon the services of the doctor at Carn Du he would never have seen the sun rise on the morrow's dawn. But as it happened, the warmth of the wrapping, the influence of the spirit that had been poured liberally down his throat, and the chafing, combined with his naturally strong animal power to revive him from the state of insensibility into which he had fallen, and long before they reached the granite pier of the little harbour his eyes had opened, and he was staring in a peculiarly puzzled way at Mark Penelly, who still knelt beside him in the double character of medical man and nurse.

"Eh! lad, and that's right," cried the master in a sing-song tone; "why, we thought we was too late. How came 'ee to get twisted up in the nets like that?"

Harry Paul did not answer, but lay back on the heap of what had so nearly proved to be his winding-sheet, trying to think out how it was that he had come to be lying on the deck of that fishing lugger, with those men whom he well knew apparently taking so much interest in his state.

For all recollection of his swim and the conversation that had preceded it had gone. All he could make out was that Mark Penelly, who was never friendly to him, was now kneeling by his side looking in a curious way into his eyes.

By degrees, though, the cloud that had been over his understanding seemed to float away, and as they were nearing the harbour he began to recall the urgings he had received to leap from Carn Du, which now stood up black and forbidding on his left; the swim out to the lugger and round; and then—"Well, how do you feel now, lad?" said the master.

"Better," said Harry, forcing a smile.

"How came ye to swim into the net? Didn't 'ee see it?"

"No," said Harry, thoughtfully; and as he spoke Mark Penelly watched him very attentively. "I hardly know how it was, only that it seemed to come down on me all at once."

"Just what I said," cried the master angrily; "and if I was you I'd have it out of Zekle Wynn here, somehow—leaves a heap of net so as it falls overboard."

"Tell 'ee I didn't," roared Zekle, shouting out his words as if he was hailing a ship. "Nets went over o' theirselves."

Mark Penelly seemed to breathe more freely, as he now rose and placed the spirits on the deck.

"I'd take a taste o' that myself, Mas'r Mark, if I was you," said the master. "You don't look quite so blue as you did. But you seemed quite scared over this job."

Mark declined, however, saying that he was quite well; and soon after, in spite of the opposition he met with from the master, who said it was foolishness, Harry Paul plunged overboard, and swam to the bathing-place, where he dressed; and, saving that he was suffering from a peculiar sensation of stiffness, he was not much the worse.

Mark Penelly watched him as he swam ashore easily and well, and the bitter feelings of dislike which had for the time being lain in abeyance before the scene of peril of which he had been witness, began once more to grow stronger, completely changing the appearance of his face as now, to get rid of the thoughts that troubled him, he took hold of one of the sweeps and began to row.

"Nice lad, Harry Paul," said the master to him then.

"Yes, very," said Penelly dryly.

"Good swimmer, too."

"Yes," replied Penelly.

"Narrow 'scape for him, though, poor lad. Lucky thing we saw that the nets was overboard in time. If I was him I'd just give Zekle Wynn there the very biggest hiding he ever had in his life, that I would. He ain't content with doing a thing wrong, but he ain't man enough to own it. I haven't patience with such ways!"

Penelly did not speak, and Zekle remained silent, but he was evidently moved to indignation at what had been said, for he kept lifting his big oar and chopping it down in the water as if he were trying to take off the master's head.

The buoy outside the harbour was reached, however, directly after, and as soon as the oars were laid in all hands were busy for the next two hours shaking out and landing mackerel ready for basketing and sending across country to catch the early morning train.

It was soon known all over Carn Du that Harry Paul had had a very narrow escape from drowning, and knot after knot of fishermen discussed the matter and joined in blaming Zekle Wynn for letting the net trail overboard.

"Still, he must have been a foolish sort of a creature to go and swim right into a tangle o' net," said the man who always had his hands in his pockets.

"Not he," said old Tom Genna; "Harry Paul's too clever a swimmer to go and do such a thing as that."

"Here's Zekle Wynn," cried another eagerly, for such an event caused plenty of excitement, and was seized upon with avidity. "Hi! Zekle! it was you as left the net trailing, warn't it?"

"Skipper says so," replied Zekle grimly, as he took out some tobacco and made himself a pill to chew.

"You're a pretty sort of a chap," said another; "why, you'll be running the lugger on the rocks next."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Zekle.

"Well," said Tom Genna, "if I was Harry Paul, I'd knock you down with the first thing I could get hold of, capstan-bar or boat-hook, or anything."

"Ah, that's what our old man said!" replied Zekle coolly.

"You ought to be ashamed o' yourself, Zekle Wynn, that you ought, and I wouldn't sail in the same boat with you."

"No, it wouldn't be safe," said Zekle dryly.

"Yes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," said someone else angrily. "I don't like Harry Paul, for he's a regular coward—chap as hasn't had courage to take the big dive as yet; but that's no reason he should be drowned by a fellow who can't manage a drift-net no better than to leave half on it trailing overboard."

"Well, if you come to that," said Tom Genna, who was an authority in the place, "I think it was the skipper's dooty to ha' seen that his nets was all in the boat, and not leave it to a fellow like Zekle Wynn here, who don't seem to have so much brains as a boy."

"Quite right!" said Zekle, "quite right!"

"Yes: what I say's quite right," said Tom Genna; "but as for you, young fellow, you're quite wrong, and it's my belief you're about half out of your mind."

Zekle Wynn stared vacantly round at the speakers, and then, putting his hand to his head, he walked thoughtfully away.

"He is going wrong," said the fishing sage, nodding his head; and this formed a fresh subject for discussion, especially as one of the knot of idlers recollected that a second cousin of Zekle Wynn's was an idiot.

But Zekle Wynn was not going out of his mind, but, as soon as it was dark, straight up to the house where Mark Penelly lived with his father, and as soon as he had watched Penelly, senior, out of the house, he went boldly up and asked to see Mark.

The latter came at the end of a few minutes, looking curiously at his visitor.

"Sit down, Zekle," he said. "Brought a message?"

"No!" said Zekle.

"Brought up some fish, then?"

"No!" was the very gruff reply.

"Did you want to see my father?"

"No!"

"Then what do you want?" exclaimed Penelly sharply.

"You!"

"What is it, then, my good fellow?" said Penelly, speaking now in a haughty tone, for the man's way was rude and offensive.

"I want to know something," said Zekle.

"Then why don't you go to somebody else?"

"'Cause you know best what I want to know."

"Speak out, then, quickly, for I am busy," said Penelly, who, while in an ordinary way ready enough to chat and laugh with the fishermen, was at times, on the strength of his father's position as a boat-owner, disposed to treat them as several degrees lower in social standing.

"Busy, eh?" said Zekle scornfully. "I dessay you are; but you mus'n't be too busy to talk to me."

"What do you mean?" said Penelly hotly. "How dare you speak to me in that insolent way?"

"Insolent, eh?" said the man. "Ah! you call that insolent, do you?" he continued, raising his voice. "What would you call it, then, if I was to speak out a little plainer?"

"Look here, Zekle Wynn," said Penelly; "there are times when I come down to the harbour, and into the boats, and go fishing with the men; but recollect, please, whom you are talking to."

"Oh, I know who I'm talking to," said Zekle; "I ain't blind."

"If you speak to me again like that I'll kick you out of the house. How dare you come in here and address me in this way?"

"Where's your father?" said Zekle; "suppose I talk to him."

"Go and talk to him, then; and mind how you speak, sir, or you'll get different treatment to that you receive from me."

"All right, then!" said Zekle mockingly. "I shall go to him and tell him that, while I was busy shaking out fish in our boat to-night, young Harry Paul come swimming up, and our mas'r says, 'Come aboard,' he says; but Mas'r Harry Paul he says, 'No,' he says, 'I shall swim round,' he says, and he swims round our boat."

"Well, he knows that," said Penelly, looking at him strangely.

"And then I'm going to tell him," continued Zekle, "that as soon as ever a certain person who was aboard our boat sees young Mas'r Harry coming, he goes and sits on the other side."

"Yes, I did," said Penelly sharply.

"Oh, you did, did you? You owns to that?"

"Of course," replied Penelly scornfully. "What then?"

"What then? Ah! I'll soon tell you what then," said Zekle. "You ups with an armful of net, and just as young Harry Paul comes round under you, you drops it on top of his head."

"Hush!"

Mark Penelly sprang at the speaker and clapped his hand over his lips.

"I thought," said Zekle, freeing himself, "that it was only for a bit of mischief; I'd forgot all about young Mas'r Harry; but now I know as you did it to drown—"

"Hush!" cried Penelly again hoarsely, and his face was like ashes. "I didn't; indeed I did not, Zekle."

"Why, I see you with my own eyes," said the man.

"Yes, I did drop the net over, but it was only out of mischief. I did not think it would do more than duck him well. I never thought it would be so dangerous. I meant it in fun."

"But it *was* dangerous," said Zekle with a grin; "and as people know you hate Mas'r Harry, they'll say you meant to mur—"

"Hush!" cried Penelly again; and he clapped his hand once more upon the speaker's lips.

"Oh, that won't stop me from speaking!" said Zekle. "I'm going to tell all I know, and it's my belief as they'll have you up, and bring it in 'tempt to kill young Mas'r Harry."

"But you won't speak about it, Zekle," said Penelly imploringly.

"But I just will," said Zekle, "and I come to ask you what they'll do to you for it. I don't want to tell, but you see it's 'bout my dooty."

"I'll give you anything to be silent."

"But I must tell," said Zekle, shaking his head; "it's my dooty to, and I wouldn't hold my tongue not for twenty pounds."

Penelly gave a gasp, and in those few moments of thought he saw all the consequences of his escapade—the disgrace and shame—perhaps prosecution for an attempt at murder, for a magistrate might refuse to listen to his plea that it was only in fun.

But there was a gleam of hope. Zekle had mentioned money. He would not hold his tongue for twenty pounds he said. Perhaps he would. Penelly had not twenty pounds, nor yet five; but perhaps he could get it. Turning to Zekle then he said:

"If I give you ten pounds, Zekle, will you swear that you will never say a word?"

"No," said Zekle stoutly, "nor yet for twenty; and now I'm going to tell all I know."

As he spoke he turned towards the door, and Mark Penelly made a clutch at the nearest chair.

Chapter Three.

Harry Paul's Present.

Zekle Wynn already had his hand upon the door when, mastering the strange feeling of dread that had seized him, Mark Penelly caught him by the arm and held him tightly:

"Look here, Zekle," he said hoarsely; "that was all a bit of fun—a joke; but I don't want anyone to know. I'll give you fifteen pounds if you'll hold your tongue."

"No," said Zekle, stoutly; "it's my duty to tell, and I'm agoing to tell."

"Twenty pounds," cried Penelly.

"No, I said afore that I wouldn't do it for twenty pounds," said Zekle, with a very virtuous shake of the head; and as he made an effort to get away, Penelly, who felt desperate, offered him twenty-five pounds.

"Yes, twenty-five pounds, Zekle; I'll give you twenty-five," he cried.

"It ain't no use to try and tempt me, Mas'r Mark—it ain't indeed. I didn't ought to hold my tongue about it. No, I'll go and do my duty."

"But it will nearly drive my father mad," said Penelly imploringly; while Zekle's little sharp eyes twinkled as their owner wondered whether his victim could muster twenty-five pounds.

"I'm very sorry, of course," said Zekle; "but you see a man must do his duty. No, no, Mas'r Mark, you mustn't tempt me."

"I'll get you the money at once, Zekle," said Penelly, who saw that his visitor was trembling in the balance—that is, he appeared to be; but Zekle had make up his mind to have twenty-five pounds down before he entered the house.

"I didn't ought to take it, you know," said Zekle, hesitating.

"But you will, Zekle, and I'll never forget your goodness," said Penelly imploringly; and then hastily locking the door to make sure that his visitor did not go, he went out of the room straight to a desk in his father's office, which he opened with a key of his own, and returned directly with four five-pound notes and five sovereigns.

"I oughtn't to take this, Mas'r Mark," Zekle grumbled; "it ar'n't my duty, you know; and I wish you'd give me sov'rins instead of them notes."

"I cannot," said Penelly sharply. "It has been hard work to get that."

"Then I s'pose I must take them," said Zekle, "but it don't seem like my duty to;" and as he spoke he carefully wrapped up the notes and placed them with the gold in his pocket.

"Now, you'll swear you'll never say a word to a soul about this, Zekle."

"Of course I won't, Mas'r Mark. But it goes again the grit. I wouldn't do it for anyone, you know; but as you say it would be hard on your poor father, I won't tell."

Penelly bit his lips and said nothing, while Zekle went maundering on about his duty, and how unwilling he was to take the money, till, seeing an awkward look in his victim's eyes, he concluded that he had better go, and went out, turning at the door to tell Penelly that he might be quite comfortable now, and wishing him good-night.

"Comfortable, you scoundrel!" cried Penelly as soon as he was alone. "I shall never be comfortable till the news

comes in that you have been lost overboard in a storm. I've been a fool. I was a fool to do such a thing. I only thought it would give him a ducking; and I'm a greater fool to try and bribe that scoundrel. He'll be always bleeding me now. I'd far better have set him at defiance and bid him do his worst. Bah! I wish I was not such a coward."

"If I don't make him pay me pretty heavy for all this," said Zekle, chuckling to himself, "I'll know the reason why. Five-and-twenty pounds earned right slap off by just seeing that net pitched overboard! That's cleverness, that is. Now I'll just go up to Mas'r Harry Paul and see what he has got to say. P'r'aps there's a five or a ten to be made there. It's better than fishing by a long way."

Harry Paul's home was a pleasant cottage on the cliff-side, and on Zekle knocking the door was opened by Harry's widowed mother, who fetched her son and left the two together.

"Ah, Zekle!" cried Harry frankly, as he held out his hand, "I'm afraid I did not half thank you for helping to save my life."

"Oh! it don't matter, Mas'r Harry," said the fellow, smiling and shuffling about.

"But it does matter," said Harry warmly; "and I am very grateful to you. I am going into Penzance to-morrow, Zekle, and when I come back I'm going to ask you to accept a silver watch to keep in remembrance of what you did."

"Oh, you needn't do that, Mas'r Harry," replied Zekle; "but I thought I'd like to tell you, don't you know, all about like how it happened. I kinder felt it to be my duty, you see, and then if you liked to say to me, 'Here, Zekle Wynn, here's five or ten pounds for you for what you did,' why you could, you know; but if you didn't, why it wouldn't matter a bit, for I always feel as if it was a man's duty not to take no money 'less he's earned it."

"Ah!" said Harry, looking at him with quite an altered expression.

"You see, you don't know all," said Zekle mysteriously, as he went softly to the door, peeped out, and then spoke in a whisper.

"Know all!" said Harry. "Why, I know I was nearly drowned."

"Yes," said Zekle, going closer to him and taking hold of his pilot jacket, "you was nearly drowned; but how was it?"

"Some of your pile of mackerel net fell overboard and covered me up. It was very careless of you people."

"Mack'rel nets don't tumble overboard and nigh upon drownd people without somebody makes 'em," said Zekle with a cunning leer.

"Somebody makes them!" said Harry with his eyes flashing. "Why, you don't mean to say that anybody threw that net over me as I swam round!"

"Oh, no!" said Zekle, "I wouldn't say such a thing of nobody. Oh, no! 'tain't my duty to go about telling tales."

"Look here," said Harry sharply, "if you expect to earn any reward from me, Zekle Wynn, for telling how it was that that net came over me—and I own that it was very strange that it should just as I was swimming by—speak out like a man."

"Oh, no! I can't go accusing people of what they p'r'aps didn't do," said Zekle; "but look here, Mas'r Harry, have you got any enemies?"

"Enemies! no," said the young man. "Perhaps Mark Penelly is not very fond of me since we had that quarrel, but I've no enemies."

"Ho!" said Zekle with a peculiar grin. "Who was aboard our boat?"

"I did not see him as I swam up, but I suppose Mark Penelly was there."

Zekle nodded.

"Yes, and he walked round to the side; and I saw him, as I was shaking out the fish, go and stand by them mack'rel nets."

"And do you dare to say that he threw them over me?"

"Oh, no!" said Zekle, "I wouldn't say such a thing of anybody, Mas'r Harry; no, 'tain't my duty. I wouldn't accuse no one; but them nets was safe aboard one minute, and the next minute twenty fathom was atop of you; and if we hadn't hauled you out you wouldn't have been talking to me just now."

Harry Paul jumped up and began to walk about the room, his face flushed and his hands twitching.

"Look here, Zekle Wynn!" he said sharply, "I'm plain-spoken, and I like people to be plain-spoken with me. Now, mind what you are saying."

"Oh, yes! Mas'r Harry, I am very careful what I say, and I'll go now; but I thought it was my duty to come, and I said to myself, 'If he likes to say to me, "There's five or ten pound for you, Zekle Wynn," why, he could,' but of course I don't expect nothing for doing my duty."

"Oh, you don't expect anything?" said Harry sharply.

"Oh, no, Mas'r Harry, sir; I never expect to receive anything for doing my duty."

"And you thought it was your duty to come and tell me that Mark Penelly tried to drown me?"

"Oh, no! Mas'r Harry, sir—oh dear, no! I never said nothing o' that sort; I only said as the net was in the boat one minute and the next minute it was all over you."

"Same thing, Zekle," said Harry sharply. "And you didn't expect anything for coming and telling me this?"

"Oh dear, no! Mas'r Harry, sir," replied Zekle.

"Then you'll be disappointed," said Harry, smiling pleasantly, "for I shall give you something."

"Oh, thank you! Mas'r Harry, sir," said Zekle, whose face expanded with pleasure. A moment before he had not liked the way in which Harry had taken his hints; but now this declaration of an intention to give him something was pleasant, and he smiled quite broadly as the young man went to a cupboard.

"Will it be five or ten pound?" said Zekle to himself. "I'm making a good night of it this time, and if I don't—Don't you hit me with that there, Mas'r Harry! don't you hit me with that there!" he roared suddenly. "Don't you hit me with that there, or I'll have the law of you."



ZEKLE WYNN RECEIVES HIS REWARD.

"Get out of the place, you contemptible, tale-bearing sneak!" said Harry; and he accompanied his words with lash after lash of a big old-fashioned dog-whip. "How dare you come here with your miserable stories! Out with you, you dog, or I'll lash you till you are blue!"

There could be no doubt but that some of the strokes administered would leave blue weals, though Zekle did not get many. Four or five fell upon his back and sides, however, before he got out of the door; and he was just turning to shake his fist and vow vengeance when a tremendous lash curled round him, inflicting so much pain that he uttered a loud yell and ran as hard as he could to a safe distance, where he turned once to shout, "Yah, coward!" and then disappeared.

"Coward!" said Harry bitterly. "Well, people say I am. Don't be frightened, dear," he continued as his mother entered the room in haste.

"But I am, my dear," she cried excitedly. "What does all this mean?"

"I only used the dog-whip to a scoundrel—that's all," he said, with a reassuring smile; and as soon as he had pacified her he went outside to walk up and down and think about his late escape.

"No," he said at last after a long thought, during which he had gone well over his adventures that evening; "I will not believe that a man could be such a wretch."

He felt better after this and went in; but that night the excitement of the adventure and the effects of his immersion were sufficient to keep him awake hour after hour, while when he dropped off into an uneasy slumber it was for his mind to be haunted by dreams in which he was being dragged down into the depths of the sea by a strange monster that clung to his limbs and writhed about him, making him shudder as he felt the chilling embrace.

Again and again he awoke and tried to shake off the unpleasant sensation, but no sooner did he drop off to sleep again than the horrible dream came back, gathering in intensity as the time wore on.

Then came a variation. Mark Penelly was the creature that was trying to drown him; and as he dragged him down and down, lower and lower, into the depths, he kept telling him that it was because he was such a terrible coward, but that if he would dive off Carn Du into a ninth wave he would let him live.

This went on till it grew unbearable, so, leaping out of bed, Harry went to the window, drew up the blind, and threw

open the casement, to lean out and gaze at the grey sea, that looked so dark in the early dawn of morning.

It was as smooth as a pond, except where, with a low moan, it heaved up and beat against Carn Du, falling back with an angry hiss as if of disappointment, while all above looked calm and dark and starlit.

Away to the east, though, there was a faint light, telling of the coming day; and as Harry Paul stood there, with the soft fresh morning breeze blowing in his hair, he made up his mind that he would go and fish for three or four hours before breakfast, as he could not sleep.

A good wash made him feel fresher. Then dressing, he took a couple of lines from a cupboard down-stairs, and went out.

He had no difficulty in getting half-a-dozen damaged mackerel down in the harbour—fish that had been torn by the nets; but he was only just in time, for in the soft grey light he could see the gulls already busy floating down on their ghostly-looking wings in the gloom, uttering a mournful, peevish wail, and carrying off fragments of fish for their morning meal.

“Another ten minutes, and there would not have been one left,” muttered Harry, as he strode along the rock-strewn shore to where his boat was drawn up high and dry. He, however, soon had her afloat, and, taking one of the oars, he stood up in the stern and sculled her out with that peculiar fish-tail motion which is so puzzling to one not used to the custom.

Half an hour’s sculling took him out to a great buoy close by some sunken rocks; and having made fast his boat to the rusty, barnacle-encrusted ring, he proceeded to bait his lines, and lowered down the leads into the deep water below.

“What’s it to be this morning?” he said. “They ought to bite on such a tide as this.”

He held one line in his hand, twisted the other round one of the thole-pins of the boat, and then sat waiting. There was black Carn Du right in front, with the waters rising up dark and glistening, to fall back fringed with pale ghostly white.

Then, as no fish bit to take up his attention, he began to think of the great black mass of rock, and to ask himself whether it was worth his while to go that or the next evening, and, climbing up, take the plunge as he had seen so many young men take it before.

“If I did,” he said, “it would please a good many people, and they would no longer look upon me as a coward. I think I could—I feel sure I could. But if I did take the dive how people would triumph after all, and say that I was stung into doing it by what they had said!”

“No,” he added, after a little more consideration; “they may say what they like. I’ll hold to my determination. Coward or no, I’m not going to prove my courage for the sake of gratifying busy tattling people. Better remain a coward all my— Ah, that’s one!”

A sharp snatch at his line, followed by a long peculiar drag, told him what was at his bait; and after a little giving and taking, he drew a heavy twining conger eel over the boat’s edge, having no little difficulty in preventing it from tangling his line, for it was quite a yard in length, and proportionately thick.

His captive was, however, soon safe in the large basket, and he had hardly closed the lid and placed a boulder used as ballast upon it before a tug at his other line made the thole-pin rattle, and after a little hauling he dragged in a gloriously-coloured gurnard, whose outspread fins looked like the wings of some lovely butterfly. Then he drew in, one after the other, a couple of wrasse, all grey and green and gold, with their protuberant mouths and curious teeth, after which there was a pause, and, drawing up one of his lines, Harry placed thereon a much larger hook, bound with wire right up the cord that held it. Upon this he placed quite half a mackerel, secured it well to the hook with a piece of string, and then, throwing it over the side, he waited, after feeling the lead touch the rock below, and wondered whether he should capture what he believed to be lurking amongst the ledges of the piece of rock.

“I may either get a conger or a good hake,” he thought to himself. “There’s always someone glad of a good hake.”

He waited with all a fisherman’s patience, and, used as he was to such scenes, he could not help feeling gladdened at the glorious sight that met his gaze, for, one by one, the stars had paled, till only that named after the morning shone out resplendent in the now grey west; while to eastward all was blushing with bright red and gold and purple and orange, tints so wondrously beautiful and rich that Nature had enough to spare for sea as well as sky. While the latter was growing moment by moment more refulgent, the former caught the wondrous dyes, till the water seemed everywhere like molten gold with ruddy and empurpled reflections where the sea gave a gentle heave. Even the gulls and shags that floated on the tide seemed to be glorified by the wondrous colour, till Harry, as he sat there with the stout cord of his fishing-line twisted round his hand, felt how majestic and awe-inspiring was the coming of the new-born day, and involuntarily exclaimed:

“Who would stay in bed if they knew what the dawn is like on such a morn as this!”

So rapt was he in the grandeur of the scene that he had forgotten all about the object of his journey, but he was brought back to the matter-of-fact present by a tremendous snatch which jerked his arm hanging over the side, and made the cord cut so violently into his hand that he was glad to give the line a twist and set it free to run for some distance before he began to check it a little.

“It’s a monster,” he said, as he felt the struggles of the fish, which dragged so heavily that, to save his line from

breaking, as it was, in spite of giving and taking, nearly run out, he cast the boat loose and let it drift as the fish tugged.

It was not big enough to drag it along, but it had some influence on the boat, moving it slowly, and this eased the line, which Harry had hauled upon, so that he kept getting in fathom after fathom ready for the captive's next run.

This was not long in coming, for after keeping up a steady strain for about a minute, and drawing the fish, whatever it might be, nearer and nearer to the surface, there was a sudden snatch, and away it went again straight for the bottom like an arrow, and then right away.

"The line will break directly," thought Harry. "It must be either a great conger or a monster hake, or else it's a small shark. Small!—no, that it isn't!" he exclaimed as he felt himself steadily drawn along with the current; "I shall never get it."

Now he was able to haul in a little, the fish coming towards the surface in obedience to his steady drag; now it turned and went off again to the last yard of line, and then the boat was steadily drawn along, while Harry's wonder was that the strands did not break or the hook drag out.

"This comes of having good new tackle," he said; and then, "Ah, I must lose it if it pulls like this."

For the fish made so furious a strain upon the line that he felt that it must break; no such line could bear it.

He felt in despair, for he was all eagerness now to see the monster he had hooked, when a happy thought suggested itself, and in an instant he had made three or four hitches round one of the oars with the end of the line, and cast it overboard.

"There," he said, "you may tug at that, and I'll follow you."

Away went the light oar over the surface, bobbing down at one end, and raising the blade in the air, while, putting the other over the stern, Harry stood up, full of excitement, and began sculling after the novel travelling float, when a wild cry for help, that seemed to send a shudder through his frame, came from behind him over the surface of the sea.

Chapter Four.

A Fish not fished for.

Hake, conger, shark, whatever it might be, forgotten as Harry Paul heard that cry repeated. He had already begun turning his little boat, and then, bending to his task, he forced it through the water as he stood up in the stern, making the rippling waves rattle and splash against her bows as a line of foam parted on either side.

He could see nothing for the moment, but he knew that some one must be in deadly peril in the direction in which he had heard the cry, and, exerting all his strength, he made for the place whence he thought it must have come.

He was puzzled, for, save a few luggers swinging from the little buoys that dotted the surface of the sea, there was not a sign of an accident by the upsetting of a boat, or of any one struggling in the water. Everything looked bright and cheerful in the morning sun, and after sculling along for some time he was beginning to think that the cry must have been uttered by some sea-bird, seeming weird and strange in the early morning, when he suddenly recalled the fact that sound travels far over a smooth, calm sea.

Had he felt any further doubt it was solved on the instant by a repetition of the cry, this time clearer, and plainly to be interpreted into that agonising appeal that thrills the hearts of weak and strong alike—the one word "*Help!*"

And now, plainly enough, he could see the head of some one whose hands appeared at intervals above the water, evidently in a fierce struggle for life.

Whoever it was had lost his nerve and was in some peril, for though not above a hundred yards or so from the shore he was in the race of a fierce current that at certain periods of the tide ran so swiftly amongst the rocks that a strongly-manned boat could not stem its force.

"It must be some stranger," thought Harry, as he exerted himself more and more. "Poor fellow! I shall never get to him in time."

And then, with the big drops standing upon his forehead, he toiled on, his eyes fixed upon the drowning figure, and the feeling strong upon him of how awful it was for anyone to be called upon to yield up his life on such a glorious morning as this.

At times his heart seemed to stand still with the chilling influence of the horror he felt, for, in spite of his efforts, the boat seemed to crawl over the surface of the water.

He was now near enough to see that it was a man—evidently a bather—who was struggling for his life and in terrible danger. The poor fellow seemed to have gone out too far, and, in his ignorance, had been drawn into the fierce current—one that no one dwelling about Carn Du would have ventured to approach; and, unless help were soon afforded, there would be a dead body cast up somewhere by a weedy cove just about the turn of the tide.

Harry Paul's thoughts were busy, coward as he was, while his heart was beating so painfully that he seemed ready to

choke.

"I can only do one thing," he thought—"try to reach him with the boat. If I jump over and swim, I shall get there no faster, but if I do he will seize me in a drowning clutch, and we shall both go down."

A curious shuddering sensation ran through him, and the remembrance of what he had gone through on the previous day came back with a strange exactness, in which he seemed to feel once more the cold clinging touch of the net upon his bare skin, and for the moment he felt as if he were paralysed.

He shook off the horrible sensation, though, and, toiling away at his oar, sent the boat rapidly on, so as to get into the current at right angles to its course, and be swept on towards the drowning man.

The help must come quickly if it was to be of use, for the swimmer was becoming a swimmer no longer. The horror of his position had robbed him, as it were, of his knowledge, and instead of striking out slowly and calmly, almost without effort, and keeping his head as low down in the water as possible, he was making frantic efforts to raise himself from time to time, and beating the water with his hands.

Then Harry could see an effort of the reason made over the animal faculties, and for a few moments the drowning man took a few steady strokes, but only to utter a gurgling cry and throw up his hands, beat the water again, and go under.

The moment before Harry Paul seemed to have been exerting his full strength to force the boat through the water, but an accession of strength came to him, and with a few fierce thrusts he drove her bows into the edge of the current, which gave it so quick a snatch that it was whirled round, and its occupant nearly lost his footing; but he was too practised a boatman for that. Recovering himself directly, he planted a foot on either side, the oar bent in the water, and, getting the boat's head right, he forced her along farther and farther into the current, with which she seemed to race onward towards the drowning man.

He was quite a hundred yards from him yet; but rapidly diminishing the distance now, for the boat seemed to tear along; but Harry's heart sank lower and lower, and the chilly feeling of despair grew more strong as, just when he had reduced the distance to about fifty yards, he saw a hand appear for a moment above the water, and then disappear, leaving the glistening surface perfectly blank.

Harry uttered a hoarse cry as he still sculled along, his eyes fixed upon the spot where the hand had disappeared, and then tracing in imagination the course the drowning man would take as he was swept along beneath the surface, he made for the place.

It was in imagination, but his mental calculation was not far wrong, for within a few yards of where it might be expected, and not ten from where he was now sculling, he saw something roll up as it were to the surface, there was a gleam of white in the sunlit water, and then it was disappearing again, when, acting upon the impulse of the moment, Harry loosened his hold of the oar, took two steps forward over the thwarts, and leaped into the sea.

As Harry Paul disappeared in the swift current the boat rocked and danced, and was sent many feet away by the impulse it received; but as he rose to the surface, regardless of everything but the drowning man he was striving to save, the boat swept by him, lightened of its load, and was whirled slowly round and round.

It was a matter of impulse, and Harry Paul's experience should have taught him that keeping perfectly cool, and urging the boat along to where he had last seen the body, was the surest way of rendering help. But there are times when even those of the strongest mental capacity find it is difficult to retain their presence of mind.

It was so here. Led away by his feelings and the gallant desire he felt to succour someone in distress, Harry had as it were kicked away what meant life for both; but he did not realise the danger then.

As he plunged beneath the surface of the racing current he recalled the fact that he was almost fully dressed, for the thick flannel jersey he wore seemed to cling to his arms and impede his action, but that was forgotten directly, as he rose in the water and looked around.

There was nothing visible. He was too late, so it seemed; but he swam strongly on, the cold immersion seeming to lend additional vigour to his frame.

Now there was something!

No; it was only a bunch of seaweed floating by, with its long streamers spreading out in the clear water like a woman's hair. He was too late, too late, and— Yes, that was something white down in the water rising now, and— Yes, he had it—a man's wrist, and the next moment he had given it a drag which brought its owner's head above the surface.

He was not dead, for, as Harry Paul turned him so that he floated on his back with his face above water, the drowning man began to make frantic clutches with his hands, so that it was only by loosing his hold and getting behind that Harry Paul avoided what would have been a deadly embrace.

He knew well enough what he ought to do, namely, seize the drowning man by the hair, and then turn upon his own back and float, drawing the other after him; but on trying this a difficulty met him at the offset: the man's hair was very short; but he got over it by grasping his ears, and then, throwing himself back, he struck out with his legs so as to keep afloat and go with the racing current.

Chapter Five.

Coals of Fire on an Enemy's Head.

Harry Paul had been so busily employed in avoiding the drowning man's grasp that, for the moment, the boat was forgotten. Now, however, that he had mastered him, he raised his head a little to look; but the boat was far away beyond his reach, and progressing at such a rate that he could not have overtaken it even had he been alone.

A feeling of dread would have mastered him now, but for the strong nerve that he brought to bear. There was no help there. They were several hundred yards now from the shore, and every moment being carried farther away. The part they were in was hidden by the great black pile of rocks by Carn Du from the little town and harbour, so that their peril could not be seen. It was evident, too, that the loud cries for help had not reached the ears of those about the harbour, and that no one was anywhere about the boats that swung from the buoys. On the one side there was the open sea, on the other the piled-up granite, which rose up like hand-built buttresses, composed of vast squared masses rising tier upon tier. At their foot the foam fretted and beat, and the forests of seaweed washed to and fro, presenting an almost impenetrable barrier to any one wishing to land; though here it was impossible, for the racing current formed another barrier, which a boat propelled by stout rowers would hardly have passed.

The act of his keeping the drowning man's face slightly above the water had a bad effect for Harry Paul, inasmuch as it made him he was trying to succour struggle and endeavour to clutch at the arms that held him. Once he could do this, Harry knew that his case would be hopeless, for from that death-grapple there could be no escape. He held the man then firmly and swam on, feeling himself moment by moment grow more weary, for he was swimming in his clinging clothes, and unless help soon came he knew that he must loosen his grasp and strive to save his own life.

Terrible coward as he was deemed, though, this was not in Harry Paul's disposition. He possessed all the stern, dogged determination of the true Englishman—that determination which has made our race renowned throughout the length and breadth of the world. He had determined to save this drowning man; he felt that it was incumbent upon him to give his best efforts to that end; so, setting his teeth, he cleverly managed to elude every clutch made at him, and swam on.

He did not know where he was going, but he felt that his only chance was to go with the current till he should be swept near some of the outlying rocks, when they might be drawn into an eddy, and so be able to climb up on to the shell-covered stones, and wait there till they were seen.

Try how he would, after some struggle with his captive it was impossible to help feeling a chill of dread, for he knew that he was swimming more laboriously, and that his limbs were like so much lead; but still he struggled on. Every now and then, too, the water washed over his face, telling him that his position was lower, and at last, when all seemed to be over and his strength was ebbing away, he raised his head for a last farewell look-out for help, and one of his hands struck against a rock.

Almost as he touched it the stream bore him by, but there was another mass close at hand, hung with tresses of seaweed and thickly strewn with mussels, and here he got a hold for a few moments, in spite of the drag of the rushing water.

It required no little effort to hold on and support the drowning man as well, but even a few moments' rest gave him some return of power, and he was helped now by his companion, who in a feeble struggle to get at and clutch something, caught at the seaweed, into which his fingers convulsively wound themselves, and thus gave Harry Paul a hand at liberty for his own use.

It was some time, though, before he dared to do more than cling to the rock. He was too weak and helpless. At the end of a few minutes, however, he felt stronger, and summoning up his energies for the effort, he got one hand higher, then the other, and clung there half out of the water.

There was less drag upon him here from the stream; his breath came more freely, and with it returning strength, sufficient to enable him to climb right out of the water, lie face downwards upon the rock, and, stretching down his hands, clasp the wrists of his companion, whose fingers seemed to have grown into the tough weed to which they clung.

This act brought his face within a foot or so of his companion's countenance. Their eyes met, and in his surprise Harry Paul nearly let go, for he now for the first time realised the fact that he had been risking his life in an endeavour to save that of the man whom he had heard accused of an attempt to destroy him the night before.

It was a strange position, and Harry Paul, as he bent down holding Penelly there, recalled all he had heard, and, in spite of his manly feelings, he could not help believing that in a sudden fit of dislike, or under a momentary temptation, Penelly had thrown the nets over him, though evidently repenting the next moment of what he had done.

Penelly, too, was fast recovering his strength, and with it the horrible sense of confusion was passing away. He, too, realised that the man whom he had so cruelly assailed was now sustaining him after evidently swimming to his aid.

He gazed for a few moments straight into Harry's eyes, and in their stern gaze as they seemed to read him through and through, he saw, or fancied that he saw, his own condemnation, and that Harry was going to thrust him from his hold.

It was a strange reaction as he hung there—he, the brave and daring swimmer, famed for his dives off Carn Du, held up by the man he had always denounced as a terrible coward; whom he had hated from boyhood almost, without cause, and whom really, under the impulse of a horrible temptation, he had on the previous night tried to hamper in

his swimming, though not really to drown.

Neither spoke, neither stirred for some time. There was no great strain upon Harry's hands now, since Penelly's grasp was desperate. The former was content to lie there gazing into his enemy's eyes, for his strength was returning with every breath; that breathing was less laboured, and, in place of his heart throbbing and jumping, sending hot gushes of blood, as it were, choking to his throat, it began to settle steadily down to its ordinary labours in the breast of a strongly-built, healthy, temperate man.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all;" so the great writer has said; and truer words never stood out bold and striking from the paper on which they were written.

In his abject misery and dread, Mark Penelly saw, in the stern gaze before him, anger and a vindictive desire for revenge; he saw therein fierce hate, and an implacable, unchanging condemnation; he felt that Harry was sustaining him there where he had dragged him to make his sufferings more acute, and that, after holding him up for a while, he would loosen his hold, causing him to sink at once into the deep water by the rocks, and be swept away by the tremendous current.

He judged Harry Paul, in fact, by the same measure as he would have meted out to an enemy himself; and so terrible were his thoughts, so horrifying to him was the thought of the death from which he had escaped, that he was robbed of all energy; he had not strength to do more than hang there clinging to the weeds with desperate clutch, and, with only his head out of water, gaze up in Harry's stern eyes.

And they were stern, for strange thoughts had intruded themselves, seeming to take possession of the young man's mind, and making him speak and act contrary to his wont.

At last he spoke, and the trembling wretch beneath him shivered and uttered a despairing cry.

"How came you in the water?" said Harry sternly.

"Oh, in mercy, spare me, Harry Paul," shrieked the miserable wretch, "and I'll tell you all."

"Then he *did* throw the nets over me," thought Harry, in spite of himself; and he began to wonder why it was he did not make an effort to drag Penelly on to the rock.

"Tell me, then," he said in a low hoarse voice, that he did not know for his own.

"I will—yes, I will tell you," said Penelly; "only promise me you'll spare me."

"Tell me this moment," said Harry sternly.

"You are going to let me sink down," cried Penelly in horror-stricken tones. "Oh, Harry Paul, my good, brave fellow! help me out—save me—save me!"

A curious smile curled the young man's lip, one which horrified Penelly, who shrieked out:

"Yes, yes; I'll confess all. Zekle Wynn threatened to tell—to tell—"

"That you threw the net over me last night?"

"Yes—yes—I did; but it was an accident—an ac—"

"What?" roared Harry.

"No, no—I confess," said Penelly feebly, for he felt that his last hour had come. "I did it. I felt tempted to do it when you swam round; but Heaven's my witness, Harry, I only meant to duck you. I meant to help drag you out after a minute, and so I did."

"How came you in the race this morning?" said Harry, in a cold, cutting voice.

"I'll—I'll confess all," said Penelly faintly, "only help me out and save my life. I'll go away from Carn Du, Harry Paul. I'll be like your dog in future, only save me."

"The dog of a terrible coward?" said Harry coldly.

"Oh, no; but you are not a coward, Harry. Help!"

"How came you in the race?"

"I—I—swam off to the lugger. I meant to swim off and cut her adrift—the lugger Zekle was in—he said he'd tell you. I got into the water this side of Carn Du, and meant to swim to the buoy, cut her adrift, and swim back, but I was caught in the race. Help me out—I'm dying! Oh! help me, Harry! help!"

Harry Paul made no effort to drag the wretched man out, but gazed thoughtfully downward into his eyes, while, under the influence of that stern gaze, Penelly quailed and shuddered, his blue lips parted, his eyes seem to start, but he could not speak.

"Mark Penelly," said Harry at length; and his voice sounded deep and angry, and like the utterance of a judge, to the despairing wretch beneath him—"Mark Penelly, I never did you any harm."

Penelly stared at him wildly, but he could not answer.

“You have always made yourself my enemy, and tried to ruin me in the sight of others. It is to you I owe the character of being the greatest coward in Carn Du. You said I was a miserable cur—a dog. Every dog has his day, and now it is mine. It is my turn now, and I mean to have revenge.”

As he spoke his hands tightened round the shivering man’s wrists till they seemed like iron bands. He changed his position rapidly, and as Penelly closed his eyes, lowered the miserable wretch down till the water covered his lips, and then, by one strong effort, dragged him out on to the weedy rock, where he lay motionless and half dead, his eyes fixed upon Harry, and evidently waiting for the end.

“Poor wretch!” said Harry to himself, as he gazed down at the helpless man, and, loosening and taking off his woollen jersey, he wrung it tightly, getting out as much water as he could, and then drew it on the stony cold figure lying in the washed-up dry brown weed. This, too, he dragged over him, piling it up in a heap, to try and give him some warmth, while the exertion sent a thrill of heat through his own half-naked frame.

Fortunately, the sun’s rays came down hot and bright, and the rock grew warmer, so that by degrees the terribly void look began to leave Mark Penelly’s face, and at last, when Harry held out his hand, saying, “Do you feel better?” Mark Penelly caught it in both of his, clung to it, and, turning half over on his face, laid his forehead against it, and, forgetting his years of manhood, lay there in his weakness, and sobbed and cried like a child.

They were on that rock till nightfall, when a passing lugger bound for the fishing-ground answered their hail, and sent a boat to take them off, giving them the news that Harry’s boat had been found ashore, with only one oar, and Mark Penelly’s clothes beyond Carn Du, and that they were mourned as lost.

This mourning was soon, however, turned into joy; but before the two young men parted at the harbour Mark said humbly:

“Forgive me, Harry, and I’ll try to be another man.”

With a frank smile on his face Harry held out his hand, and giving the other’s a hearty grip he exclaimed:

“Ask God to forgive you, Mark; I am going to forget the past. I thank Him that I saved your life.”

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