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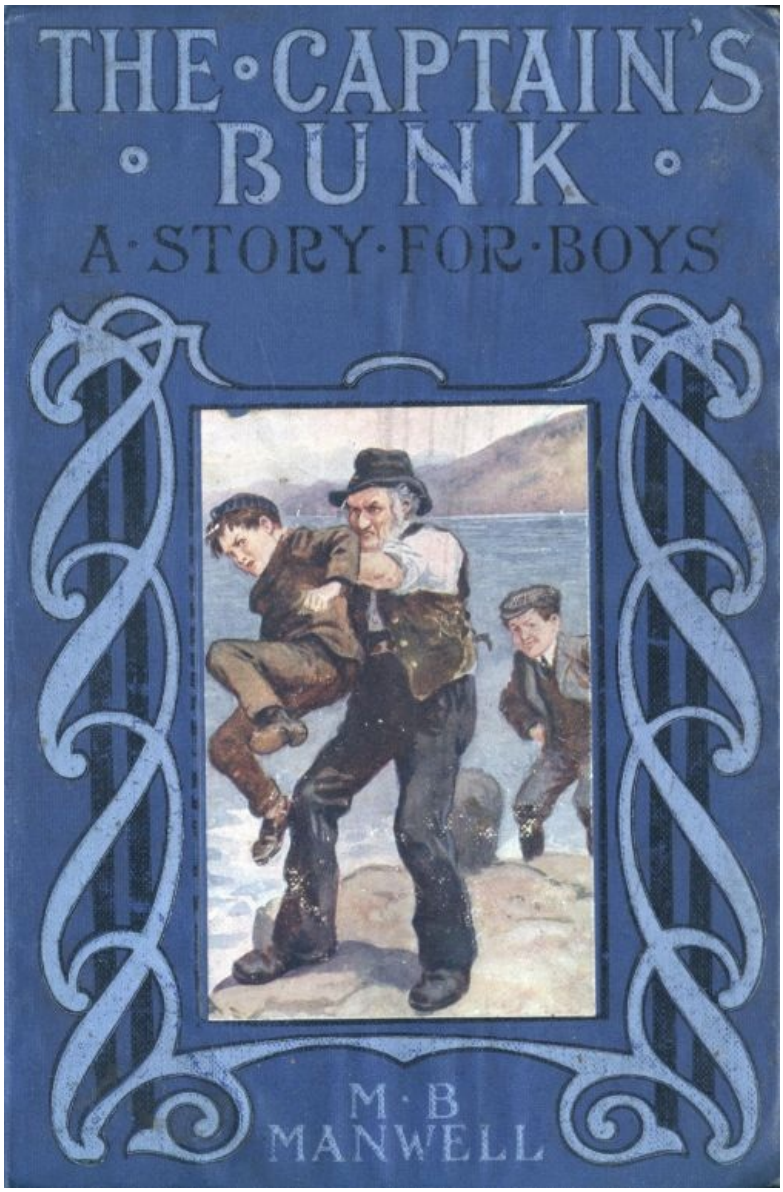

Cover art

THE CAPTAIN'S BUNK

A STORY FOR BOYS

BY

M. B. MANWELL

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WITH COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE CAPTAIN'S BUNK

CHAPTER I

A PLAGUEY PAIR

'Do the thing that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles.'

If anybody wanted to go down and have a look round Northbourne for himself, it would be necessary to take a railway journey as far as Brattlesby town, and then tramp the rest of the road, unless a friendly chance befell the traveller of a lift in some passing vehicle.

There had never been so much as a talk of extending the railway line to Northbourne, which was a quaint little fishing village tucked away under the shelter of a long stretch of downs. It consisted of a few small thatched cottages that had seated themselves, as it were, in a semicircle round the tiny bay, to peep out from its shelter at the far, open ocean, the highway of waters on which the outward-bound liners loomed like grey ghostly shadows as they passed.

There were but two of what is known as gentry's houses in Northbourne. Oddly enough, each of them finished off the half-circle of cottages, and in that way they stared across the bay at one another, face to face.

One of the two, the Bunk, had been for some years inhabited by an elderly half-pay naval officer, Captain Carnegy, and his motherless boys and girls. The other house was the Vicarage, the habitation of Mr. Vesey, the good old vicar, his invalid wife, and a pair of excitable Yorkshire terriers, Splutters and Shutters, thus curiously named for the sake of rhyme, it is to be presumed. They were brothers, and as tricky a pair as one could meet, ever up to their eyes in mischief from morning until night. Indeed, Splutters and Shutters kept what would have been a still, staid household in nearly as great a ferment as did the captain's crew the Bunk across the bay.

'They two dogs, they be summat like a couple o' wild b'ys; they keeps the passon and the mistress in, not for to say hot water, but bilin' water, for the livelong day!' constantly declared Binks, who was the handy-man at the Vicarage, and, in fact, handy-man at the little church as well, he being both factotum and sexton. Binks was a worthy old soul whom the terriers led a troubled life by their destructive capers in the garden and lawn, which he vainly tried to keep trim. Still, on the whole, Binks, harassed as he was by the dogs, was apt to thank his stars that Splutters and Shutters were not actually boys; such boys, for instance, as those of the captain at the Bunk across the bay, who were a sore handful, as any one could see for themselves, without the prompt testimony of all Northbourne to that effect.

'You be a plaguey pair, you b'ys!' was the unfailing greeting of Binks, when he encountered Geoff and Alick Carnegy.

'Come, you shut up, Binks! You surely would not have us a couple of mincing girls peacocking round in this fashion, would you now?' And the captain's boys affectedly pirouetted up and down on the shingle below the low wall of the Vicarage garden, laughing boisterously the while.

'I dunno, young musters!' rejoined Binks, contemplating the ridiculous spectacle with much the same gravity as he would have regarded a funeral. 'P'raps it'd be a sight better if so be as you *was* gells. That is, gells after the pattern of your sister, Miss Theedory!'

'Oh, Theo! Well, she's different!' and Geoff sobered down his antics, and stood still to retort. 'That just reminds me I've brought a note for Mrs. Vesey from Theo. I'll run up to the house with it. I don't remember if it wants an answer; but don't you go away, Alick. Wait for me!'

'All right!' Alick nodded, and swinging himself up on the wall, he watched Binks, who was patiently pottering over the carrot-beds. The ceaseless tussel he had to induce these refractory vegetables to make a fair show was one of the minor crosses of the old man's life.

Of the two Carnegys, Alick was the least reasonable, if the word reasonable could be applied to either of 'them young limbs,' as Northbourne privately called the captain's boys. He, however, managed to sit still for the space of five minutes or so on the wall, whistling vigorously.

'I 'opes as you be a-gittin' on brisk with your book-larnin', Muster Alick?' Binks lifted his head, after the prolonged silence, to regard, with a critical air, the boy who sat dangling his feet above. Binks had a fashion peculiar to himself of staring at most people in a reproving manner, as though he had just found them out in some dark transgression. It was possibly a habit due to a lifelong experience of the faults and the failings of human nature, and it was one which stood Binks in good stead, giving him an austere and awe-inspiring appearance. Especially on Sundays did this detective air prove helpful, when he did duty as parish clerk in the quaint, old-time

church on the shore, where it served to keep the small fisher-folk in proper order.

'Oh, bother!' said Alick shortly. 'We have enough of that sort of talk from old Price. He pegs away at us to get on, get on, until I'm sick of the sight of books, and pen and ink!'

'Ay?' Binks leaned on his spade, and, resting, stared fixedly up into the face of the boy-speaker. 'Sick of it, be you? And what be you supposin' as Muster Price feels? A deal sicker, I make no doubt, toiling and moiling every week-day as the sun rises on, a-tryin' to till sich unprofitable ground as your b'y-brains! I dunnot 'spose as you ever looked at it from his pint of view, did ye?'

Certainly Alick never had. It was a new idea to him to wonder how poor Philip Price, the tutor, liked walking every day, rain or shine, over from Brattlesby, the little inland town some three miles off, in order to teach Geoff and himself just so much and no more as either of the unruly brothers chose to learn; for the Carnegy boys were 'kittle cattle,' as the North-country folk say, to deal with. Their father, though he had been, in the old days, skilled at commanding men, knew little or nothing of managing children. When his wife died and he retired from the service, he found his hands full, with the most unruly crew that he had ever encountered in his long naval career. Not gifted with much patience, he soon gave up trying to guide the helm of that unmanageable ship, his own home. Betaking himself to his special hobby, which was the compiling an epitome of all the naval engagements that have taken place within the memory of man, he left his boys and girls to grow up anyhow or, to put it more exactly, just as they pleased. His conscience was satisfied when he had placed his young folk in the hands of one whom he knew to be a genuinely upright Christian gentleman, Philip Price, the tutor from Brattlesby town.

The boys themselves were no fools. They knew in their hearts that it was but a slack rein that guided them. There was a good deal of forcibly put justice in the suggestive question of Binks, and for a few seconds Alick, nonplussed, kept silence, swinging his feet a little faster under the fire of the sharp, light eyes that glinted from beneath the old man's bushy eyebrows.

'But—but, I say, it's Price's business to teach. That's what he has got to do, you know!' he stammered out at last, rather uneasily.

'P'raps you was a-goin' to say as it was what he was made for, purpose-like!' observed Binks ironically. 'Well, maybe so! And, maybe also, who can tell, it's what the Lord has made you for likewise, Muster Alick. Time may come as you'll be tramping every day, wet or dry, to teach ongrateful, onruly b'ys according to their station.'

What d'ye mean?' A furious red flush rose on Alick's cheeks, and he glared back into the face of the bent old man, who stood still so fixedly regarding himself.

'Mean? Why, just what I'm a-sayin' of!' was the calm rejoinder. 'I've heard tell,' went on Binks, undisturbed by Alick's wrathful looks, 'as Muster Price is the son of a reverend genelman as was pretty high up in the Church. When the poor soul was took off, suddent, his fam'ly had to help theirselves in the world, and this one, bein' the youngest, and enjying terrible poor health, ain't fit for nothin' but teachin' b'ys. That's how he keeps the old lady and hisself in bread I've heard say. And if so be'—Binks straightened himself, and drew out his spade from the earth—'as I was him, I'd a deal rather break stones, or else try to grow them plaguey carrits in damp clay! But,' he added sardonically, as his outburst calmed down, 'in course if, as you think, it's what he was made a-purpose for—— Well, I say no more. I never was one to hinterfere with, or so much as even to question, the will of the Almighty in aught. I'm not like some in that.'

'How you do run on, Binks!' sulkily put in Alick. He felt rather cornered by the old man's plain speaking. 'And it's all very fine for you to talk; you and Theo say the same things. But if you'd to grind away, when the sun's shining and the sea dancing before your eyes, at rubbishy old Latin grammars and arithmetic, and all the rest of it, you'd be the first to grumble. Oh, I wish a hundred times in the day that I was only Ned Dempster, who's out all hours, free as any lark!' ended Alick, with a sudden burst of energy that nearly sent him toppling off the sea-wall.

'Ned Dempster!' echoed Binks in amaze. Then, after turning over a few spadefuls of earth, he looked up to say epigrammatically, 'Well, young muster, what Ned is, I was. And what I am, Ned will be! There! D'ye take my meaning? 'Cos I, when a b'y, was like Ned, free as any lark in the air, so when I came to be a man without no book-larnin' in the pockets o' my brain, I had to grope my way about in the world. Many's the time it's bin all dark, round and round, 'cept in the faces of other folk where I seed the light o' understanding shinin' about them things as I couldn't make out. 'Tain't so to say comforable for a grown man to feel that; but it's what you'll come to, young muster, if you gits your will to go free as free!' and Binks set to work on his refractory carrots with renewed energy.

CHAPTER II

A NOVEL TRADE

There was something so quaint about Binks, the old handy-man, that nobody resented his preachings at them. Not the Carnegy boys, at least, not even Alick, who was no fool. He knew, if he had allowed himself to say so fairly and squarely, that a man without education must of necessity make but a poor show in the world among his fellow-men. But Alick was incorrigibly lazy, and he had grown up so far without attempting to get the reins of his idle, pleasure-loving self between his own fingers. Geoff, on the other hand, though a regular pickle of a boy, did manage to scramble through his lessons, and to present a more decent appearance therein, doubtful as it was if he thoroughly digested what learning he took in.

He was a greater favourite in the neighbourhood than Alick; and as he came rushing, helter-skelter, along the garden-path, cramming Mrs. Vesey's answer into one of his crowded pockets, one could not be surprised at his popularity, for a merrier-faced boy than Geoff did not exist. And his looks did not belie his laughter-loving nature. The boy overflowed with mischief and good-humour. His was one of those natures that never fail to take their colour from their surroundings. Geoff was influenced this way and that by every wind that blew. Had it not been for Alick's bad example, the boy would have been as orderly and obedient a pupil as even his tutor could desire. As matters stood, however, Geoff trod on the heels of his mutinous elder brother in every mischief hatched at the Bunk. There was this distinct difference between the rebels, however: Alick's tricks and practical jokes, as well as his rebellion against authority, had in them the strain of *malice prepense* which made of them blacker faults, while Geoff's misdemeanours were committed in the name of, and for the sake of, pure mischief. Splutters and Shutters instinctively recognised this kindred spirit in the boy, as they tore madly after him through the garden, barking vociferously their affectionate admiration.

'Binks, I say!' Geoff almost yelled in his endeavour to drown the terriers' voices. 'Who do you think has come back to the village? Why, Jerry Blunt, with one arm, poor chap, from that North Pole expedition. He has given up the sea; and you'll never guess the land trade he means to take up, not if you sat down for six weeks to think it out. You couldn't, so I may as well tell you. Training young bullfinches to sing tunes. Ho! ho! He! ho!' Geoff Carnegy had a most extraordinary laugh of his own, and it rang out on the crisp salt air.

'Who told you? How did you hear?' shouted Alick from above.

'Why, Jerry himself has just been up to the Vicarage to tell Mr. Vesey all about it, and—— But, wait a bit, I'll come up beside you and finish the story!' and Geoff clambered up alongside of his brother.

'Whatever's that you're a-sayin' of, Muster Geoff?' Binks, with spade in mid air, was open-mouthed.

'Jerry Blunt—you remember old Jerry, Binks, don't you? He has come back from the North Pole.'

'Oh, comed back, has he? Jes' so! Well, I ain't surprised.'

'No, you never are, Binks!' Alick drily observed. 'Take an earthquake to wake you up!' he added under his breath.

'And do'ee say as the lad's left an arm behind?' inquired Binks.

'Yes, I did,' rejoined Geoff. 'He's up at the house yonder, in the study, telling the vicar how it was done. Mrs. Vesey didn't know; she told me about the bullfinches, but she couldn't say how the arm was lost. I should say it must have been nipped off by a Polar bear, shouldn't you, Binks?' Geoff's eyes protruded excitedly as he mentally pictured the suggested nip.

'Polar bear? Hum! Well, it might ha' bin. I never fancied bears. There's a deal o' low cunning about a bear; no slapdash courage, so to say, same's there's in a lion or a leopard, but jes' a cruel, slow, deliberate intention to kill, like a nor'-east wind as blights and nips, sure as sure. Once, I remember, there was a travellin' bear came Northbourne way. 'Twas when I was a b'y, same's your two selves. This yere bear had a man with it, a mounseer, to judge from his tongue. He wasn't a bad chap, and couldn't well help bein' a Frenchy. He wasn't never unkind to the bear; he fed him, and saw to his straw bed o' nights, same's the creature was his own child. But as I've said, there ain't no nice feelin' about a bear; you can't win 'em, nohow.'

'Well, but what happened?' impatiently broke in Alick. 'Did the bear do anything?'

'I'm a-comin' to that, muster, if you'll give me time; but you're the hurryin' sart, you are. I should think as the teacher-genelman must have his work laid out to keep up with you, you be so mortal anxious to learn.'

Alick reddened, and glared down at Binks's unruffled countenance; but he forbore to retort, recognising that the old man's powers of repartee were superior to his own.

'Oh, come on, please do!' persuasively said Geoff, thrilling to hear the sequel of Binks's story.

'Well, as I was sayin',' Binks relented and went on, ''twas when I was a b'y, and a rare fuss it did make. I was one as saw the thing with my own eyes. That mounseer chap had divided his dinner with the bear one day; the greedy baste had swallowed his own share, and was watching his master out of them cunning eyes bears has. Of a suddent he clawed away the victuals and bolted them; then there was a shriek from poor Frenchy, and we all saw as the bear had him in a grim death-hug. I tell you it took a few Northbourne men to separate them two, and when 'twas done, I don't forget the sorry sight the unfortunit' man was. There warn't no hospitals nor nothin' in them days, and the doctor he had a tough job to bring the poor furriner to, and patch him up, I tell you!'

'And the bear?' struck in Geoff. 'Did they do anything to the bear?'

'Only shot him dead; nothin' else. 'Twas the doctor hisself as shot him; we didn't want no savage wild beasts round Northbourne woods. But, as I was sayin', there's no nice feelin' about bears, and I make no doubt 'twas owin' to one of them Polar beasts as Jerry lost his arm, but we'll hear about that from hisself. Poor lad, he wasn't a bad sort, Jerry. You could always take his word for whatever 'twas. I never knowed Jerry tell a lie, and you can't say more'n that for a genelman born. B'ys, I'd rather, when my own time comes to be laid by in the churchyard yonder, have it in writin' over me, *He never telled a lie*, than I'd have anything on arth writ there.'

'Well,' said Alick reflectively, 'there's one thing I can't make out, and that is, what brought Jerry Blunt back to Northbourne? If I'd his chances, and got free away from this stupid hole, catch me ever coming back, that's all!'

'Ah, so you say, muster!' Binks had returned to the refractory carrots once again. 'But you'll find out, one of these days, that there's summat in each of us like cords that draws a man to the old home. 'Tis nature, as the Almighty 'as planted deep in our hearts, a-workin' in the wust of us and in the best of us alike. Why, 'tis the same thing, that hankering, we—some of us—has for a further-away home still, the homeland beyond.'

As Binks leant on his spade, and pushed back his straw hat to gaze over the blue waters to the misty, far-off horizon, a softer look stole over the wrinkled face. He had forgotten, the mischievous boys perched on the wall above, forgotten Jerry, the returned wanderer, in the thought of that home to which he would willingly enough depart, where the old man's human treasures were already housed, and where they awaited himself.

'I say, let's get down, and slip round to the lane; perhaps we might catch Jerry, and walk home with him.'

It was Geoff's suggestion; and the brothers slid down from the wall to the beach on the other side to make off, amid a distracting volley of heart-rending howls from the betrayed Splutters and Shutters.

CHAPTER III

'MISS THEEDORY'

'Oh dear! I wish I could make it come right!'

The speaker was a tall girl of eighteen or so, who sat with her thumbs pressing her ears, and her fingers shading her eyes, to shut out the sights and sounds of the blue waters that rolled up and broke in crisp waves on the stretch of yellow sands under the windows of the Bunk dining-room.

Theo Carnegy had been trying her hardest for a couple of hours to add up the housekeeping bills for the week. It was a task the girl dreaded always, and on this particular day the figures seemed unusually contrary and obstinate to cope with. Somehow, they utterly refused to come straight and tally with the money she had been entrusted with to lay out. The bristling difficulties seemed all the more unmanageable because the sunshine that afternoon was so bright, and the wind so fresh; while the boat that belonged to the Carnegy family lay tossing at anchor within sight, as if inviting the girl down for the greatest enjoyment of her life—a pull across the bay.

But there was good stuff in Theo, gentle and yielding though she looked, with her sweet, soft face, and the fair waving hair surrounding it. She was the one of all the Carnegys who had deliberately given her heart to God's service. That she had done so spoke out of her clear, steadfast eyes, and in the peaceful lines of her mouth, and more than all, in her unflagging determination to keep on straight at what she knew to be her duty, without allowing herself to be beguiled to this side or to that of the narrow path. Eighteen is not a very advanced age, even regarded from the point of view of her brothers and little sister; and Theo, who passionately loved the sea, had a great struggle to keep her blue eyes fixed on the tiresome figures, which

would not come right, struggle as she might to make them. It never occurred to her to shirk a difficulty in any sense; her nature was such that she must grapple with a duty, however distasteful, once she felt she was appointed to fulfil it. Her mother had died when Theo, the eldest Carnegy, was fifteen, and Queenie, the younger, only two years old. So, already, she had been for three years her father's housekeeper. A certain sum of money was given into her hands every week by the captain, and there was an end of the matter as regarded him. He wanted to hear nothing about ways and means, certainly no details regarding household management. All such was forbidden sternly; the captain's time was valuable, he imagined, it being dedicated to the great object which he hoped to achieve before he died. Distinctly, the naval battles of the world throughout the ages were more important than the everyday skirmishes in his own household. Theo, therefore, knew that on no pretext whatever might she venture to appeal to her preoccupied father in her difficulties; but she was faithful to her charge, and gallantly enough fought with the distracting items and their corresponding figures, which should have agreed, but didn't. It was uphill work, however, for the youthful housekeeper.

'Can't you come out yet, Theo? The boys are across the bay at the Vicarage, and we could have the boat all to ourselves, if you would only leave those nasty sums!'

It was a patient little voice that interrupted the distracted girl. Its owner had been into the room three times already, with the same object, to ask the pathetic question.

'Oh, don't worry me, Queenie dear! I'm just as anxious as yourself to go on the water; but there's three halfpence gone astray, and I—I can't find it out!' half sobbed Theo, who was getting nervous over the troublesome figures.

Queenie, a small, sedate maiden of five, a miniature of Theo in face, stood silent in the doorway for a few seconds, wistfully piecing out the possible meaning of her tall sister's bewildered grief. Then she disappeared.

'Theo, look!'

Theo glanced through her fingers, and Queenie, who had been struggling with the clasp of what looked like a doll-purse, proudly spread out three halfpennies so remarkably clean and bright that they had unmistakably been carefully washed by their small owner.

'You may have these, Theo, 'stead of the three you've lost. Please take them. I don't weally want them, for I've still got five ha'pennies left!' The small woman spoke urgently.

'Oh, my darling Queenie, you don't understand! I could have done that myself—I could have put in three halfpence, and made all right, but it would have been all wrong in another way. Listen now, and I shall try to explain to you.'

Placing her arm round Queenie's little neck, Theo tried to make the child understand that such a proceeding would not be fair, nor upright, nor honest. It would not be getting out of the difficulty; it would rather be making it a deeper one.

'What's difficulties?' abruptly asked Queenie, with her round, solemn eyes gazing into her sister's face.

'Difficulties are things made on purpose to be conquered in the right way,' said Theo, after a pause of consideration. 'I think,' she added, 'that God puts them in our way, very often, just to try us.'

'Oh, if God makes difficulties, they must be quite right, mustn't they, Theo?'

'Yes, yes!' was the quick response; and Theo, fired afresh, shut out the fair picture of the tiny speaker whose grave, sweet face looked out of a tangle of fine-spun, golden hair. Covering her eyes, she applied herself with renewed vigour to the detested task before her.

Queenie, who had oftentimes witnessed such struggles before, knew better than to utter another word; the child stood perfectly still. There was no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock and the cracking of the seeds with which Miss Pollina, the old grey parrot in the cage by the window, amused herself unceasingly from morn until night. Even Miss Pollina seemed to be aware that perfect quietness was necessary for the present, and she had hushed her usual chatter.

'I've got them! I've got them!' cried out Theo, suddenly throwing up her pencil in the air, and showing all her white teeth in a joyous laugh over her triumph. Pollina instantly lifted up her head and raised her voice also in a succession of deafening screams of congratulation, while Queenie, always sedate as regards laughter and chatter, silently performed, with a quaint gravity, a careful, slow minuet round and round the room.

'I lent three halfpence to Geoff to make up his sixpence for the hospital-cot collection at the children's service last Sunday. He had only fourpence halfpenny. I remember it all now. Oh, how stupid I've been, to be sure!' It was an intense relief to have chased successfully the truant halfpence. 'Now, Queenie,' went on Theo gleefully, 'in five minutes I shall be ready for you, and we are going to have a good time in the boat. Get your hat on, deary.'

'May I bring some of my doll-people, Theo?' Queenie turned as she was disappearing through the doorway to ask anxiously.

'Oh dear, yes! As many as you can carry!' Theo called back absently, for she was finishing the column of figures, with a flourish of triumph.

In five minutes more 'Miss Theedory,' as all Northbourne called the captain's eldest daughter, was rowing across the bay with Queenie sedately facing her in the Bunk boat. Queenie had seated several members of her waxen family on either side of her, and taking them an airing was a serious responsibility for their anxious little parent. She was in truth over-burdened with family cares, being the owner of no less than thirteen dolls of various sizes and degrees of beauty. 'Miss Queenie's baker's dozen,' the boys Geoff and Alick loved to tease her by calling them.

At the Bunk there was a tiny, three-cornered room overlooking the bay, too small for any purpose whatever, even for a storeroom. This niche had been given up to Queenie as a play-room. In it the child kept her thirteen children; and, in addition, all the accumulated toys of the family which had come down to herself, the youngest Carnegy, were therein hoarded and stored by that most staid and careful of little maids.

'Where is us going to, Theo?' sedately inquired Queenie, after she had settled her family to her mind in the boat.

'Across to the Vicarage, first. We are going to have tea with Mrs. Vesey. I wrote this morning to say that we should come. And then, on our way back, I shall pull round to old Mrs. Dempster's; I want to have a talk with her about Ned. You won't mind sitting in the boat if I tie her to the old punt, will you, deary?'

'Oh no!' tranquilly said Queenie. The little maid was quite as much at home on the sea as on the land, for the Carnegy young folk took to the water like ducklings, from the time they could walk. The family boat, 'The Theodora,' christened after Theo herself, was in daily use in the bay, which was generally well sheltered, no matter how fierce the storms that raged out their fury in the deep waters beyond. 'Is Ned a naughty boy?' inquired the little girl presently, her watchful eyes fixed on the waxen ladies and gentlemen who lay back languidly when they did not abruptly slide altogether down to the bottom of the boat.

'Well, Ned's not a bad boy exactly!' said Theo slowly. 'He's not quite satisfactory, though. I'm afraid our Alick is too much with Ned; they are putting mischief into each other's heads, if I'm not mistaken!' Theo had a trick of talking confidentially to her little sister, as if she were grown-up enough to understand that this world is not made of play-days. Possibly that was one of the reasons why Queenie seemed so sedate and solemn.

'Alick's going to be a sailor, and find the North Pole,' observed Queenie, administering a quiet box on the ear to an ill-behaved doll that wobbled with the motion of the boat in a manner that was enough to render anybody who watched her quite sea-sick. 'Who lost the North Pole, Theo?' demanded the child.

Queenie's questions were usually of a most unexpected nature, and were occasionally comical enough.

'Oh, nobody, of course!' laughed Theo. 'What a queer mite you are, deary!' Then she went on gravely, 'Finding the North Pole means trying to reach and to see, with human eyes, what I, for one, don't believe human beings will ever live to behold. It is one of God's mysteries which man has never yet penetrated, perhaps never was meant to penetrate.'

'What's mysteries?' Queenie of course thirsted to know.

'Dark, wonderful things; possibly things that it might hurt us to see or to know. I've heard Mr. Vesey say that when the fever to find the North Pole gets into the blood it never leaves a man until life perishes. That's why so many have been already lost in the attempt. They will persist, and nature gives out. But here we are at the Vicarage pier. Jump out, dear, and I'll tie "The Theodora" safely up.'

CHAPTER IV

BINKS'S BIT O' TEACHIN'

An uproarious welcome awaited the captain's daughters as they stepped out of their boat on the little pier belonging to the Vicarage. Splutters and Shutters scrambled to meet the visitors, barking out hospitality in their customary violent fashion. Behind them hobbled Binks, eager to help 'Miss Theedory' fasten up the boat, privately sceptical of the young lady's capacity to do so.

'Oh, Binks! How d'ye do?' politely asked Queenie, who, having disembarked her waxen family, was endeavouring to protect them from the frantic welcome of the terriers, both of which seemed ready to eat up the doll-guests, so glad were they to see them.

'Sadly, missy; I'm but proper sadly!'

'What is it, Binks?' sympathetically asked Theo, shaking out her blue-cotton skirts, and drawing on a pair of gloves, for Mrs. Vesey was peculiarly dainty and sensitive about trifles. Though an invalid herself, the poor lady was always exquisitely dressed, maintaining as a reason that if the human body be the temple of Christ, then it must be the bounden duty of the Christian owner not only to keep it wholesome, but also to adorn it, making it fair without, to match the fairness within. Not only in her own person did this dainty gentlewoman carry out her theory, but she looked for it in the persons of her visitors. Theo invariably respected her wishes by appearing before her trim and trig.

'Tis jes' they rheumatics, Miss Theedory!' answered Binks cheerfully, for all the world as if his aches and pains were so many honours. 'But there, what's 'ee to expec' at sixty-seven? People's jints bain't made to hold out for ever-'n-ever. Will 'um now?'

'No, they won't!' joined in Queenie comprehendingly. 'Miss Muffet's jints are giving way, too. Just look, Binks!' She held up for inspection an elaborately dressed lady, whose arms and legs were in such a tremulous condition that their total lapse from the body to which they belonged would have been no surprise.

'I shall ask father for some of that famous liniment of his, Binks,' said Theo. 'I could send you over some in a little bottle; the boys shall bring it this evening.'

'If you ask me candid, I should say that glue would be the best liniment to patch *them* jints!' Binks was stolidly contemplating the loose condition of Miss Muffet's limbs.

'We're at cross purposes!' laughed Theo. 'Come along, Queenie; there's Mrs. Vesey standing at the drawing-room window waving to us. We must not keep her waiting. Can't you leave your doll-people in the boat, dear? Binks will see that the dogs don't worry them to bits.'

'Ay, ay! That I will, missy. Bless 'em both, they're picters, they two, as taut and trig as you please. God give 'em smooth seas to sail over!' added the old man under his breath, as he watched the captain's daughters cross the lawn above.

Time was, far back in years, when Binks had watched with pride such another maiden as 'Miss Theedory,' the daughter God had given, or, rather, had lent, for a little while, to the parents who idolised her. The frosts of death nipped the human flower. Slowly, surely, it faded, until the little home it had gladdened and made fair was empty and dark, like the hearts left sorrowing. Long years ago though it was since the blow had fallen, still not yet was the wound healed over. Behind the austere front and grim temper of old Binks, the memory of his maid Bessie lived fresh and fragrant as the girl herself had been. There are some of us who, loyal ever to the love rooted deep in our hearts, thus keep green the memory of those 'faces we have loved long since, and lost awhile!'

'She's rare and sweet, is Miss Theedory,' murmured the weather-beaten old man, when the sisters had disappeared, and he turned to fasten the boat to the pier-head. 'But I make no doubt she've her peck o' troubles, too, what with them limbs of young brothers, and the captain so uplifted-like that he can't give a hand to help her rule 'em. Yes, Miss Theedory has no easy life of it, though she be a born lady. 'Tis a world o' ups and downs, this is.'

'Hilloa, Binks! Oh, I say!'

The old man wheeled round to find Geoff and Alick had unexpectedly returned.

'Whatever's ado now? What's brought 'ee both back?' snapped the old man crustily. The boys were anything but pleasant interruptions in his eyes.

'Oh, we got tired waiting about for Jerry. He hasn't come yet. And we've just seen our boat come into the pier, and we want it to go for a row,' both boys spoke at once.

'Ye want the boat, do 'ee now? Well, then, ye can't get it, that's all!' Binks faced round upon the boys, who were trying to push past him and jump into the boat. 'Miss Theedory, she says, says she, "Binks, I looks to you to see arter that boat for me!" and with that she stepped up to the house, she and little missy, to see the mistress. 'Tain't likely I'm a-goin' to 'low her to find no boat waitin' for her, bym-bye, when she's ready to go back 'ome. You jes' be off, young musters!'

'That's all nonsense! It's no use of you showing fight. We mean to have the boat. It's our boat, and Theo can walk home; do her good, too.'

Alick spoke sullenly, and pushed past Binks on the slippery little pier. But he reckoned without counting the cost. Binks, though rheumatic and a trifle bent, still retained some of the strength that had made him a byword as an athlete in his young days. With a touch of angry red in his brown, wrinkled cheek, and a spark of wrath in his deep-set eyes, he seized the boy neatly

by the back of the collar and the band of his Norfolk tweed jacket. It was useless for Alick to splutter and howl and threaten. Old Binks swung him, as though he were a kitten, over the edge of the pier, while Geoff fairly doubled up in a wild ecstasy of laughter.

SWUNG HIM AS THOUGH HE WERE A KITTEN.

SWUNG HIM AS THOUGH HE WERE A KITTEN.

'Tis this way I'll serve 'ee, if so be as you wants to, interfere wi' me doin' of my dooty, young sir!' croaked out the sturdy old veteran.

'Let me down, I say, let me down! Oh, I'll pay you out!' screamed Alick, maddened more by a sense of humiliation than of terror, for none of the Carnegy name dreaded a ducking in the sea.

'There ye be, then!' Binks at last deposited his wriggling burden flat on the pier. 'Now, p'raps ye'll understand the way an honest man dispoges of obstructions in the path o' dooty! You're an obstruction, you are, muster; and if so be as you lay the lesson to heart, the bit o' teachin' on my part will be wuth while.'

'I'll pay you out. See if I don't!' repeated Alick, sidling hurriedly off, with a parting shot in the shape of the coward's favourite threat.

'Oh, come!'—Geoff was at his heels,—'the old chap is very game. You must allow, too, that he was in the right, Alick, and we were wrong.'

Clear-sighted Geoff never hesitated to render justice to others. But Alick was different. Baffled and furious, he slouched away, hatching secret revenge upon the old man who had so determinedly baulked his will.

CHAPTER V

BREAKERS AHEAD

Ned Dempster was certainly the sharpest of all the boys in Northbourne. Naturally sharp, that is to say, for he, in common with Alick Carnegy, was incorrigibly idle, and Ned's talent of ability was therefore allowed to rust from disuse.

The Carnegy boys and Ned were in the same class at Sunday school, a class taught by Theo. The rest of the boys comprising it being dull and lumpish, it was only to be expected that a sharp-witted lad like Ned stood out brilliantly from his neighbours, attracting by his intelligence the attention of his teacher as well as her young brothers.

Ned Dempster was an orphan who had been brought up by his grandmother, Goody Dempster, the oldest inhabitant of the little fishing-village, an aged woman whose skin was baked brown by the sun and the salt sea-breezes until she had more the appearance of a New Zealander than an Englishwoman. Pitying the boy, as well as being considerably interested in his intelligent answers in class, Theo began to have him a good deal at the Bunk. She found many little offices there for him, such as to look after and keep tidy 'The Theodora,' the family boat, and to help in the obstinately unproductive garden. In this way the acquaintance between the three boys became a week-day as well as a Sunday one. Alick and Ned, in particular, rapidly found themselves to be kindred spirits. In each was ingrained a powerful love of adventure. Alick, a great reader, who had devoured already his father's little library, which was made up for the most part of books on seafaring subjects, found in Ned Dempster a listener who hungered for as much of that exciting fare as Alick could manage to retail second-hand.

For a long time the darling topic that absorbed their individual attention was pirates. The boys were never weary of rehearsing all the thrilling scenes of pirate-life which Alick had either read or heard of. In these lively pastimes Geoff willingly shared, lending a hand and a stentorian throat to the exciting work, though his tastes did not lie in that direction to the same extent as did those of his brother and Ned Dempster. Still, to be dressed in fierce red sashes, to wear elaborately corked moustaches, to be armed with clumsy, antique weapons which represented cutlasses, and to board, with ringing shouts, the beached-up fishing-boats in search of slaves, was a delightsome diversion. And perhaps to Geoff its greatest charm was that there was plenty of noise about it.

In course of time the joys of pirate-life palled. Next, there set in an extended course of terrible shipwrecks to order; these catastrophes being altogether independent of the weather. Into this game, which was not so exclusively manly, the many dolls belonging to Queenie were pressed. Time after time, these waxen ladies were bravely rescued and ceremoniously restored, dripping from the waves, to their anxious little owner, who, truth to tell, caught more colds than one in tending the shipwrecked doll-people.

But, in after days, Alick and Ned struck out quite a new line. Late and early they were found poring over atlases; drawing charts upon everything and anything, promiscuously, in the Northbourne landscape. Their daily conversation consisted of mysterious whispers about marching Polewards; about dangerous floes, and about camping out on the ice. At this juncture Geoff threw up his partnership in the games, which had become over-serious for his light-hearted, fun-loving nature. Not for him was there any attraction in the great mystery of the North Pole.

The imagination of Ned Dempster, on the other hand, took fire over the marvellous adventures, the awe-inspiring dangers and hardships of those explorers who, hitherto, have failed to attain the great object. This, in truth, was an aim to live for, to perish for, if need be; and as time went on, the boys became closer intimates than ever, particularly as nobody else took any interest in the one topic that had seized, with iron grip, their youthful imaginations. Perhaps the fact of the indifference of others bound the two closer together.

Alick grew worse and worse over the preparation of his lessons for the tutor. The routine and discipline of the schoolroom became too irksome to be borne. Consequently, punishments and detentions and complaints were the order of the day at the Bunk, to the despair of their tutor, Philip Price, a quiet, not over robust-looking young man, who had qualified for the Church, but as yet had failed in getting a living. Meantime he taught the young Carnegys every morning, and made up a slender income by giving afternoon lessons elsewhere.

The young man and his widowed mother, after their home was broken up by death, had sought a hiding-place far from the summer-friends, who fell away so quickly in the 'day of trouble.'

'I'll work for you, mother dear; never you fear about the future!' Philip had bravely declared. Poor lad, he had gallantly striven to do so, but sometimes he felt as though every man's hand was against him, so fruitless were his struggles. It is hard work to force one's way inside the world's pitilessly closed doors.

Certainly, Philip Price might have had his chances, as they are called, if he had not been so bent upon entering the clerical profession. His mother's relatives were City men of some repute, and a sure footing among them might have been gained by the young man, had he chosen to relinquish his dream. But Philip did not so choose. Even after he had fully qualified, and the living he had made so sure of stepping into passed into the hands of others, and it seemed as if the labourer were not 'worthy of his hire,' Philip did not regret his choice of a career.

'It will come right, mother, don't you doubt it,' he persisted. Meanwhile something else came. Failing health was the cross that Philip Price was required to shoulder. He grew painfully thin as time went on; his tall, elastic figure acquired a stoop; and there came, to stay, an anxious, upright

line between his eyebrows, that spoke of mental worry.

'Philip dear,' his watchful mother, quick to note these signs, laid her hand on his shoulder to say, 'these pupils try you overmuch. I know they do!'

'Nonsense, dear old mater!' evaded Philip, imprisoning the wrinkled hand. He had come in looking unusually spent, and thrown himself on the hard, slippery sofa of the cheap lodging the Prices called, nowadays, their home.

The truth was the young tutor had begun to tire woefully of the daily grind he had taken up so blithely. It was the incorrigible Carnegy boys who were his special worry. His other pupils, a meek, small boy and his shy sister, though they would never set the Thames on fire by their wit, at the same time would never goad their teacher to desperation by mutinous, unruly ways. But Philip Price never carried tales out of school. Not from himself did his mother learn how tried the tutor was, but, with a woman's instinct, she divined the cause.

'I wish, dear, you had never seen that family, the Carnegys,' she said plaintively. It was a chance shot, of course, but Philip started up alert.

'I've been told a good deal about them, only to-day,' went on the widow, taking up some fleecy knitting. The mother and son were sitting in the twilight, and knitting needed no spectacles. 'It seems they are an ill-governed pack, the young people, neglected by their father, and allowed to grow up anyhow, people say. Philip, I feel quite positive that they try you beyond your strength. Is it not so? Tell me, my dear.'

'Mother,'—Philip's thin face flushed as he spoke hurriedly,—'is it quite fair of you to quote "they say" about people whom you don't know? The Carnegys are not an "ill-governed pack," I assure you. The boys—my pupils—are, I grant you, unmanageable young rebels; but the others—Miss Carnegy and her little sister—they are——' Philip stopped abruptly.

'Well, Phil?' His mother raised her head quickly to glance at the troubled face opposite.

'They are as sweet and gentle-natured as they are fair!' said Philip in a low voice.

'I should like very well to see and know these Misses Carnegy for myself,' presently observed Mrs. Price; and Philip noted the faint, jealous displeasure in her voice.

'Mother,' he laughed in a boyish way, 'one of those Misses Carnegy, as you call them, is so charming that you could not resist taking her in your arms and setting her on your lap!'

'Oh, they are only children, these girls?'

'One of them is,' rejoined Philip, after a hesitating pause. 'She is a child of five. But the other Miss Carnegy is grown up; she is the eldest, and the mainstay of the family. There is no mother, you see.'

'Ah! Poor dear young things! Well, but, my boy, the thing troubling me most is that you should be condemned to such poor work as teaching, when, by rights, you ought to be filling a far different position. Oh, Philip, to think with your fine abilities you should be nothing better than a mere drudge! I often wish, dear, that you had not been so obstinate. You might have had a capital position by this time, with one or other of your uncles in the City.'

'Hush, mother, please!' Philip raised his thin hand. 'You know that from my childhood I've desired to be a soldier of Christ. If there be no opening prepared for me as yet, it must be that I am not fit for the work. In God's own good time He will point the way. I am content to wait that time, mother; and,' added the young man softly under his breath, 'if it be that the opening never come in this life, well, we know that all things are possible to Him, without any feeble help from us weak mortals.'

'Dear boy,' sighed the widow, 'your patience shames my discontent. But, you see, it tries a mother's heart sorely to see her child stranded high and dry, while others, not half so fit, rush in and win the prizes of life.'

'Bide a wee, mater, bide a wee! Everything comes to the man who can wait, as the old proverb says. But I must confess I am at the end of my patience with those young scamps, the Carnegy boys.'

'Speak to their father, Philip. Rouse him up to rule in his own house,' said Mrs. Price energetically.

'I really think I must,' assented Philip; and he did.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE MOTHER

The next day the harassed tutor bearded the lion in his den.

'I really must have a few words with you, captain!' he began nervously enough.

'What on earth's the matter, Price? What's wrong now?' testily demanded the captain, grievously annoyed at being disturbed over his ponderous literary labours.

'It's the old story,' said Philip dejectedly. 'The fact is, the boys are getting beyond me, Alick especially so.'

'Well,' said the captain, fidgeting impatiently with his pen as he sat surrounded by waves of MSS., 'thrash them, can't you?'

'I'd rather try any other means than that!' was the quietly spoken answer.

'Hasn't the pluck in him for it!' was the thought that passed through the fiery old sailor's mind. But if he had noted the calm smile of a self-controlled nature that flitted across the face of the young man standing opposite him, the captain would have rapidly changed his opinion as to the lack of pluck in Philip Price.

'Oh, well, what do you want me to do, eh? You really can't expect me to come into the schoolroom and horsewhip the young scamps for you! You see for yourself how my time is occupied on a most important subject.' The captain waved his pen over the closely-written sheets before him.

'Perhaps not. But I really must ask you to reason with Alick, if not to punish him. It is imperative that something of the sort must be done. It comes to this, captain, I don't feel that it's quite honest to be taking your money for the mockery of teaching the boys, particularly Alick!' As he forced himself to speak thus, a dark-red flush rose to Philip Price's brow, for he was one of the over-sensitive folk.

'Pshaw, man! What a fool you must be!' The blunt captain was at the end of his patience. He was quivering to get back to his work. 'Besides, boys will be boys all the world over. Alick is no worse than others, I suppose. You're too conscientious. It's absurd!' ended the sailor in a more kindly tone, after he had pushed his spectacles up into the roots of his iron-grey hair, to take a leisurely look at the earnest, agitated face confronting him.

'Now, I'll tell you what, Price!' he began again—'the best thing you can do is to go and talk the matter over with Theo. That girl can do anything with her brothers. She's got a way that some women are born with—not all women, mind you, but my Theo has it. Just go and consult her, and let me get on with my work, I beg of you. I am going over my MSS. for the fifth time, young man! That will give you an idea of my perseverance with difficulties. Follow the example, and you'll soon conquer those young limbs. Now, good morning to you, Price, good morning!' and Philip was hastily bowed out of the stuffy little sanctum, with its piles of MSS. and its odours of stale tobacco.

'Theo's the one to settle it all!' cheerfully muttered the captain, as the tutor's footsteps died away. 'She's such a sensible little woman, and has such a talent for managing and organising; she takes after me!' he added, with a complacence that would have received a rude shock by a little plain speaking as to those duties close at hand in his home that he was daily neglecting, in order to follow a will-o'-the-wisp in the shape of literary success.

'Miss Carnegy, the captain has referred me to you about a matter I have been forced to mention to him.'

Philip Price was standing in the doorway of the tea-house, as the Carnegys called the rustic erection at the end of the long, unproductive garden, hanging sheer over the little rocky headland on which the captain had built his bunk, when he came to settle at Northbourne. A large part of the Carnegys' lives was spent in the tea-house, for as a family they loved the open air.

It was Queenie's schoolroom, in spring, summer, and autumn. The two fair heads raised at the sound of Philip's voice belonged to Theo and her pupil. They were busy over the Monday Bible-lessons, it being a wise rule of the young teacher to follow up the lessons of Sunday while they were still fresh in the childish memory of her little charge.

'What a contrast!' inwardly groaned the tutor as he took in the peaceful scene, and compared it with the one he had so recently quitted, in despair, where Geoff and Alick had that morning well-nigh goaded him to frenzy by their rebellious conduct. Alick had been in one of his worst moods, and Geoff had caught the infection. Books had been flung up to the ceiling; the ink-bottles deliberately emptied; and the rebels daringly shouted 'Rule Britannia!' from the top of the table on which they had leaped, brandishing the fire-irons. The tutor knew that he could have severely chastised one of the boys, and conquered him with ease, but he could hardly cope at once, single-

handed, with the two. He therefore felt it to be the most dignified thing to leave the schoolroom in silence. All this he told, in a few brief words, to Theo, unwilling as he was to burden her youthful shoulders, already overweighted with many cares.

'I'm sorry, Mr. Price, so sorry!' Theo spoke humbly, and her sweet face coloured from chin to brow with vexation. 'It's hard for you to be subjected to such treatment. The boys are truly unmanageable. But, indeed, they have good hearts; they will be so repentant for their shocking behaviour by and by.'

'They must say so, if they are,' said Philip, firmly, his pale face growing set. 'I must have an apology from them before I can resume the lessons, whatever may be the cost.'

'Of course! oh, of course!' hurriedly assented Theo, her fingers working nervously. There were breakers ahead, she foresaw. The idea of Alick, or Geoff either, apologising! 'I shall go to them, and do my best to bring them to reason,' she said presently.

'Thank you! I am sorry that the matter should vex *you*!' was the grave reply; and lifting his hat, the tutor departed home.

'Vex me!' murmured Theo, leaning her head out of one of the open windows of the tea-house, and staring absently down upon the waves leaping over the black rocks below. 'Vex me! It's more than that. Oh, it's too bad that all the burden should fall on me! Father *ought* to look after the boys. It's too bad!' she repeated.

Then the sea and sky were blurred, and a vision took their place—a vision of a sweet, fading face; hands outstretched in pleading; and a loved voice, long since dumb, rang in her ears: 'You will promise, Theo, to be a little mother to the boys, and help them over the rough places in life's journey, as I should have tried to do? God will help you, dear. He will ever be ready with His aid!'

How vividly it all came back to the girl, that dark time in her young life when the dear, tender mother was called from out their midst. When all things, in heaven and earth alike, were shrouded in the pitiless gloom which hid the face of her Heavenly Father from the despairing daughter. What a chill, empty, rudderless home it was for the terror-struck children, with no one to look to for guidance! Father was away at the far ends of the world on his good ship, and mother—ah, farther off still was the mother, who had slipped out of the little home. Theo remembered, with a pang, the clinging hands of the desolate boys and the baby, Queenie, which had stirred her out of her own stupor of sorrow. It was borne in upon her, then, that she must step into the dead mother's empty place; and, frail, weak girl though she was, she had done her brave best to fill it ever since. She knew well, none better, that God had indeed helped her daily in her efforts hitherto. Lifting her tear-stained face, Theo told herself that He would do so still, for 'His mercies never fail.' With a silent little prayer for strength and patience, she left Queenie in the tea-house while she went indoors to confront the rebels as courageously as she could.

CHAPTER VII

MUTINY AT THE BUNK

'Boys!' Theo's clear treble voice rang through the din that was shaking the very pictures on the walls of the Bunk dining-room.

'Why, it's Theo, I declare!' shouted Geoff, the first to hear his sister. 'We're in a state of mutiny, Theo! Isn't it fun?' He shrieked in his glee.

'We've turned on old Price, and completely routed him off the decks, and we've seized the ship. We're in sole command of the Bunk—hooray!' Alick, his face flushed with triumph, his eyes dancing with wicked mischief, executed a hornpipe in the middle of the dining-table in furious style and making a hideous clatter, shouting the while—

'Will ye hear of Captain Kidd,
And the deeds of which he did,
All upon the Spanish main,
Where so many men were slain?'

'Won't you get down, boys dear, and tell me quietly what has maddened you so this morning?' Theo, who had been standing transfixed, spoke at last, looking calmly at her excited brothers, and her voice, so evenly modulated and gentle, had an instantaneous effect. The dreadful din and noisy dancing abruptly ceased, while the rebels regarded her with much the same sullen stare as one encounters from a drove of Highland cattle when molested.

'Where's Price? Have you seen him?' suspiciously asked Geoff. 'Has he been reporting us?'

'He'd better not try on that game, I tell you, the coward that he is!' growled Alick.

'I don't know about Mr. Price being the coward,' pointedly said Theo. 'It isn't usually the fashion among brave men for two to set on one, is it, boys dear?' she added tranquilly.

Geoff gasped. Then his mouth, opening to sharply retort, shut with a click. He knew that his sister, though only a girl, was perfectly right. It had been an unfair, uneven conflict. Theo put her finger on the blot with remarkable accuracy for a girl; two to one must always be unfair, and a rush of shame tingled over him.

Not so Alick. He would not allow himself to be convinced.

'I'd like to know what right has Price to grind us down?' he muttered, gloomily frowning at Theo. 'He's an oppressor, that's what he is! But I'll soon let him see; I'll pitch into him, if he dares to show his white face here again, I tell you! Down with tyrants!'

'He isn't likely to show his face here,' said Theo, loftily regarding the inflamed countenance of her brother. 'That is,' she continued, 'not unless he receives an ample apology from each of you for this morning's work.'

'Apology!' shouted—almost yelled—Alick. 'Never! Don't you believe it, Miss Theo! You think you can do most things, but you won't bend us to that!' Rub-a-dub on the dining-table hammered the furious boy's toes and heels, as he broke out into another hornpipe.

'Won't you come down, dears?' again pleaded Theo as gently as before. 'Come to the tea-house, and tell me exactly what the trouble was from the very beginning,' she said persuasively.

'Oh, we'll tell you!' eagerly assented the boys, with one voice; and scrambling down from the table, each slipped an arm through Theo's, and walked away with her, both talking at once, excitedly endeavouring to make the best of their case in her eyes. They were genuinely fond of their elder sister; principally, it may have been, because she never scolded or flouted them, however badly they behaved. Theo's way was different. It was by gentle means she sought to lead, not drive, her rebellious, hot-headed young brothers back to the path of duty from which they were so constantly straying.

'What did you want, did you say?' she asked, bewildered by the two angry voices full of complaint on either side of her.

'You be quiet, Geoff, and let me tell her, said Alick, in a domineering tone. 'I'm the eldest!' That being a fact, Geoff could not well contradict it, and Alick triumphantly went on, 'You see, Theo, this is how it all began. We asked Price, civilly enough, this morning to allow us a whole day off on Wednesday next, instead of the usual half-holiday. And I'll tell you why we were so anxious for a whole day. You know Jerry Blunt?'

Theo nodded. Everybody had heard of the wanderer's return to Northbourne.

'Of course you do. Well, but perhaps you didn't know that he has set up as a bird-trainer, because he can't do any work since he lost his right arm, and he is bound to make a living somehow. Jerry told Ned Dempster that he was going to Brattlesby Woods all day Wednesday to seek for young bullfinches, and he also said that we might go with him, if we cared to, and help search the nests. Wouldn't that have been splendid? Now, wouldn't it?'

Theo nodded again—emphatically. She thoroughly sympathised with all the boys' pleasures and pursuits, even when she could not join them.

'But that cantankerous old Price refused us flat. He said we'd been far too idle, me especially, to yield us one single hour extra; and he hammered away about his responsibilities as he has the cheek to call *us*. Now, I ask you, wasn't that enough to make a fellow just mad? Wouldn't you have done exactly as we did yourself, Theo?' Alick gave his sister's arm an impatient shake.

'Well, no. I don't think I should have danced so madly on the table to the horrible music of the fire-irons. And I *do* know I should not have insulted a gentleman. Another thing'—Theo skilfully reserved her best shot for the last—'I also am quite sure I shouldn't have set on him when he was single-handed and I had a partner, as I said before.'

Geoff slid his hand quickly out of Theo's arm; her shot had gone home, and his face took on a look of hot shame. Alick, on the other hand, only frowned the more deeply.

'Let us sit down and talk it all over reasonably,' went on Theo. 'Queenie dear, it is one o'clock; you may take your lesson-book, and make yourself and your doll-people tidy for dinner.' Queenie obediently trotted off to the house, and the speaker continued. 'What's all this about Jerry Blunt, boys? I thought he was a sailor? What in the world has a sailor to do with training bullfinches, I want to know?'

'Why,' glibly began Alick, his face clearing, for the subject was one specially dear to him, 'you know Jerry was away on that expedition to find the North Pole—the one that went so far north.

They got to the Franz Josef Land, the very farthest anybody has ever yet penetrated. But they failed that time, and Jerry got a frost-bite all through his own carelessness—he admits that. His right hand and arm above the elbow had to be taken off. Oh, you needn't shudder, Theo; a man can't both venture and go scot-free. When the expedition came back they gave Jerry the sack—turned him off, you know. So he has come back to Northbourne to settle with his old mother, and of course he is anxious to turn an honest penny for a living. It seems he knows a rare lot about training young bullfinches to pipe real tunes. He learned the trick from a cunning old Frenchman's yarns—a man who was on the expedition.'

'Yes, and just fancy, Theo!' cut in Geoff excitedly, and forgetting all his recent twinges of compunction. 'Jerry trains the bullfinches with a queer little musical instrument, a bird organ it is called. The notes are as like their own as they can possibly be, Jerry says so. He is going to show us the one he has got of his own. Old Frenchy, who taught him how to train, gave him one for himself.'

'What's Jerry Blunt's object in training the birds? How can it be a living for him?' asked Theo wonderingly. For the moment she, too, had forgotten the disagreeable events of the morning in the novelty of the subject.

'Why, he will sell them, of course—sell them to a chap in London who sells them again. They fetch a good price, I can tell you. And oh, Theo, listen, *we* are going to have a trained finch, Alick and I. We're going to save up, and Jerry has promised to keep a young bird to train for us. We shall pay him, you know.' Geoff in his elation jumped up and down on the seat.

'Yes, we are!' said Alick; adding wrathfully, 'and wasn't it a mean, low trick of Price to refuse us leave to go with Jerry?' He was quite ready to blaze up again, volcanic-wise, in another fury.

'Well, boys,' Theo spoke quietly and simply, but there was that in her face and voice that forced both other brothers to listen, 'you know, each of you, that father is too busy to look after you; so Mr. Price is set over you, and he is on honour—being a gentleman, you understand—not to take advantage of father's preoccupation to give you such holidays as you have no right to have. Already they say your work is far too light, and I know Mr. Vesey has again and again urged father to send you both to a public school. When the book is done, and sent to the publishers, father means to see about it seriously. You've called Mr. Price a great many bad names to-day, but you can't call him dishonourable; that's one point in his favour, and it's but fair that we should allow him what we can. It would have been so easy for him to grant this favour ——'

'Humph!' interrupted Alick, as if to say, 'Oh, you're coming round to our view, are you? I thought you would!'

'Quite easy!' repeated the young girl gravely. 'And there's another thing: if it would have been such a pleasure to you, think what it would have been to Mr. Price to get rid of such tiresome plagues as yourselves for a whole day!'

In a flash Alick remembered the recent words of old Binks to the same effect. For the second time the novel idea of how irksome he and Geoff must be to their much-tried tutor presented itself, to the resentful boy's secret astonishment.

'I am sure,' Theo began again, and still more gravely, 'you boys must remember that the Bible tells us to respect those appointed to be rulers over us.'

'Don't preach!' Alick rudely cut her short; but Geoff bit his lip. He was already bitterly ashamed of his morning's exploit, and tender, serious words from Theo never failed to touch him to the heart.

Left to himself, Geoff was undoubtedly one of those who, amid good surroundings, would have kept on the straight path easily enough. So could many. But human nature is, for the most part, made up of Alicks as well as Geoffs—of boys who wilfully choose to do wrong and to stray from duty. Like the genuine wheat and the tares, all must grow together side by side—in the meantime.

'I didn't intend to preach, Alick,' rejoined Theo gently. 'I only want to ask you boys to show that you also are gentlemen, in the true sense of the word, by frankly begging Mr. Price's pardon, when he comes to-morrow, for your rude outbreak of this morning. It is the least you can do, to make amends for an almost unpardonable insult.'

There was a silence. The waves below dashed and broke on the rocks, and the hoarse voices from a belated, heavy-laden fishing-boat stole across the water in shouts to the women, who had been anxiously awaiting them for some hours on the shore.

'Well, boys dear, have you decided? Are you to act as father's sons, as Carnegys of the old stock, or, to put it in another way, as Christians who have given offence, and know that there is but one way of making up for it? Will you apologise?' Theo spoke with urgent persuasiveness.

'I shall!' Geoff stood up straight, and his face was pale and set, as he confronted Theo bravely.

'I shan't!' Alick's head sunk lower and lower; on his brow a gloomy scowl deepened, and his eyes refused to meet those of his sister wistfully seeking his.

CHAPTER VIII

THEO'S HAVEN

'Oh, mother, mother, it's too hard for me! You have asked too much, and I have failed, miserably failed!'

The wind from the sea was blowing fresh and free over the village, and beyond it to the little churchyard, the God's acre of Northbourne. Kneeling beside one of the grassy mounds therein was Theo Carnegy, tears rolling down her earnest face. The girl was overwrought by home-worries, for Theo was none of the crying sort, as a rule. But there are times in the lives of each of us when all things seem too difficult for our feeble hands to smooth out; the knots, the difficulties, become hopelessly entangled; we sit down dismayed in stony despair, or we weep helplessly, according to our several temperaments. From the beginning of the sorrow that shaded her young days, Theo had a trick, in times when harassing troubles crowded upon her, of secretly slipping away to the churchyard, and whispering her trials to that grassy mound, the most sacred spot of earth to the girl.

It was so still, so unutterably peaceful, in the hallowed enclosure, where the green grass grew tangled among the grey headstones that elbowed each other in the cramped space. During the week the little churchyard was deserted. On Sundays the simple fisher-folk wandered in and out among the Northbourne sleepers, talking softly of their old neighbours; but it never occurred to them to do anything towards keeping the graves neat and straight. Theo's loving care kept the quiet corner where her mother slept in perfect order; but for the rest an air of dreary neglect prevailed.

Bewildered and harassed by her brothers' mad outbreak, Theo had sought her usual consolation, and was sitting leaning her cheek against the stone that told the last chapter in the life-history of the gentle mother who had risen at the Master's call to go up higher. And as she so sat, a peace, born of the surrounding silence, brooded down over her troubled soul. Her anger at the boys' mutiny died out. Somehow, among the silent sleepers round about her, it seemed small and paltry to fume over the wranglings of the schoolroom. The wind that stole up from the bay dried the tears on Theo's cheek. New resolves stirred her heart. She would pluck up courage and try, once again, to move Alick's stubborn will. Not that she had much hope of inducing him to apologise to his justly offended tutor. She knew that Philip Price had created an insurmountable rock in the path of reconciliation by his insistence on such a thing.

'I don't blame him, of course not,' she said half aloud. 'It's due to him that the boys should apologise. Dear old Geoff is already willing to do it; but Alick never will!'

'Who is you talking to, Theo?' A sweet, shrill voice made Theo jump, and turn quickly.

'Queenie! Oh, my deary, how did you know where to find me?' she cried in her surprise.

'Oh, I could find you nowhere, Theo. I asked everybody, even father. Then I knewed you must have gone to see mother, and so I comed too.' Queenie, armed as usual with a couple of dolls, proceeded to seat herself and them on the other side of the green mound. 'Tell me about mother an' me, Theo, when I was a very little girl, will you?' she soberly begged, when she had established herself and her infants to her satisfaction.

In this little one there was an utter lack of dread of death. Nobody had filled her childish mind with vague fears of the unknown life beyond. Her simple faith was that unlimited trustful belief that our Lord alluded to when He said, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

The mother whom Queenie only knew by hearsay had gone home first—gone to Paradise beyond the blue skies. Theo said so. This dear mother would be waiting, with wistful welcomes, for each one of her dear ones when they, too, went to that other far-off home. Theo said so. Queenie, therefore, came, with happy, childish trust, to her mother's quiet resting-place much as she would have trotted into that mother's room, had God not called His meek servant away out of her earthly home.

'I don't think I could tell you stories to-day, dear.' Theo rose slowly from the grass, and looked down upon the fair little face under its straw hat. 'I am too troubled.'

'Is it the horrid figures, Theo?' Queenie asked, half-sympathetically, half-absently, her attention being attracted by a bold thrush hopping across the graves.

'No, it's worse than figures; it's the boys,' mournfully rejoined Theo.

'The boys are going shrimping this evening, with Ned,' said Queenie importantly. 'I wish you and I was boys, Theo!' the little one plaintively added. Queenie was beginning to discover the fact that dolls were not, perhaps, the highest joys of life.

Going out shrimping with Ned! Theo started. Then things were hopeless indeed. There would be no evening preparation. Perhaps even Geoff had changed his mind, and would refuse to say he was sorry.

'I must take you home now, at once, deary. Come! I have to go and see old Goody Dempster before tea. Say good-bye, and come.'

Queenie's fresh little mouth was pressed against the grey headstone, and she softly whispered, 'Good-bye, mother darlin'!'

Theo stooped and did the same. The touching little ceremony was never omitted by either. Then hand in hand they soberly left the quiet resting-place, the missel-thrush peering out of its bold eye at their retreating figures.

CHAPTER IX

COMING EVENTS

'May I come in, Goody?'

A sweet voice penetrated the dim recesses of the little thatched cottage which, with its weather-stained front, was the centre one of the half-circle of homely dwelling-places that huddled together looking out on the world of waters. Sitting by the smoky fire, watching, as she knitted busily, the iron pot of potatoes boiling for her supper and that of her grandson Ned, was Goody Dempster. Her face, as she lifted it, was brown and wrinkled—indeed, it was not unlike in hue the kippered herrings hanging on a stick outside. But a pleased surprise sprang into her eyes as she recognised her visitor's voice.

'Is that yourself, Miss Theedory? Come along in, deary! You're always a sight for sore eyes, as ye know well. Sit ye down on the little stool as ye've set on sin' ye were a tiny toddler. It's kep' dusted careful, case you should drop in; and nobody, not even Ned, sits on Miss Theedory's stool.'

'I know that, Goody dear. I shouldn't mind if they did; but you mean it for kindness to keep a stool specially for me. Well, you see I've come again to have another talk with you about Ned. Indeed, I hoped to see himself, but he doesn't seem to be in the way.'

'No, Miss Theedory, he ain't. And reason why's this. He's bin out with the Fletchers' boat all the day. There's a great take o' mackerrow expected shortly, and the Fletchers they're on the look out; they're always that spry to the main-chance, as you know, deary. Not as I'm one to blame they; people has got to be sharp in their bis'ness.'

'Yes, of course,' assented Theo absently. She was staring into the fire, wondering what tack would be best to take with Ned, when she did get hold of the boy. 'Have you been talking to Ned, Goody, as you promised you would?' she turned her head to ask presently.

'Ay; I've talked a bit to he. But b'ys is a handful, Miss Theedory, as nobody should know better than yourself. Now, my Ned his heart's in the right place; it's his head as is the trouble. He has crammed hisself with trash of foring travel until the b'y is fair crazed to be off and out into the world. That's what it is!'

'I shouldn't call books of travels trash,' said Theo slowly. 'It wouldn't be quite fair—nor true. But it's exactly the same at home with our boys, especially with Alick. He reads exciting books of adventure constantly. Of course I know some folk must go out into the world, and do all the wonderful things; everybody can't be stay-at-homes for life. But the worst thing about it is that Alick won't wait his time. He wants to shirk his education and rush off, in his ignorance, to do things that it takes full-grown men, and well-instructed men, to even attempt. Oh dear!'

'Same wi' Ned, set 'em both up!' angrily exclaimed Goody, dropping the stocking she was knitting into her lap. 'And as for wanting to find the North Pole, did anybody ever hear tell o' sich impident presumption! If the Lord had meant as we should find the North Pole, He'd ha' showed the way to it, straight as straight, and made it easy as easy. But seein' as time arter time men have giv' up their lives, bein' lost in the ice and snows, and still, to my thinking, if not to others, the North Pole is shrouded from their reach, why, a body can see, plain as plain, that 'tain't meant as man should ever compass it. Not that I can say as it's forbid special in the Book; I won't say that, nohow. At least,' added Goody cautiously, 'I've never come across it in my readin's.'

'Oh, well,' said Theo heavily, 'it would not really so very much signify what the boys' day-dreams of the future were, if they would only do their duty meantime. I was trying so hard last Sunday, in the class, to make them all understand that God Himself leads always, and that until He points the way we have no right to set out upon it. But it is questionable whether they took in my meaning.'

Goody nodded. There was a little silence in the cottage. The potatoes bubbled gaily in the pot, and the clock in the corner ticked in measured dignity.

'There's one thing, deary, that I think you had ought to be telled.' Goody broke the stillness, at last, with an effort. 'I've had it on my mind for some weeks back to let 'ee know; but somehow I dursn't. Them b'ys is plannin' mischief. They've a notion to run away—to sea!'

The old woman spoke the last words in a whisper, though there was nobody to hear, save the sleepy old tortoiseshell cat by the fender, which opened one lazy eye, winked as if she, too, were in the secret, then, shutting it, purred off to sleep.

'Run away!' Theo's fresh face turned chalky pale, and her eyes widened into a terrified stare.

'True, deary, quite true! Night arter night I could hear Ned a-talkin' in his sleep in his little bed yonder, same's if somethin' was on his mind. So, at last, I got out o' my bed one night a-purpose to listen careful, and there, if Ned wasn't ravin' away to hisself, in his sleep, and 'twas all about gettin' away up to the docks at Lunnon, and hidin' in some ship bund for the North, him and Muster Alick. It giv' me a turn, as I see it's done the same to you this minnit, my dear. So I thought I'd best tell 'ee private, when I'd the chance; for nobody knows what a b'y won't dare to do. P'raps you could speak to the captain, and git him to make a stir. Eh, deary?'

'Father? Oh, it would be no use. He wouldn't care, nor even listen. He's too busy with his stupid old writings to mind any of us, or what trouble we are in. It's too bad the way we are left to ourselves!' Theo in her excitement lost her self-control, and spoke with a bitterness not belonging to her sweet nature. In truth, the girl was becoming a great deal harassed by the cares that were pressing upon her so heavily of late.

'Deary!' A wrinkled brown finger was raised, and Goody looked over her horn spectacles in grieved surprise. ''Tain't for me to pint out to one so good and gentle as our Miss Theedory that one of the great God's commandments is to "Honour thy father and thy mother"! Ain't that so?'

'Yes; but—but,' sobbed Theo, who, tired out and ashamed of herself as well, suddenly broke down, as much to her own astonishment as to that of Goody, 'that means a father and a mother who take a real interest in their children, who——'

'It don't say so special, if so be as it means that!' rejoined Goody dryly. 'It don't mention any sort in pertikler. It just says "thy father an' thy mother"; and that's all you and I've got to do with it. Let's look to our part, and perform it. But folks is always in such a hurry to settle other people's bis'ness that they lose sight of their own.'

'Oh, Goody, you're right! What a monster, what a bad girl you must think me!' Theo sat up straight. 'I am ashamed of myself. To think I should grumble at my own father, my good father, who was such a brave sailor, as everybody knows, and who never has been unkind to one of us children in all our lives!'

'That's it, deary! That's it. 'Tain't what your father isn't, but what he is, that you've got to look at, and to be grateful for. Remember what I'm a-goin' to say, and don't 'ee take offence at an old body's words. We never, none of us, has but one father on earth, same's we've but one Father in heaven, who commands us so special to honour our earthly parents. And another thing, deary; them things as seem mountains in your young eyes seems but trifles to the captain's eyes. If the time comes as there's real need for him to interfere, and bring about order in his own home, he will be safe to do it, never ye fear. The captain he was one of them as England expec's every man to do his dooty, and he did it in battle, so I've heard tell. And he will do it by you and the b'ys, don't 'ee fear!'

'I'm sure he will,' said Theo humbly. She had come full of the spirit of putting everything and everybody to rights, and she told herself that her own pride and self-sufficiency had earned its well-merited fall. Theo Carnegy's heart was too gentle and single in thought to harbour arrogant pride. Her quick repentance for the ill-advised words she had suffered to spring off her lips gave ample proof that it was so, and that in her the Christian spirit reigned.

'Here's Ned a-comin'!' Granny lifted her head sharply to listen to a prolonged, familiar whistle, and the cat, uncurling herself, rose up into an arch. There was a rush past the little window, and then Ned bustled into the room, bringing with him a breath of strong sea air and also of the odours of the mackerel-boat.

'They've comed, granny! The mackerrow has comed into our bay, and we're goin' out agin—— Evenin', miss! I—I didn't see you before.' Ned's cap was off, and he stood, colouring up, before the young lady sitting on the stool and looking at him out of her clear, earnest eyes.

'Ned,' said Theo, somewhat gravely, 'I want a quiet talk with you, one of these days soon.'

'Yes, miss.'

'Not to-morrow,' went on Theo. And Ned gave a gasp of relief, unobserved by her. He was secretly thankful that Miss Theedory had not fixed on the morrow, seeing it was the day of the proposed bird-hunt in Brattlesby Woods. 'We are all going across to the Vicarage to tea to-morrow,' continued the young lady; and Ned's relief changed to dismay. 'By the way, Ned, we shall be so glad to see you at the schoolroom tea at six o'clock. To-morrow will be Mrs. Vesey's birthday; and there's to be a little treat at the schoolhouse, as well as our tea at the Vicarage. You'll come?'

Ned fidgeted and turned all colours. He was a straightforward, honest boy, and his nature would have enjoined him to speak out and frankly say that his word had been already passed to go with Jerry Blunt to the woods on Wednesday, but his tongue was tied for Alick's sake. He could see that Theo was ignorant of her brother Alick's determination to carry out his rebellious mutiny. A fierce struggle raged in Ned's mind. 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood.' Should he be outspoken, or should he be faithful to his chum, Master Alick?

'Better be true,' said the clear voice of conscience.

'No. Better still stick to your friend through thick and thin,' contradicted a louder voice. How well the last specious suggestion sounded! So did the whispers of the serpent in Eden in Eve's ears.

'You will come to the tea-party, then?' said Theo, rising from her stool to depart.

'Thank ye, Miss Theedory; yes, I'll come,' was the mumbled reply; and in an agony of shame Ned shambled out of the cottage, making believe to be busy over the tangled brown nets lying in front of the door.

He was a capable lad enough, was Ned, and the Fletchers looked upon him as a promising hand already in the boat. Loving the sea passionately, he had been gay as a lark all day, watching keenly for the expected coming of the swarm of 'mackerrow.' But though the take had been abundantly successful, and the boat came home heavily laden; though the bay and the encircling cottages were bathed in the cheery red light of a gorgeous sunset, and supper-time was at hand, somehow the spring of happiness had died out of everything. Ned hated deceit with the vigorous hatred of an outspoken, truthful nature. He wriggled mentally, full of guilty discomfort, as he watched Theo's straight, slim figure rapidly stepping round to the Bunk, and told himself ashamedly that he had wilfully deceived the 'young miss' who was always so kind, so civil-spoken, to himself.

'Ned! Ned, my lad!' called out Goody's cracked voice from within. 'Whatever's ado that 'ee don't come to supper? The taters is coolin'.'

'All right, granny! I be turnin' over the nets, that's all.'

Goody's ears—her sharpest sense was hearing—detected the heaviness in Ned's voice.

'What's come to 'ee, Ned, so suddent?' she asked anxiously, as she heaped a plate with potatoes, and poured out a mug of butter-milk.

Perhaps it was the smoking supper that proved too much for the hungry fisher-boy, or perhaps Ned's conscience still troubled him, but the boy was unusually silent. Goody, try as she might, could get nothing out of him.

'I'm off again, granny, soon's ever the moon's up,' Ned at length broke silence to say, when his supper was finished.

'Are ye, lad? Well, good luck to 'ee! The wind's fair and the water calm.' Goody stepped to the open door, and peered out at the darkening bay. 'Ay! There's Fletcher's folk makin' ready in the boat, Ned.' She returned to the house-place, and reaching down the thick woollen muffler, stained with salt water, but a valued heirloom for its warmth, she handed it to the boy. 'See you don't forgit to put it round your throat,' she enjoined. 'Neither don't 'ee forgit the bit o' a prayer, my boy, that I taught ye to say out on the deep by night. Folks is apt to think as prayers belongs to a night spent in a comfortable bed ashore. But God listens as ready to bits of prayers that goes up to Him in the black silence o' night, out on the waters, same's He listens to them as is put up in church o' Sundays, with parson for mouthpiece. Will 'ee remember, Ned?'

'I'll remember, granny; I do always!' quietly replied Ned, throwing the muffler across his shoulders. To do the boy justice, he always did remember the 'bit o' a prayer' Goody had taught his father before him.

The Fletchers, three generations of whom manned the fishing-trawler, were decent folk, with a keen eye to the main-chance, or what some people consider to be such—namely, making as much money as possible. The sky had clouded over somewhat, and it was darkish as the 'Aurora'—known locally as the 'Roarer'—the chief of the Northbourne fishing-boats, put out for the night's work. Ned, glancing at the Bunk, could see the twinkling lights from its several windows reflected in the calm waters below. He wondered what Muster Alick was up to at that

time of evening. 'He ain't learnin' of his lessons, that's sure,' thought Ned, with an uneasy recollection of the story of the rebellious outbreak in the schoolroom; for Alick had poured his indignant version of the same into the ears of his humble comrade. 'Happen he've got hold of a fresh travel-book.' Then Ned's thoughts easily slipped off to the subject of other 'travel-books' devoured by Alick and retailed to himself. He pictured vividly, as the 'Roarer' swished through the dark waters, a far different scene to that of the quiet Northbourne bay. A scene made up of dangers by land and dangers by sea; of wide, lonely floes of ice, their white gleam darkening into the gloom of the mysterious distance as yet untrodden by human feet. Ned's pulses never failed to beat like hammers when such thought-pictures dangled themselves before his mind's vision. He forgot in the entrancing dream the outbreak at the Bunk; forgot the holiday to be stolen on the morrow in Brattlesby Woods, and the deception practised on Miss Theedory; forgot, for the first time, the 'bit o' a prayer' taught him by faithful old Goody to say when his nights were passed on the deep.

CHAPTER X

UNDER ARREST

Tuesday morning had come and gone. Philip Price, the tutor, sat in the dining-room of the Bunk with but one pupil facing him at the table. Geoff, faithful to his promise, had apologised in a manly, straightforward fashion for his unruly behaviour on the day of the 'Great Rebellion,' as the Carnegys had secretly christened their outbreak. No sooner had the boy so done than he was freely forgiven. But Alick flatly refused to sue for pardon, when confronted with his offended tutor, spite of Theo's tearful entreaties. Stubbornly the wrong-headed, wrong-hearted boy held out.

'Very good!' dryly said Mr. Price, after waiting in vain. 'Then, until you see fit to do so, I must dispense with your attendance here, Alick, otherwise our positions as master and pupil would be reversed. Good-morning to you!' Philip had risen, and was holding the door open. A great struggle had been going on in the young man's mind. It would be easier, he knew, far easier, for him to gloss over Alick's obstinate refusal to repent, and just to let things go on in the old way. The temptation to do so was great, particularly to one whose days were shadowed by much physical suffering, which made it the harder for him to rise up and energetically quell such a rebellious rising as he had had lately to cope with. But Philip owned a lion's heart as well as clear, well-defined notions of right and wrong. Also he had learned not to lean on his own strength. There was, he knew by experience, a higher help always ready for those who seek it, and Philip had long made it a habit to do that in all things, small or great. He was, therefore, enabled to deal with the young rebel in a dignified and temperate yet firm manner.

Muttering savagely Alick withdrew with slouching gait. He knew well that he was no match in regard to words with his tutor, who had preserved *his* temper admirably. Master Alick consequently felt it to be the best policy to hold his tongue.

'Has you got a holiday, Alick? Or has you got the toothache?' asked Queenie innocently, surprised when Alick sauntered into her playroom, an hour after, feeling rather like a fish out of water without his inseparable companion Geoff, and without his usual employment. Ned Dempster was also out of the way, he being absent with the fishing-boats; for the bay was alive with the shoals of mackerel, over which intense excitement simmered throughout Northbourne.

'Yes, I *has* got a holiday, miss!' was Alick's grim rejoinder. 'A pretty long one too, I expect.' Then he added in a curt, sharp tone, as though to stop further questions, 'Now, look here, Queenie! Have you got any of your family that wants mending, eh? Any sick and wounded? Any broken legs or heads lying about? Because if you have, I can undertake to put them right this morning. I've got nothing else on hand.'

'Oh, can you, will you?' delightedly said Queenie. Then, suddenly recollecting herself, she quickly added, 'But, Alick—oh, I couldn't get out all my sick dollies this minute, 'cos, you see, it is nearly 'leven o'clock, and Theo will be waiting for me in the tea-house, to begin my lessons.'

'Lessons! Never you mind rubbishy old lesson-books, Queenie! I don't mean to, never again!'

'Has you learnt up everything then, Alick?' asked the child, gazing respectfully at her brother, with all the wondering admiration one often sees in little girls for big brothers.

'What has that got to do with it?' roughly answered the boy. He was in that volcanic condition of mind that every word spoken was as a match, and set up a blaze of ill-temper. 'Give me over that one-legged doll, and I'll "fix" her up, as the Yankees say. Hand her ladyship over.' Alick Carnegy had one tender spot in his heart. Most of us have. And that in Alick was occupied by Queenie. He was passionately fond of the innocent-faced, round-eyed little sister, and he was always ready to mend her sick and damaged properties.

'That's poor Miss Muffet. She felled out of my arms on the beach, and Splutters and Shutters worried her, Alick, before I could pull her away. Ah, it was dreadful!' chattered Queenie.

'You shouldn't pull things away from dogs. Never, never do such a thing. Do you understand, Queenie? They might snap, you know, and then where would you be?'

Down on the floor Alick sat himself, and fell to work to repair as best he could the interesting cripple. But Queenie, eager enough though she was to watch the surgical operation, had a conscience hidden away in her small person, as her restlessness showed.

'I mustn't stay, Alick. I mus' go! Theo will be waiting, for the hall clock has struck. I counted 'leven strokes just now!'

Away to her lessons bustled the little maid, and Alick, unhappy, sullen and forlorn, was left to himself in the play-room. The boy was distinctly most miserable. Indeed, he could not be otherwise; it is unnatural for the young to be in a state of rebellion against those set in authority over them. They suffer hotly for it, with the measureless capacity for suffering belonging to the young.

In spite of his wretchedness, Alick was, however, fully determined to go bird-hunting on the morrow in Brattlesby Woods with Jerry Blunt. Equally determined was the boy also that he would never beg his tutor's pardon—if he could possibly help it, that was. Alick knew that if his continued insubordination came to his father's ears the certain result would be a thrashing, similar to one of which he still had a most vivid recollection. It occurred on the only occasion that the captain had been roused to administer punishment to both Geoff and Alick. That was when the brothers had strangled several of Widow Dempster's hens by lassoing them, on the pretext that the unfortunate fowls were prairie-horses, the boys being prairie-hunters. This was a heinous misdemeanour in the upright old sailor's eyes. Alick winced still at the remembrance of the captain's wrath, and also of the captain's whip, which he by no means spared on his boys' backs.

'I certainly hope that father won't get to know about this row!' he muttered uneasily, as he finished screwing on Miss Muffet's leg, and set her up as proud as the best. Then looking round for more surgical needs to operate upon, and finding a hapless horse minus a tail, Alick ingeniously supplied the unbecoming deficiency with bristles out of the hearth-brush. He was a remarkably handy boy; his fingers were skilful, and he possessed a certain amount of invention. As he prowled about the shelves, setting a good many of Queenie's infirm toys on their feet, and making all things taut, the morning wore on apace. He was glad enough of any occupation to pass the time, which seemed strangely lagging, as he glanced impatiently at his silver watch.

'I suppose Price and old Geoff are as thick as thieves, palavering away over that awful Latin,' he soliloquised between the tunes he was whistling. 'Price will be buttering up Geoff at my expense, no doubt. Well, I don't care; why should I? I've made up my mind not to give in, and nobody—not Price, at least—shall make me. Hilloa!' Lifting up his eyes to the light, to see if he had glued on the wooden canary's head quite straight on its neck, Alick caught sight, through the window, of a couple of fishing-smacks making steadily for the bay.

'That one to the left is Fletcher's boat, or I'm blind, and Ned's on board, I know. I'd better just run down to the beach, and have a private word in his ears, as soon as he lands, about to-morrow. What a day we shall have in Brattlesby Woods! Oh my, shan't we just!'

In a short time Alick, his morning's misery all forgotten, was down on the shore, vigourously helping to haul in the heavy nets, and sharing in the tumultuous excitement never failing to greet any and every boat that put in to Northbourne beach.

'Can you come along with me, Ned?' he took the opportunity of whispering in Ned's ear. 'I've got something to tell you about *to-morrow*. You know what I mean.'

Yes, Ned could give Muster Alick five minutes before he sped home to Goody's for a warm meal, and likewise a bit of sleep; for the boy was stiff, as well as starving, after his long, chill night on the water.

'I only wanted to say,' Alick hastily announced, 'that I'm game to go with Jerry Blunt to-morrow morning, if you will let me know the hour you mean to set off.'

'We thought of going pretty early,' said Ned slowly, after a pause of hesitation. 'We wants to make a good long day of it. But—but, Muster Alick, have ye told them up at the Bunk that ye're set on going with us? I thought as ye said the tootor wouldn't 'low ye, and that Miss Theedory backed him up. Didn't ye?' Ned eyed his companion with a certain amount of stern suspicion as he put the questions.

One of Theo's class-boys himself, he had a genuine reverence for his gentle teacher. There was nothing, the poor fisher-lad was wont to tell himself, that he would not have dared or done for the sweet young lady's sake. Her very gentleness and soft speech seemed to attract and also subdue his rough nature, by force of contrast possibly.

'What on earth is that to you?' loftily demanded Alick, resenting both the questions and the mention of his sister's name, as brothers will.

'Why, 'tis this to me!' rejoined Ned grimly, and standing square. 'I ain't a-goin' to have Miss Theedory lookin' at me through an' through, an' a-sayin', "Ned," she'll say, "why ever did'ee lead away my brother to do wrong?" I couldn't stand that, muster!'

'What a born idiot you are, to talk in that way!' said Alick grandly. 'It's quite enough for you that I tell you I'm coming to-morrow; that's all you've got to do with it. Oh, I say, Ned!'—he descended from his pinnacle of dignity all in a hurry—'it has been such a lark! I told you what a row we have had with old Price, and that I bowled him over. But Geoff has actually given in. Theo—I mean my sister—talked him into an apology—begging pardon, you know. But I stuck out, and held my own. So old Price bowed me off the premises. You should have really seen him do it!' ended Alick, with a laugh that had no merriment whatever in it. Ned nodded. He readily comprehended that 'Muster Alick' had held his own.

'And did he, did Muster Geoff reely ask parding?' he inquired wonderingly, presently.

'Yes, he did!' Alick spoke shortly, for he resented strongly his brother's disaffection from a bad cause. 'But what's more to the purpose, *I* didn't knock under. So I'm coming with you; for old Price won't, he says firmly, give me another lesson until I apologise too. You may guess, old chap, that I'll have a fine long holiday at that rate, if—if the governor don't get to hear about it, of course!' ended Alick rather lamely.

'Oh!' Ned gasped understandingly. He could readily enough picture the result of the captain's taking up the matter. Fireworks would be nothing to the general flare-up, in that case, the fisher-lad privately told himself.

Alick next proceeded to plan out the morrow's campaign, and by the time the Dempsters' cottage was reached, it was agreed that Alick should make his escape as early as possible from the Bunk, in order that he might start with Jerry Blunt and Ned before anybody was astir to prevent him. Then, with mutual promises of secrecy, the two parted.

CHAPTER XI

A TANGLED WEB

When the Carnegys sat down to dinner that day there was that subtle air of constraint which is the result of family jars—an electric disturbance in the home atmosphere which each and all feel. Theo, at the head of the table, looked grave and pained. Geoff was uncomfortable also, and, in his awkwardness, overtalked himself, in a frantic desire to smooth matters. Queenie and the captain himself were the only members of the family at their ease; while as for Alick, he sat sullen and dumb, brooding over his self-made wrongs.

'Well,' said the master of the house towards the end of the meal, 'have you boys come to your senses yet, hey? Has order been restored on the decks? I strongly advised Price to read the Riot Act; I hope he did so, hey?' The captain began dimly to be aware of the prevailing constraint, and then suddenly he recollected the tutor's complaining report, which had dropped out of his mind two minutes after it was spoken.

Nobody spoke in answer. The captain glared, over the top of his glasses, round the party; but Theo and Geoff would not for worlds have told tales. Each felt that silence was the best policy under the circumstances.

Queenie at last, observing, with some surprise, the unusual hush, took it upon her small self to reply.

'Alick's been so good! He has mended all my doll-ladies' broken legs, and the canary's head, too; and he has made such a bewful new tail for the old horse—the grey horse, you remember, father, what lost his tail when he was quite young. And Alick's tidied all the toy-shelves. He has got such a long holiday, Alick has! Did you know, father?' she said importantly.

'Ah!' the captain observed gravely, looking his youngest calmly over, and losing her last words. 'The toy-shelves are *your* decks, I suppose, my little woman; the play-room your ship, hey? Well, well, history repeats itself. Oh, by the way, what a wretched memory I've got! Dear, dear! why, it has only just come into my mind! Theo, my dear, I had occasion to go across the bay the other day, last week I think it was, about some references I wanted from the Vicarage library, and I just looked in to have a chat with Mrs. Vesey in her morning-room. What a sweet woman that is! If ever there were a saint permitted to remain on earth, it is herself. But what I had to say was about a special message she gave me for you. To-morrow will be her birthday, and she wants all you young folk to go over early, to have tea and strawberries and cream. You will like that, my dear, and so will Queenie. As for you boys, there's to be a special treat for you, in honour of the occasion. I was to be sure and tell you so, I remember now. You are to have the key of the

museum for yourselves, and spend the evening there. But mind, no tricks with the specimens, which are a valuable collection. Remember you are on honour, and being gentlemen, I presume that will suffice to prevent any mischief. Stupid of me to forget the message! However, it's not too late, fortunately; to-morrow has not yet come.'

There was an involuntary shout of delight from the boys when the captain finished. A treat indeed, and a rare one, it was to be permitted to pass an evening in the curiosity-room of the Vicarage. From their childhood this museum had been the most interesting spot to the young Carnegys. It was packed from floor to ceiling with a collection of foreign monsters, weapons, and rarities, gathered together, during a long life on foreign stations in different quarters of the globe, by the venerable vicar, who, in his heyday, had been an army chaplain. A more entrancing treat for Alick and Geoff could not possibly have been devised. Suddenly, however, Alick's face gloomed over. He remembered that the morrow, the birthday, was Wednesday, and it was on that day he had bound himself to go to Brattlesby Woods with Jerry Blunt, the bird-trainer, defying his tutor in the teeth to do so. Even Alick felt a spasm of regret. If he had not been so perversely obstinate in refusing to yield to Mr. Price, here would have been his reward—a whole evening among the wonders of the Vicarage museum. It was maddening! But the misguided boy felt that he had gone too far to retrace his steps. It was too late, he ignorantly told himself; for Alick knew not that it is never, it can be never, too late to confess and make amends for a fault—so long as there is breath to bravely speak out the remorseful confession.

'We know, father, about it,' Theo's quiet voice was saying. 'Mrs. Vesey guessed you might just possibly forget the message, so she sent me a note, next day. It's all arranged, and we are all going. Father, dear, wouldn't it be possible for you to come with us too?' The girl had left her seat at the head of the table, and came round to lean on the back of her father's chair. It seemed to Theo that if the captain could be induced to join his family's life-pleasures, he would come, in time, to be a refuge and a help in their life-troubles also; so she pleaded.

'Tut! tut! tut! Don't be absurd, my dear Theo. It's quite unlike you. I thought you, at least, understood what a life full of urgent importance mine is, until the *magnum opus* is achieved. After that—well, well, we'll see!'

'Yes, but, dear, just one little holiday! I know the book is a great labour, but you might take one afternoon from your work, and come with us—just for once!'

'No, no, child! When a man has put his hand to the plough he has no right to turn back. And you ought to know better than tempt me, I say. But with regard to you young people it is very different; you haven't a care, so you can't do better than be happy, that is, at the appointed time. There's a time for everything, the Book says, doesn't it? Now then, my dear, let me get away back to my work, if you please.'

The fiery old sailor held a firm conviction that he had an imperative duty to perform in this world, in the shape of his proposed literary work. Duty had been, hitherto, the sailor's god through thick and thin. To do him justice, the captain had not the faintest notion of the gusts of rebellious discontent that often enough swept over the little household he imagined to be so well ordered. Deeply attached to his boys and girls, one and all, though he was, he took no heed of the fact that the minds of the mere children, as he considered them to be, were fast awaking up—growing apace with their youthful bodies. The truth was, the young folk were utter strangers and foreigners to the man who had married late in life. So long as his gentle, tender wife—a woman eminently fitted for her niche in life by her sweet nature and her heart filled with Christian grace—lived, the captain's children were well cared for indeed. Their needs both of body and soul were alike looked after. But the mother who was so qualified by her rare sweetness to bring up the children God had given her 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' was called away to a higher, fuller life 'beyond these voices'; and the sailor, taking the reins of the household in his unaccustomed fingers, held them over-slackly.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE FAR NORTH

It was June, the 'leafy month': Nature was dressed out in her newest and freshest of robes, and the homes of her feathered children were peopled with tiny birdlings, all agape with hunger and curiosity.

Through the shady Brattlesby Woods, and along the hedgerows, stealing softly, stepping cautiously, crept Jerry Blunt, with his empty sleeve flapping against his right side, and as he went he peered here and there where leaves grew thickest. In his wake followed, on tip-toe, Alick Carnegy and Ned Dempster, all three intent on seeking for young bullfinches.

When Jerry Blunt ran away to sea from his native village, Northbourne, with his soul athirst

for adventure, his body was furnished with as many limbs as other folk. Little did he dream that the golden future he panted to grasp would make of him a cripple. As time went by, and he became a full-grown man, Jerry had his fill of hairbreadth escapes, his last exploit of all being to join an enterprising American expedition got up in the name of science to find the North Pole. This venture, one of many, proved the most unfortunate of all for Jerry Blunt. Through his own heedless carelessness in refusing to listen to the advice of his experienced betters, he neglected a severe frost-bite; in consequence, he lost his arm, which had to be amputated by the ship's surgeon. After this catastrophe, Jerry as a man on that expedition was worth little or nothing. So he returned, in course of time, to his native place, 'like a bad shilling,' said Northbourne—and with an empty coat-sleeve.

'The right arm, too, worse luck!' was all the sympathy he got, and Jerry, therefore, began to look round for himself. He knew it was imperative on him to do something for a living to help out his good old mother's feeble efforts, and to keep a roof over their two heads. He set his wits to work to puzzle out a way. Without a right arm he was of little or no use in the fishing-boats, which constituted the sole trade of Northbourne. So fishing was out of the question.

Now people don't go the length of Franz Josef Land without picking up a few odds and ends of information. Therefore it was not long before Jerry did hit upon a trade, and it was one thoroughly to his mind. From his boyhood he had been a passionate lover of the open, and Mother Nature had shared her secrets with him in no niggard fashion.

He was tolerably well acquainted with the ways and the haunts of his winged neighbours, and could, perhaps, have 'given points' to many a scientifically educated naturalist. And it came to pass that he bethought himself of certain valuable hints he had got anent the artificial training of the inhabitants of the air from an astute old Frenchman, one of those curiosities to be met with but rarely, whose minds are human museums—treasure-houses in which are stored scraps of varied knowledge.

'You may keep school, my lad,' dryly commented his mother when she had carefully digested Jerry's plan, 'but you won't find it easy to keep scholars.'

'Well, you'll see!' was the quietly spoken prediction; for Jerry Blunt had fully determined to be a bird-trainer, and the pupils he was in search of were young bullfinches.

Of course when this remarkable intention became known among the fisher-folk it was derisively condemned by the elders. On the other hand, Jerry's younger neighbours, particularly Ned Dempster, were immediately fired with an eager desire to assist him in the novel enterprise. Ned's enthusiasm naturally infected both the Carnegy boys; they also would fain become bird-trainers on the spot, lacking all knowledge of the matter though they, naturally, did. With the frenzy that possesses boys in regard to every absolutely new amusement, the two Carnegys slept, ate, drank, and, as it were, breathed to the tune of one thought—the determination that they also would be bird-teachers.

This all-powerful, novel freak was at the bottom of the furious meeting at the Bunk. Philip Price, the tutor, sympathising fully with the ardent pursuits of boyhood, had been over-indulgent in the matter of granting whole Wednesdays, instead of half-holidays. Any excuse sufficed. Skating on inland ponds in the winter; fishing in the bay, as the year wore on; and, latterly, digging for primrose or fern roots in Brattlesby Woods. But Philip Price was beginning to find out by results that too much play and not enough work was making dull scholars of his pupils, and he had determined to stand out firmly against any more indulgences in the future. It was high time that Alick and Geoff should realise that 'life is real, life is earnest'; put their shoulders to the wheel they must and should. The boys knew this, and in their hearts admitted the determination to be a just one enough. But the entrancing novelty of Jerry Blunt's proposed trade carried them away; they were extravagantly crazed to join in it, by fair means or by foul. Hence the outburst of rebellion, and Alick's stubborn refusal to sue for pardon.

When Wednesday morning arrived, he set off in company with Jerry and Ned before the early sun had dried the dew on the grass.

As they trudged at Jerry's heels he had explained to them, before entering the woods, the mode of operation to be carried out. In order to pipe tunes as bullfinches so marvellously do, they have to go through a period of training, and downright severe training the hapless mites find it. But, as Jerry tersely put it to his hearers, one of whom winced secretly, what is training but 'keeping the body under subjection'—a period of toilsome effort that any degree of perfection necessitates?

Taken from the nest at the age, say, of ten days or so—the most suitable to begin operations—the callow young things are carefully tended by one person solely, who accustoms the birds to himself, the sound of his voice and his cautiously tender touch, before he attempts anything approaching to training.

This treatment Jerry Blunt intended to carry out with his timid pupils, of which he gathered a goodly number, with the assistance of Ned and Alick, long before sunset came round again. The trainer explained his proposed code of education still more fully as he and the hungry boys sat enjoying the picnic repast they had brought with them. Alick, whose spirits were at their highest,

thought it a delightful experience to be eating cold chunks of pork and dry bread, which each guest carved for himself with a clasp-knife. Infinitely superior was this delightfully natural, manly style of feeding, than all the rubbishy artificial formality of the decently appointed meals served at the Bunk, thought he scornfully. The only drawback to his sense of exhilarating pride was the fact that Geoff was not a witness of his emancipation from society rules.

'Do you actually mean to tell us, Jerry, that in time you will be able to teach those wretched young shavers to whistle real, proper tunes?' Alick asked presently, pointing with his knife, in careful imitation of the manners and customs of his company, to the shivery mites, each wrapped in a wisp of cotton-wool, which thoughtful Jerry had not forgotten to bring for the purpose of protecting the birdlings on their debut into the world out of their warm nest-homes.

'Yes; you bide a wee, Muster Alick!' rejoined Jerry confidently, if indistinctly, seeing his mouth was full at the moment. 'Before the summer's out I'll engage that my scholards will sing "The Blue Bells of Scotland" without a single false note! And when they do, I'll get a good price for each on 'em from a chap I knows of in London, who trades in singin' birds, and is always ready to buy 'em. But I was a-goin' to say, Muster Alick, that I'll want some help from you boys. I can't do the whole thing single-handed. I shall have to board out the birds, after a bit; so there will be plenty of work for each of you, if so be you're agreeable.'

Of course the boys were more than ready with their promises of help in the labour of teaching, as soon as they understood how it was to be set about.

'You will have to put us up to the trick first; how it's to be done, you know, Jerry,' said Alick.

'All right, muster! But there's no trick in the matter, and no secret, 'cept it be kindness and firmness. Them's the two great rulin' powers with dumb animals, same's with we humans. 'Tain't no good tryin' to train a child by lettin' him do jes' whatever he pleases. You wouldn't call that training, now, would you? Say!' Jerry looked up from the pipe he was filling to put the question, with some little earnestness.

A strange flush stole up into Alick Carnegy's cheeks; for the life of him he could not help applying Jerry's excellent logic to himself. The stern, high-minded face of the tutor he had insulted floated before the boy's eyes, and he winced, for the second time that day, at Jerry's words, as he remembered how he had fought with and rebelled against the authority set over him. Alick's conscience was by no means altogether deadened, and his triumph was dashed.

'Yes,' continued Jerry reflectively, as he watched the smoke curling upward in the air, 'and 'tis the very same wi' ourselves, after we're growed up to manhood. That's how the Almighty deals with us. He's firm—none firmer; and He's kinder to us than we knows on—none kinder—if so be as we would but trust ourselves to His way.'

Jerry Blunt, exposed to temptations many and varied, had always been a right-thinking, honest kind of lad. In spite of his wanderings to and fro over the earth, he retained his early faith intact.

'Many's the time in my life,' he went on, speaking in a gravely reverent tone, 'I've fought to get my will in some things—struck out blindly, as you might say; but there was always the firm Hand guiding me in His way, not my own. Even when this mishap befell me'—Jerry touched his empty sleeve—'though I couldn't see it at the time, bein' so ignorant-like, it was all a-purpose for my good.'

'How, Jerry? What on earth do you mean? To lose your right arm must have been a frightful bit of bad luck!' Alick spoke in astonishment, but with a certain amount of respect for one who had had such a large experience as the bird-trainer.

'There ain't no such thing as luck, either good or bad,' Jerry took out his pipe to say. ''Tis God's will; that's the properest word for't—not luck. As for my own misfortin', as everybody called it, why, after all it didn't turn out so bad, when you come to think it out.'

'Why? Do tell us all about it, Jerry, will you?' urged Alick, to whom the topic of the North Pole expedition was always attractive; and he threw himself back on the mossy ground to listen in rapt attention.

'Well, muster, I make no doubt that you've heard tell fifty times over how I got a frost-bite when I was in Franz Josef Land with the expedition. It all came about with me bein' in such a hurry like to finish a job I'd to do, that I put off rubbin' my hands with snow, as is the right thing to do, remember, if so be as you boys ever get frostbit. Well, the long and the short of that neglect was, they was forced to take off my arm—there wasn't no chice in the matter—above the elbow too. We happened at the moment to be at a fixed camping dépôt—not one of them nasty movin' floes, but on a good sound spot—and the expedition was under orders to march norrards when the thing happened to me. Well, in course, they nat'rally said as they didn't want to be saddled with a one-handed man, and I was turned back—me and old Pierre Lacroix, the Frenchman who taught me how to train them little customers.' Jerry pointed with his pipe to the infant finches under his handkerchief. 'Old Pierre was too rheumatic, they soon found out, to be any use, in spite of his long head, which was as full of wisdom as an egg's full of meat. None but sound, able-bodied men will do for that work, I tell you. He was a queer old fish, Pierre was. Poor

chap, he was a Roming, you know; but for all that he was, in his mistaken way, a pious, God-fearing man. It was kind o' queer to see him, when we two were on our way back through all them ice-plains; if we so much as heard the howl of a hungry wolf, Pierre would pull out his beads and rattle off a prayer. But I didn't so much wonder at his fright, for the cries of them wolves certainly did freeze one's marrow through and through. And we once came to pretty close quarters with the brutes. It was one night, a starless, cloudy night, with a storm brewing, and we heard behind us a faint sound that struck us dumb with horror. The wolves had scented us from afar, and were giving chase. We took to our heels, as the sayin' is; but you don't make much way on that there ground. The awful baying voices gained on us, minute by minute. On, on, we breathlessly fought our way, desperate to escape. At last, so close was the pack behind us, that I could count 'em, half a dozen or so, and by the light of the torches we carried I could plainly see their red tongues lolling out of their hungry jaws. So did Pierre, and out came his beads. But reely, boys, there are more wonderful escapes in real life than ever folks read of in books. Now, what do you suppose saved us that night? Under Providence, of course, I means. We might have turned at bay and shot one or two, and there was a knife apiece. But we should have been doomed men had we done so. However, help was close, just as hope was dying out in our hearts. Running for our lives we had reached the land,—before that, you understand, we'd been traversing an ice-floe,—we knew 'twas land by the low bank sheering down. As we set foot on it a mighty roaring crack sounded, breaking up into a thousand echoes in the white silence. It was the ice parting from the shore, through the wind-storm that had risen. Between us and our savage hunters the cold black waves boiled up instantly, released from their prison, and the baffled wolves howled furiously at the fissure growing wider each second. We were saved; and, boys, never did I see the finger of God more plainly than at that moment! I am glad I wasn't ashamed to throw myself on my knees and thank Him aloud, and Frenchy joined me with all his heart.'

'But,' began Alick wonderingly, after a long pause, 'how on earth did you find your way back, you two, through all that frozen white country with no landmarks?'

'How? Why, I s'pose you don't know the watchword of all Arctic expeditions, young master? 'Tain't likely as you should, so I'll tell you. The law out yonder is: keep your line of retreat open; and a better rule couldn't be. It so be as you take heed to it keerful, you can't be cut off from the world. So Pierre an' me, in due time, found our way back to the ship, which was stationed in the Spitzbergen Sea.'

'And what about t'others, the rest of the expedition? They pushed on, didn't they?' asked Ned eagerly.

'Ah! that's the queer thing that I be a-comin' to,' said Jerry, speaking solemnly. 'In course they pushed on. But never a man of the lot came back to tell the story of what they'd seen. They was too venturesome; they went too far ahead, and must have perished of sheer cold; leastways that's what I've heard. If you don't see a meanin' under that, well, I do! And real grateful I feel to the Almighty. I lost an arm, but them poor lads they lost their lives.'

There was another silence. Jerry industriously puffed away; Alick stared up unblinkingly into a chink of blue between the tree-tops; and Ned gravely whittled away at a tiny boat of wood, one of a fleet with which he kept Miss Queenie so numerously supplied that it bade fair to develop into a Lilliputian navy in time.

'Did you ever use any dogs on the expedition, Jerry?' asked Alick, whose thoughts had been travelling along the silent white expanse of the far-away North.

'Dogs? No, muster, we didn't in them days. But Frenchy used to talk away, I remember, o' nights round the camp-fires, about the proper use dogs would be on an expedition. There was one breed in pertikler he spoke well off—the West Siberian, I think he called 'em.'

'Yes,' eagerly put in Alick, 'they're the ones, the West Siberian. Father was speaking about them. They're considered to be awfully useful.'

'I dessay!' assented Jerry, knocking the ashes out of his pipe before carefully stowing it away in one of his many pockets. 'But 'pears to me we've got to be thinking of going home. The trunks o' the trees are reddening, which tells us the sun's slantin'; and these little shavers must be fed and bedded before sundown. Come, musters, rouse yourselves; we must be steppin' Northbourne way!'

Picking up the shivering, quaking mites in their cotton-wool wrappings, Jerry lodged them in his several pockets and even in his cap. But he firmly refused to suffer the two boys to share his burdens.

'We can't be too keerful for the first day or so after takin' of 'em out of the nest; so you leave 'em to me,' he persisted; and presently the trio were trudging on their way back to Northbourne village.

CHAPTER XIII

IN PERIL ON THE SEA

While Alick Carnegy was absent, enjoying his forbidden pleasure in Brattlesby Woods with Jerry Blunt, the bird-trainer, and Ned Dempster, strange things were happening in the quiet little bay at home—things that will be talked of for years to come in the long winter nights, when the fisher-wives sit mending their husband's nets round the peat-fires, and the children crowd close to listen with all their ears to the story.

'The Theodora,' the boat belonging to the Bunk, had been getting out of repair for some time back. At first the young folk—even Theo herself—being a happy-go-lucky, reckless set in most things, disregarded the leak, never dreaming it to be a serious one, and laughed at their wet feet; for who ever heard of salt water hurting anybody? It is just, however, those neglected little things, evils that are suffered to go on, which increase sometimes, with a sudden rush, into big mischiefs. That week Theodora, who had not been in the boat for a few days, was struck afresh with the damage; she saw that it was high time something should be done to mend matters, if only for the sake of keeping dry feet. She therefore gave Ned Dempster a few directions how to remedy the leak. Of course Ned, being a born fisher-lad, was quite capable of doing the piece of work in his spare moments. This Theo knew. But, unfortunately, her orders, and everything else as well, went clean out of Ned's head, owing to the excitement he had imbibed from Alick about the expedition to Brattlesby Woods after the finches.

When Theo and Queenie, consequently, got into the boat in the afternoon to pull across to the little birthday festival at the Vicarage, they speedily found, to their discomfort, but by no means to their dismay, that the leak was considerably worse than usual.

'Oh,' screamed Queenie, 'my bestest new shoes is quite wetted, Theo! Look!'

Queenie certainly was right; the shiny little toes that, dangling, did not reach the bottom of the boat even, were already wet. Theo's fresh blue print also was fringed round with sea-water when she looked down at it.

'I think we might manage to get across, though,' said Theo hopefully. 'It's a pity to turn back. We shouldn't get much wetter than we are already, should we?'

'Not much wetterer,' acquiesced Queenie equably, as she dipped first the tip of one shoe, then the other, into the water. Of course, if Theo didn't mind, it was nothing to Queenie.

The afternoon was a glorious one, with a faint touch of north in the wind, just enough to bring out colour intensely. The blue of the sea and the blue of the sky were alike sapphire in hue, against which the gulls that darted and skimmed hither and thither showed white. It was, in truth, an afternoon when the world seemed so passing fair, so secure, that the mind was lured into believing that it was all-sufficient.

Thus it is with ourselves. When we are getting on too smoothly at school, or at our work, it all begins to feel such easy plain-sailing, that we rest on our oars and grow over-confident. We are, in a sense, off guard. And so it was with the occupants of 'The Theodora,' as it gradually made its way to the middle of the bay. Of course they would get across in safety, as Theo declared; they had done it a hundred times already, since the leak was first sprung.

Nothing had ever happened in the girl's eighteen years of life in the shape of any serious accident either by land or by sea. It was difficult to realise that mishaps could possibly occur, and, with her eyes fixed on the wondrous blue above and below, Theo rowed on, calling herself lazy because she did not seem, somehow, able to get so fast through the water as usual.

'Theo! oh, Theo!'

'Queenie!'

Two affrighted shrieks rang out simultaneously; for, suddenly, the sisters each became aware that 'The Theodora' had shipped a quantity of water. The boat was so heavy that Theo's oars could hardly move it.

'Oh, what have I done?' cried the elder girl, ashy pale, and stunned with the shock. 'Oh, my darling Queenie!'

It was for the beloved little sister that the thrill of anxious terror rushed over Theo. She herself could swim, in a fashion, if the worst came to the worst; but Queenie, the baby-sister, how was the helpless little one to be saved? Wildly Theo gazed over the blue, rippling water.

There, yonder, on the stretch of sands in front of the fisher-folk's dwellings, her long sight could distinguish the women at their usual monotonous employment, mending their nets in the doorways, all unaware of her peril and that of the child in the sunlit bay.

'Help! help!' she shrieked in the agony of fear that encompassed her, and in her own ears her voice sounded thin and feebly small, as when in some horrid nightmare we, all in vain, try to scream aloud, and fail. Would they sit there, those fisher-women, and never so much as raise their eyes to glance at the distinctly sinking boat?

It was maddening to the distraught girl, simply maddening.

'What is it, Theo?' quavered the frightened child opposite her in the boat. 'Is we going to be drowned in the water, Theo?'

'Oh, my darling Queenie! what shall we do?' cried out Theo in a frenzy of helpless terror. The oars were lying helpless in the bottom of the rapidly filling boat. 'What are we to do?' She fairly shrieked out the question again.

'Say "Our Father,"' said Queenie promptly; and she clasped her tiny hands together in Theodora's. The child was too ignorant to realise their danger. It was only the terror in Theo's face that frightened her—Theo, the sister who was so strong, so tall, so all-wise, in the trustful little one's innocent eyes. But though unconscious of all their peril, the child's unerring instinct pointed to the true, unfailing Refuge for all human trouble.

'Our Father in heaven, help me to save Queenie!'

The cry, strong and vibrating, floated over the solitary water. Theo, in the sudden and unexpected approach of great danger, had forgotten that God's ears are listening always to catch our prayers, even when belated and half despairing.

But when the little sister's simple words brought back to her mind the remembrance of the one great Shelter for us all in the 'day of trouble,' Theo threw her whole soul into the imploring, impassioned cry for help.

Then, knowing that God is most ready to aid those who aid themselves, she rapidly collected her scattered wits to plan out what she had best do in the extremity she found herself. Untying the long, soft, red sash Queenie wore round her waist, she hastily, but firmly, fastened the child to herself, never ceasing, meanwhile, to cry her loudest for help, though her voice grew hoarse and weak under the terrible strain. Then Theo proceeded to free her own skirts from her feet, lest, being entangled, she might be sucked down under, when the boat settled down, as she knew, now, it undoubtedly must.

And overhead, flecking with white the blue glitter of the sky, the busy gulls skimmed hither and thither, wheeling round in circles. On the shore the fisher-wives, with bent heads, were still too intent on their mending to raise their eyes for one moment, and the chatter of their own high-pitched voices dulled their ears to the despairing cries floating across the waters. So the tragedy went on.

It was cool and shady in the Vicarage old-fashioned drawing-room. Mrs. Vesey, the invalid mistress, frail and sweet, was lying, as usual, on her couch, her dim, patient eyes watching the bay for the boat bringing over her expected guests from the Bunk.

In the next room tea was spread out: piles of sweet cakes and brown bread-and-butter; strawberries gleamed ripe and red in large, heaped-up dishes, and jugs of rich yellow cream stood about. Mrs. Vesey knew what a feast should be like for hungry boys and girls, and ordered a lavish repast to be prepared. Nor had she forgotten to provide for other guests who were bidden to celebrate her birthday. Down in the village schoolroom, tea and plum-cake, with piles of fruit, were all in readiness to be laid out the moment that the little scholars departed from afternoon school—a feast which they would return in due time to demolish.

Mrs. Vesey was a great sufferer; she had been house-ridden for years of her life, but she bore her cross of bodily ailments bravely and with soldierly courage. It was never thrust forward as an excuse to shelter its bearer from what she felt to be her duty. Although she was totally unable to preside in person at the treat for the fisher-children, she had arranged to be represented by Theo Carnegy, when the Vicarage tea was over. That young lady, after helping the little ones to make merry over their feast, was finally to marshal a procession up to the Vicarage, where the children intended to present to Mrs. Vesey such posies as their busy little fingers had managed to gather in the woods behind the village.

As Mrs. Vesey lay watching the bay from her open windows, Binks, the old handy-man, moved about on the lawn outside, now and again exchanging remarks with his mistress as he passed and repassed.

'Muster Geoff, he've come, ma'am!' said he presently, peering in the room.

'Oh, has he? Where is he, Binks?'

'He've stepped round to the stable for Splutters and Shutters, ma'am, that's where he be. B'ys is never content without the dogs arter them. I dunno where t'other young muster is, but the ladies is on their way across in their boat,' added Binks, shading his eyes to gaze out over the water.

'I know they are,' said Mrs. Vesey; 'I've been watching them. I saw them start from the Bunk pier. The boat's pretty well into the middle of the bay, now. Can't you see them, Binks?'

There was no answer.

Perhaps Binks resented the question, or perhaps he objected to admit that his eyesight was not so good as that of his mistress. Anyhow, he continued perfectly silent as he gazed, with a fixed stare, at some distant object.

'Hi, Splutters! Heel, Shutters! Come back, sir! Oh, Binks, really I couldn't prevent them coming round on the lawn; they were too much for me when I opened the stable door. Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Vesey! I didn't know you were at the window.' Polite Geoff, heated and flushed with his chase after the excitable terriers, stood hat in hand under the window while Splutters and Shutters tore madly up and down and across the lawn. Strangely enough, Binks took no notice of their capers, which, for once, were allowed to go unrebuked. His eyes, shaded by his wrinkled hand, were still intent on the distant boat.

'Theo and Queenie are on their way, Mrs. Vesey,' continued Geoff. 'I see the Bunk boat creeping over; they seem in no particular hurry. Don't you see them, Binks?' demanded the boy, rather astonished at the old man's stillness. 'Why, I can see them waving something—a long red thing. They certainly don't get on very fast, though, do they? Why—why, Binks! Oh, what on earth's the matter? Something's wrong with the boat; they're so still and—— Binks, *what* is it?' Geoff ended with a shout that was almost a scream, as he clutched the old man's arm wildly.

'Come along, Muster Geoff!' Binks roughly shook off the boy's hand. 'Run for your life; you're fleeter than me. Shove down our boat into the water, and I'll folly ye quick's ever I can!' roared the old man. 'They're sinkin' out there fast as fast. God help us all!'

Faster than ever he ran in his life tore Geoff, with a face blanched and drawn, to seize the Vicarage boat, and push her to the water's edge, putting forth all the strength of his young body to do so single-handed. To jump on board and take up an oar was the work of half a minute, and Geoff was pushing off without a thought of anybody else when a hoarse shout stayed him.

'Stay, muster!' panted Binks, hurrying to the edge. 'Two's better than one; two oars will reach 'em quicker!' and in scrambled the breathless old man, drops of perspiration rolling unheeded down his wrinkled cheeks.

Not another word was spoken by either as the man and boy tore through the water, with all the strength they possessed. Geoff silently watched Binks's face, trying to read, in its strained lines, the fate of those behind his back. But the boy's white, dry lips refused to utter the terrible question, 'Are they still above water?' Geoff's brain seemed too paralysed to think. Every sense was merged in the mad race of trying to cut still faster through the water to the rescue. The hard, brown visage of Binks was a dead wall as he pulled and puffed and panted. From it Geoff could gain no information, and, somehow, for his life, the boy dare not turn his head to see over his shoulder for himself.

On the shore the women-workers had at last awoke to the fact of the tragedy being enacted on the blue waters, and in the full blaze of the summer sunshine, almost within their reach. Wild cries of affright arose; the brown nets were flung aside this way and that. Bewildered groups stood close down to the water's edge tremblingly wringing their hands in miserable helplessness, and their eyes starting out of their heads as their gaze clung, glued, to the little craft slowly, slowly settling down.

CHAPTER XIV

A DOOR OF ESCAPE

It was a spell of long-drawn-out anguish for the watchers on shore, the while that Theo Carnegy and little Queenie sank helplessly in their rapidly filling boat. From one to another of the cottages round the bay the news had flown like wild-fire that the captain's boat, with the captain's daughters, was going down within sight, and not a man nor a boy in Northbourne village but was out at sea since daybreak, for the 'mackerrow' were proving a little gold-mine to the community, and the fishermen grudged to sleep or eat, so eager were they to make hay while the sun was shining.

The women would not have thought twice of taking to the boats themselves and attempting a rescue, but all the decent crafts were at sea; the few that were beached were useless, being out of repair. There was, accordingly, nothing to do but stand in huddled groups wringing the hands that, perforce, were helpless. Some—the timid ones—covered their eyes from the sight. Others, fascinated, found it impossible to turn their gaze for a single second from the hapless boat which

their practised sight noted was now perceptibly lower in the water. One or two among them, old Goody Dempster conspicuously, stood with white lips that moved silently as they prayed God to have pity, to stretch out His mighty hand and save those in dire danger.

And while the women watched breathlessly, or prayed, Geoff, with old Binks, struggled on, a nightmare feeling weighing them down all the time, that they were standing still, instead of making way.

At last, when the watchers on the shore could no longer see aught but the rim of the top of the boat, and only the two clinging figures in it, for 'The Theodora' had settled down almost under water, the Vicarage boat pulled up alongside, with a final long sweep, into which Geoff, half fainting, put his sole remaining strength.

How the rescue was achieved, then, none of the four could ever afterwards tell or picture with any clearness. It was as if other hands than those of Geoff and Binks did the work, while Queenie and then Theo were half lifted, half dragged in by the two.

More dead than alive, the rescued sisters were, with considerable difficulty, laid at the bottom of the boat. Theo had swooned away the moment she realised that they were saved, and the women watchers on the shore sobbed loudly in hysterical relief.

'Shall we take 'em over to the Vicarage?' hoarsely asked Binks, handling his oar for the return.

'No, no! Home—home to father!' whispered back Geoff, whose voice seemed to have died away into a feeble sort of whistle.

Then the two, exhausted as they were already, pulled their hardest over the blue waters to the tiny pier under the Bunk.

The catastrophe, next door to a terrible tragedy, had happened in the space of about fifteen minutes, and it seemed strangely impossible that the sun should be still shining, and the light wind curling the rippling waves as if nothing had happened.

The captain, who had been, as usual, absorbed in his manuscript, sitting with his back to the window, knew nothing of it until he was hastily called to carry up the senseless Theo. It was a considerable time before his efforts to restore the unconscious girl were successful; and it would not be easy to tell how the father, whom Theo Carnegy had allowed herself to think and pronounce indifferent to his children's welfare, suffered as he hung over the senseless form of his best-beloved child. Her peril stirred up all the love that, though undoubtedly existing, had been dormant. From that fateful hour, however, the old sea-captain was an altered man. His heart awoke to the fact that the chief place in it should be filled by his motherless children, instead of, as it had been, by a mere hobby.

All through the hours of the anxious night that followed he went from one bed to the other, tending the occupants with that gentleness, almost womanly, which a sailor possesses in no ordinary degree. For Queenie there were no apprehensions, save dread of a chill from the wetting she received; the child was tranquil, and appeared to have sustained no shock.

'We said "Our Father," me and Theo,' she whispered innocently to the captain, as he sat by her little bed holding her hands, 'and He sent Geoff and Binks directly to pick us out of the water; and then Theo went off to sleep in the boat, and my new shoes is spoilt most dreadful!'

With Theo it was otherwise. She had sustained a severe mental shock, as well as the bodily strain, in her fruitless efforts to pull the heavy boat through the water. And it had been a terrible spasm of terror to sink slowly, helplessly, in the yawning waves, trying all the time to hold up the precious little sister. When the doctor from Brattlesby arrived, he looked grave enough over his elder patient; and next day he was even more serious.

'She is in for brain fever!' he said briefly. He was a man of few words, leaving the burden of conversation, as a rule, to his patients. Hence, perhaps, it was that little Dr. Cobbe was the most popular being, man or doctor, for miles round Northbourne.

And with regard to Theo it was as he said. For many weeks Theo Carnegy lay battling for her life in the cruel clutches of the fever, unconscious that her most devoted and tenderest nurse was the father whom she had bitterly imagined thought more of his hobby than of his boys and girls. All Northbourne, as with one heart, sorrowed aloud for their favourite Miss Theedory; her grave condition was the sole theme of talk in the cottages round the bay.

'Happen she was too good to live!' croaked Jerry Blunt's mother, with an appropriate melancholy in her voice; and the gossips nodded approvingly at a sentiment which fitted in with their own views of life.

'Nothin' o' the sort!' struck in a dissentient voice, which belonged to Goody Dempster herself. 'There's none too good to live, seein' as life is a great gift that can only come from the Lord Himself. He gives, and He takes away, that's how we've got to look at things. And, please God, He will see fit to raise up Miss Theedory among us again, hale and sound. She's one as could be ill

spared.'

'Amen!' assented more than one voice among the listeners, in ready response.

But there was one heart that felt heavier than all others—too heavy to hold a ray of hope—and that belonged to Alick Carnegy. When he returned home from his stolen holiday, and found what had happened during his absence, the remorse of the boy was uncontrollable. He could not but feel it to be true, what others did not scruple to tell him bluntly, for plain-speaking was a distinguishing feature of the fishing village, that had he and Ned Dempster been at home, they could have reached his sisters in far less time than Geoff, younger and weaker of muscle, and Binks, long past his heyday of strength and stiffened with rheumatism, had done.

With cold shivers of dread, he heard how Theo, though delivered from one perilous strait, lay in jeopardy of her life in the new peril of fever.

She would die, he was convinced, and voices seemed to be incessantly crying in his ears: 'It will be your fault, all your fault! You fought to have your own way, in spite of her pleadings, and now she will die because you were not here to help her in such sore peril. She was deserted, so she will die, our Theo!'

Alick, a boy of strong feelings, became maddened by despair, and exaggerated the calamity. As time went on—and brain fever rarely hurries itself—Theo grew no better, but rather weaker, and Alick secretly called himself her murderer. He was distraught.

'Oh, Ned, if we had been at home, you and I, we could have reached them in half the time Geoff and old Binks took! We could have rescued them before "The Theodora" began to settle down!' he blurted out when he found Ned sobbing helplessly in a corner of the tea-house, The latter, though not possessed of Alick's torturing powers of imagination, was overcome with remorse for his own share in the transaction.

Oh, Muster Alick, it ain't "we" it's me, only me, as is to blame!' he hoarsely said, in a voice choked with sobs.

'What do you mean?' asked Alick heavily; and he stared down at the crouching speaker.

'Miss Theedory telled I to mend the leak,' moaned Ned. 'And she thought I'd done it, I expec', for she showed how 'twas to be mended; but I knowed how as well as she did, for I've seed a-many done. But I put off the doin' of it to go to Brattlesby Woods along with you, Muster Alick, and Jerry Blunt, an' I deceived her; an' now she's drowned, Miss Theedory is! Leastways, 'tis the same thing; for all Northbourne's a-sayin' as she's bound to die of it all!' The boy, burying his head, broke down into a loud, irrepressible fit of crying.

Ned too! Alick's lips quivered as he turned abruptly away. He himself it was who tempted Ned away, and caused the boy to neglect his duty, bringing down all this misfortune. He had been thinking himself the only person in fault for being wilfully absent, but it was worse and worse! He had lured away, and placed another in the same position, so wide-spreading can a single evil step be in its results. Even through his sinking fears about Theo, Alick could not but feel pathetically sorry for poor Ned, whose grief grew wilder in its abandon after his confession was out.

'Have you told any one about not mending the leak, Ned? Does my father know?' he came back to Ned's side to ask anxiously.

'I dussn't!' was the choking reply. 'But I feels bound, somehow, to tell you,' he added. 'If Miss Theedory dies, 'twill be me as did it; an' you can tell 'em all so, if you like! They'll put me in gaol, o' course; p'raps they'll hang me. They may bring it in manslaughter. I dunno what they haven't the power to do!' ended Ned desperately.

Alick stared through the window out to sea, with an equally woebegone face with that of his companion in misery. Two more unhappy boys one could not have well beheld. And this grievous state of affairs had revengefully trodden on the heels of the delightfully fascinating expedition to the woods, which had been forbidden to the one boy, and which the other boy had shirked his duty to join in!

'What would be the end of it all?' Alick dully asked himself.

'Ned,' he said aloud, and there was a passionate ring of regret in his voice, 'it wasn't worth it!'

'No, muster, it warn't!' assented Ned, fully understanding that Alick would have given his right hand to have put back the clock of time, that he might again have the chance of apologising as Geoff had done, and returning to his duty in the schoolroom. Both boys felt positively assured that had they been on the spot the catastrophe could not possibly have occurred.

There was a spell of silence in the tea-house. Now and again the echo of a sob shook Ned from head to foot. Alick leaned his forehead against the window jamb, and stared sullenly at the leaping waves below. As he gazed, a strange resolve came into the boy's mind, born of the

deepening despair consuming him.

In the black gloom that environed him, came Satan's opportunity.

'You will never be forgiven if Theo dies,' whispered the tempting voice. 'Perhaps you also will be put in prison, who knows, with Ned as an accomplice!' Alick Carnegy, it will be seen, had but confused notions as to what manslaughter meant. He shivered and cowered at the terrifying notions of being shut up for life, perhaps, in some gloomy gaol. Better-informed boys may jeer at Alick's ignorance of things in general, but Northbourne was an out-of-the-way, stand-still spot, with few or no opportunities of smartening the wits, of keeping up with the times.

'The best way out of the difficulty would be to run away, wouldn't it?' as he brooded, somebody seemed to suddenly and swiftly whisper in his ear. And Alick, when the sense of the suggestion penetrated his mind, abruptly lifted his hanging head. He gasped aloud in relief. A door of escape opened in the black, impenetrable wall that was closing in round him.

'Ned,' he said softly, nudging the other boy, 'listen to me! Be done with that cry-baby business! We two, you and I, have got ourselves into an awful scrape, and there's only one thing for us. Can't you guess what that is? Rouse up! Can't you guess?' he repeated impatiently.

'Me guess? No! I can't make Miss Theedory get well; and what else matters?' Ned lifted a tear-stained face to say brokenly.

'You've often said you'd be game to run away to sea, if I made up my mind to do it, haven't you? Well, all the blame of whatever happens comes on us—you and me. We are bound to suffer the penalty.' Alick spoke slowly, and with the air of weighing his words, while Ned listened in awe. 'Now, then, it seems to me, is our chance to do it. Let's set out this very night; they'd never miss us in all the—the worry about Theo, until it would be too late to overtake us. We could walk to London in about three days, I expect; and once at the Docks it would be queer if you and I couldn't slip quietly on board some North-bound vessel, as we've often planned to do. Speak up! Will you come?'

And Alick breathlessly waited for Ned's long-of-coming answer.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIRD-SCHOOL

Meantime, while all Northbourne, in its genuine affection for Miss Theedory, hung expectantly on the issues of life or death—for who could say which it might be?—Jerry Blunt was quietly making his preparations for pursuing his new calling of bird-trainer.

Although he had said nothing about it, one of the new pupils had been specially set apart to be given to Theo, if it pleased God to spare her young life. Theo, gentle and sweet-spoken to all, had won the reverence and loyal regard of the disabled sailor, when he returned home a cripple, by her friendly welcome to him.

Jerry Blunt was not one to forget a kind word. He had not come across so many, in his up-and-down life, that they had become cheapened.

It was not, however, until the young finches were about two months old, and showed symptoms of whistling powers, that Jerry could really begin the labour of educating them in real earnest. His first step was to systematically separate his pupils into small classes, so to say, or groups of birds, lodging them in wicker cages. The next proceeding was to shut them up in a darkened room and keep them without food for a given time.

The skilful teacher then began the singing-lessons by slowly playing over and over the special tune he had selected—'The Blue Bells of Scotland'—for the finches to learn. He performed the melody upon a small instrument given him by Pierre Lacroix, his comrade on the expedition, the notes of which were curiously like the birds' own. Jerry truly had marvellous need of patience. But he knew—none better—that it is only by slow means that perfect trust is gained. His pupils sat for a considerable time sulking, perhaps with deeply injured feelings, being dinnerless; and they were, doubtless, bewildered by the darkness of the room. They were not deceived into thinking that the night had fallen, not they! As a proof, they made no attempt to sleep. They simply sat puzzling out, with suspicion, the mystery that surrounded them.

By and by, some sharper, brighter wit among his fellows began to listen to the music, so curiously familiar, with his tiny head on one side; and he was won over! Presently he tried, timidly and cautiously, to pipe a few faint notes in imitation—just a few. Then he halted.

'Not so bad for a beginning!' delightedly murmured Jerry, under his breath.

Bully, on his part, rather seemed to like the sound of his own voice. With a vain perk and a flutter, he tried again, his note more assured. Lo! there was a duet. A neighbour finch had joined in; another bully was won over, and Jerry chuckled softly. Old Pierre had been perfectly correct, then! The thing was possible. It was Jerry's own first attempt, and he had been careful to follow out the Frenchman's directions, though, until he heard with his own ears the result, he had been secretly somewhat sceptical.

In a few moments more there was a feeble chorus piping in unison with the tiny bird-organ which Jerry continued to softly play. The other finches had summoned up courage to join their brethren.

As an instantaneous reward the teacher let a flood of light into the dark room, in accordance with Pierre's code. More, he proceeded to give his hungry pupils a little—only a little—food, enough, in fact, to make them ravenous for more. Then he plunged the little room in sudden darkness again by shutting out the light. Thus Jerry gradually educated the birds into connecting the idea of food and light with the sound of his little instrument's melody.

After two or three repetitions of this performance, it followed that the finches, kept on short commons, no sooner heard the notes of the bird-organ always playing the one unvarying tune, than they, too, attempted to sing it, in the sheer hope of being fed, and of seeing the hated darkness disappear. Jerry being ever careful not to disappoint their expectations, the result came to pass that the particular melody was committed to memory—the tune was learned, more or less correctly; for the feathered pupils were like human scholars, in that the few, not the many, arrive at perfection.

After this reward for his enormous patience, Jerry Blunt's next move was to board out his pupils in the village with trustworthy boys who were selected for the posts of pupil-teachers. One boy was appointed to each bird, in order to carry out the business of teaching *the* tune by whistling it incessantly until the air was firmly fixed in those tiny memories, which, if they had not been exactly 'wax to receive,' proved 'marble to retain.' As the finches grew perfect in their one life-lesson, the Scottish ditty resounded sweetly all over the village of Northbourne. After that, the pupils being pronounced 'finished,' Jerry Blunt set forth, with his batch of performers, to London, where he got a fairly good price for his well-trained songsters. His birds sold off rapidly, each of them going off to be the pride and joy of some girl or boy's heart with the tuneful old melody—

'O where and O where has my Hieland laddie gane?'

and Jerry returned home with orders for many more bullfinches as he could procure.

These orders, however, he was doubtful of executing; the finches were getting too advanced in age to prove docile pupils. Still, Jerry would do his best, and he set off to trap some young birds that had already left the parent-nests. The work of training these advanced birds was quite as difficult. However, Jerry was a persevering individual, gifted with wondrous patience, an untiring teacher. He succeeded beyond his hopes, and as time went on was enabled to earn what he called a 'tidy' sum.

'"Tis wonderful strange, Jerry, my son, that ye can train the morsels o' critters to sing what we may call human tunes! Nobody, of course, could do it but yer own self, I'm sure,' grudgingly admitted his mother, when success became sure.

'The idea! That's so like you, mother!' laughed Jerry, as he softly tickled the head of the bullfinch he had retained as a gift for Miss Theedory out of the first and best batch. 'You're that conceited, you think that your own son can do all things better than other folk. But I could tell you a true story, now, of what others have done.'

And in his own words Jerry related, while his mother knitted in the firelight, how a great musician had, as a youth, trained a young bullfinch to pipe 'God save the King.' The musician was much attached to the bird, and the bird to him. Love begets love, with the animal creation at least, which is, undoubtedly, the simple secret of the strange power possessed by some human beings over birds and beasts. If you desire to be their masters, you must, first of all, love the dumb creatures. Where love is, all things are possible. Bull-finches, in particular, have a strongly developed faculty for attaching themselves. And the simple logic is easy to follow out. In the training already described, music and pleasure—that is, the food and sunlight, which constitute Bully's pleasure—are inseparably connected. Hence it follows soon, that the bird, to show his joy at the sight of his owner, learns to greet him with the one tune his little life has been spent in learning.

The musician, having cause to go abroad, left his petted bird in charge of his sister. On his return to this country, his first visit was to that lady, who told him, sorrowfully, that Bully had pined himself into a serious illness, evidently in the grief he felt at his master's absence. The grieved owner went hastily into the room where the cage was, and spoke gently to the ailing bird, which stood huddled up into what looked like a ball of feathers on his perch. Instantly, at the sound of the loved master's voice, the dim, closed eyes were opened wide. There was a feeble flutter of the faded plumage; the drooping head was raised. Half creeping, half staggering, the little creature attained the outstretched finger, on which he had barely strength to steady

himself. With a supreme effort, as it seemed, he piped out feebly, in low, half-muffled notes, 'God save the King.' And then—Bully fell dead!

Jerry's voice had a slight choke in it as he finished his pathetic little story. As for his old mother, she had thrown her apron over her head, and was quietly sobbing under its shelter.

'Well, my lad,' she said, by and by, when her tears were dried, 'I've aye said that you were the best son mother ever had, and for the same a blessing will, no doubt, rest upon your head. And as for the bits o' birds an' beasts well, I've heard the old passon—Mr. Vesey himself—say, an' I never forget the words, as—

> '"He prayeth best who loveth best
> All men and bird and beast;"

so, to my thinkin', that's how 'tis wi' you. Ye love the mites, and ye can do all things wi' them. That's yer secret!'

And undoubtedly Jerry's old mother was right.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEAMY SIDE OF LIFE

It was a still, dark night when two short figures, each carrying a bundle, stole away from Northbourne, skirting Brattlesby Woods, and making for the old London road.

The fugitives were Alick Carnegy and Ned Dempster, and each was trying his hardest to prevent his companion from hearing the choking sobs that could not be kept down.

All boys, of course, secretly believe that it is a fine, manly thing to run away to sea. From time immemorial it has sounded so well—in fiction. Is there a boy breathing who has not pictured himself, free as a bird on the wing, shaking off the trammels of home in this fashion? But the grim reality was an altogether different matter to the couple of friends who were setting forth under cover of darkness. For one thing, Alick, who hated anything underhand, was thoroughly ashamed of sneaking away in the night. That in itself distinctly took away from the dash and glory of the affair.

In addition, he felt himself groping in a fog of misery. Nevermore, he felt convinced, would he see his gentle, loving sister in this life; and he shivered uncontrollably as he thought that, but for his absence in her hour of peril, Theo would be as well and strong as anybody—as, for instance, little Queenie, upon whom the accident had left no evil effects.

Before and behind, life was grim and stripped of hope for both the boy-adventurers as they plunged along the high road. They were too intensely miserable to look forward to the future. All they were intent on was to escape from the dreaded consequences of their misdoings.

It is hard work travelling with a heart of lead in one's bosom—

> 'A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a.'

Still, the two trudged on, mile after mile, until when the dawn stole up the sky they found themselves on the outskirts of a country town at a considerable distance from Northbourne. Having but a few shillings, belonging to Alick, they had decided to walk every step of the road to London Docks. In the dim grey light from the east they saw, to their astonishment, large looming vans and many blurred forms, all in busy motion. There seemed to be, as it were, a commotion of shadows.

'What on earth is it, Ned? They look like ghosts flitting about!' Alick said, half fearfully.

'No! They ain't ghosts!' slowly rejoined Ned, after a prolonged stare. 'I'll tell you what it means. Tis a circus, or mayhap a wild-beast show, or somethin' of that sort. They're carryvans, leastways, and they're makin' an early start. Depend on it, that's what 'tis, Muster Alick!'

Alick whistled.

'I shouldn't wonder, Ned. You've just hit it. It's a circus! Let's go closer. Who knows but they might give us a lift on the road to London!'

Ned shook his head; he was extremely doubtful as to that. Such civility was not by any means

the rule of the road.

As the boys drew nearer, they felt sure it must be a wild-beast show, from the rumble of subdued roars, as if from pent-up animals, and the chatter of birds that resounded from the depths of the caravans in which the inmates were, evidently, disturbed from their slumbers by the early move. Horses were being put to, and men were running to and fro, but Alick and Ned felt shy of accosting any one of them.

They hung back and watched eagerly.

'Hilloa, you two shavers! Whatever do you want loafing round here at this time o' morning? Say, can't yer?'

The shrill, loud voice came from the window of a house-caravan, and a woman's head, stuck all over with curl-papers, was thrust out to stare intently at the new-comers.

'We are going up to London—on business,' said Alick, mustering up courage, and speaking as manfully as he could. 'And,' he moved up closer to say, 'we thought that, perhaps, you would give us a lift as far as you could. I'll give you a shilling!'

The boy spoke with the air as though shillings were plentiful enough. But, in truth, he had only two half-crowns of his own in the world; they were the entire amount of his savings, which he had brought on setting forth in life.

The woman with the curl-papers stared hard down at the two young strangers before she answered, not so ill-naturedly—

'Well, I don't much mind, if so be as one of you gits on these yer steps, and has a ride along of us. The t'other can git on to one of the beasteses' vans at the back. 'Twon't break no bones if you do, as I can see.' With a reassuring nod, she then withdrew her curl-papers into the interior of her moving home.

'You'd best go aside her, I suppose, Muster Alick,' whispered Ned. 'I'll hang on to that van yonder;' and he took himself off in the direction to which the woman had seemed to point.

'The missus said as I might have a ride on the back of this van,' said he, meekly enough, to a man in his shirt-sleeves, who was too busy with the bars of the van to look up at the speaker.

'All right! If so be as she says so, it's got to be, I reckon!' he growled; and Ned swung himself up behind, trying hard to make out, as the procession moved off slowly and ponderously at last, what sort of beasts were on the other side of the boards he was leaning against. Suppose they were lions, or suppose the boards got loose? The fisher-lad, whom storm and tempest on the deep could not dismay, felt a bit creepy. Setting his ear close to the wood, he could distinctly hear hideous growls, as if some savage creature, maddened by hunger, were ready to break out and leap upon him. What would granny say if she could dream of his situation? But dashing his hand across his sleepy eyes, Ned hastily told himself there must be no harking back, no thinking of what granny or anybody else at Northbourne would say or do. It must be good-bye, for ever, to the old life. The motion of the van, the rest after the long tramp, alike caused the country-bred boy to nod sleepily as he clung to his perch.

Presently, he was back again in Northbourne. It was Sunday afternoon, and, dressed in his best, the fisher-boy stood up straight in class to repeat his hymn to his earnest-eyed, sweet-faced teacher, 'Miss Theedory.' And the words he fought sleepily to remember must have been born of his nearness to the growling monsters within the caravan—

'Christian, dost thou see them
  On the holy ground,
How the troops of Midian
  Prowl and prowl around?'

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE MIRE

It was still darkish as the array of vans filed along the London road, and, in the confusion, Ned lost sight of the van in which Alick had got a lift beside the lady in curl-papers. And no wonder! for the fact was, the show had parted in two divisions—one going to be stationed in the East End, somewhere about Whitechapel, the other portion to traverse the suburbs south of the Thames.

It thus happened that the two Northbourne boys were separated, as they each discovered

when the day wore on. Worse still: they found, to their dismay, that they had been entrapped artfully. A couple of useful boys were desperately needed, as a fever had been hanging about the show, breaking out at fitful intervals, and the chief victims had been the boy-helpers, who, one after another, dropped off, some to hospitals, others to die, like rats in the holes that were all the homes they knew.

The welcome accorded to Alick and Ned was thus explained. The showwoman was secretly overjoyed to give the strangers a lift on their journey. But before the first day closed in the pair of adventurers found out what real hard work meant. Even Ned Dempster, accustomed to the dilatory, easy-going life of sea-fishing, knew nothing indeed of the drudgery and hustling and flurry of such everyday work as he had stepped into, unawares, among the rough caravan folk.

Alick, of course, was thunderstruck and stupefied to find himself at everybody's rude beck and call. And to have his awkward, bewildered movements hurried on by hard cuffs and violent language was an unpleasantly new experience for a Carnegy to endure. His indignant attempts at rebelling were treated with loud jeers, and by savage threats of a horse-whipping. The latter menace was carried out before the week was over, on the unhappy boy obstinately refusing to clean out the animals' cages, to fetch and carry the food for birds and beasts, and to perform a hundred other distasteful offices.

'I'll teach ye; I'll conduct your education, young sir!' shouted the ring-master. 'And here's the lesson-book!' he sneered, flourishing a cruel-looking whip.

Stunned and crushed, Alick had asked repeatedly to see Ned, and also entreated to be permitted to leave the show at once. His requests were, of course, harshly refused. In addition, he was sternly warned that if he attempted to escape he would be horse-whipped again, and next-door to death.

'They're a catch for us, them two!' the brutal ring-master remarked to his wife, as he and she sat at their supper after the performance was over one evening. 'That tallest youngster's a swell as has run away from 'ome, judging from his looks and clothes. He's just what we've bin wantin' for a long time back. The fust thing to do is to break that 'igh speerit of his, and then we'll set to work to train him to show off with the leopards. That would draw famous with the public.'

'Not with the leopards! Not with them beasts! They're the worst and the fiercest in the show. 'Tis next-door to impossible to tame a leopard. I won't 'ave it, I tell you, so there!' the woman broke in, with a high-pitched voice.

'Well, well, we're not going to 'ave words about it!' The first speaker yielded; for his wife, the widow of the former proprietor, was the real owner of the circus. 'We needn't say no more about the leopards—for a bit. But I'll tell you what. 'Ee can do tricks with little Mike, the new pony, and the monkeys. We'll make up a sort of little performance a-purpose for 'im and them. I must invent a little somethink that would be taking.'

'I 'ope 'ee won't catch the fever, like the rest on 'em, that's all!' muttered the mistress, shaking her head doubtfully.

That, however, was just what Alick Carnegy managed to do. After some weeks' slaving and knocking about at the hands of the ring-master, such as fairly stunned him, he fell sick. At once the poor, gaunt, dirty lad, whom Northbourne would have refused to recognise as the smart Alick Carnegy, always trig and trim, was hustled off to the squalid room of an old Whitechapel crone who, for the five shillings in the pocket of his torn coat, agreed to nurse him through his trouble. If he had the luck to live through it, the show-folk intended to have him back. If he died—well, there was the parish ready to bury him.

Ned, on the other hand, was by no means in such evil plight. He was still in the division of the show moving from one suburb to another, so he had, at least, fresh air to breathe. True, he had brought on himself one brutal thrashing by running away from the show on the first opportunity. He was easily enough traced to the Docks, where he had sped, hoping against hope to find Alick loitering there. Instead, he was captured by the ring-master himself, who had been informed of the boy's flight, and who thought it quite worth his while to look up such an intelligent, hard-working little chap as Ned. The truth was, Ned had made himself far too useful among the animals to be thus let slip. All this time the dejected lad had been purposely kept in ignorance of the whereabouts of his companion. It was only by pure accident that he at last heard of Alick's collapse and speedy removal from the show—to die, for what anyone cared. One of the showmen had been despatched from the head-quarters of the establishment on an errand, and, knocking up against Ned, exclaimed—

'Hilloa! You ain't got the fever yet, then? Your chum has distanced you; for he's down with it.' Then the man told Ned that Alick was lying 'as ill as ill' in the house of an old crone who once belonged to the show herself.

It was a relief to hear even that much of his companion; it was better than the mystery of silence. But Ned's panic was pretty severe when he thought of Alick's perilous and deserted condition. A rush of mingled feelings came over the Northbourne lad. He felt as the prodigal son must have felt in the far country.

Yes, it was exactly like the Bible story which 'Miss Theedory' seemed to like best. At least, she told it to her class-boys more often than any other, and Ned, listening to her, had grown to realise the unhappy youth's condition in that far-off land where he had 'wasted his substance in riotous living,' and to sympathise cordially with him when he 'came to himself.'

But Ned, hustled, driven, sworn at, from morning to night, could now, in those scanty moments allowed him to swallow his rough food, or before his tired eyes closed in sleep, still more vividly picture the prodigal's desolation and despair.

Then he remembered the outcome of that despair: the unhappy youth in the parable suddenly determined to arise and go to his father, to confess, with bitter remorse, his own mad wrong-doings. Would it not be well for himself to arise and return to Northbourne, and to confess the terrible folly of which he and Alick had been guilty? Again and again Ned imagined himself so doing. But the cruel whip which he had already tasted was another side to the question. No, he dare not again attempt to escape! He writhed still when he recollected the stinging lashes of the long, serpent-like whip. At last came an inspiration. He could, and he would, write to the captain at the Bunk, entreating him to come and rescue his son, and also Ned himself. This resolve, however, was a work of no small difficulty. To procure an envelope and a postage-stamp were next door to impossible for the lad who was watched so keenly. Fortunately, some body coming out of the performance one evening, in pity for his unhappy looks, threw Ned a penny. A day or so after, when sweeping out the ring, he found in the sawdust an envelope unwritten upon, and tolerably clean. It was a prize: and that evening, when the public were shrieking with laughter over the capers of a clown arm-in-arm with a tame bear, followed by a couple of monkeys skilfully mimicking their very strut, Ned was behind one of the vans scribbling with pencil a few frantic, ill-spelt words that, when the crumpled envelope arrived at the Bunk, were wept over and laughed over in tumultuous joy. The penny thrown him went for a stamp; the letter was pushed, with trembling haste, into a letter-box, and Ned had returned to his post among the squalid back-scenes of the gay performance before anybody had time to miss him.

His heart beat in mad throbs, so that the boy was scarce able to sleep a wink that night. Hopes and fears jostled themselves in his excited brain. If the postman, old 'Uncle Dan,' who trudged from Brattlesby town every day at noon with the Northbourne post-bag, only safely delivered the letter Ned had posted, all would be well. With the captain himself to the fore, every difficulty must, and would, be swept away. Then—— But with a sobbing catch in his breath Ned put aside the after. He was too weak from misery and ill-usage to finish the blissful result. So, over and over, he murmured, 'I have sinned against heaven and before thee!' until that refrain of all true penitence lulled him to sleep.

'Alick is found! My boy is alive!' The captain had been able to utter no more as he pushed the crumpled wisp of a letter into a thin hand eagerly outstretched to receive it. The tears were running unheeded down the old man's cheeks.

'Oh, father!' There was a glad cry. 'God is good indeed! He has heard our prayers.'

It was Theo—or was it Theo's ghost?—who sat by the open window drinking in the sea breezes she was still too weak to go out of doors and meet. Yes, Theo was, day by day, coming back to her old sweet self, after a long spell of illness. There was only weakness left to fight—weakness and anxiety about Alick. As long as possible the fact of Alick having run away from home was kept from the prostrate girl. But in the end it abruptly leaked out, and nearly pushed her back through the gates of death.

Every means that the captain knew of had been set in motion to find the pair of runaways. But the searchers were checkmated at the outset by failing to find the boys at the Docks. The police in the end convinced themselves and the captain that the pair had stolen on board some foreign vessel on the eve of its departure, and, as stowaways, were already far off on the deep.

But which of the many hundreds of ships that had set sail since might the boys possibly be aboard? Again and again had the half-distracted father asked himself the maddening question as he paced the busy Docks. He would return then to Northbourne, where his other beloved child lay in jeopardy of her young life. Through the anxious night-watches by her bed, the old sailor pictured his boy on board some barque ploughing the seas, the stormy winds roaring through the rigging, the decks wet and slippery, the rough sailors cuffing and jostling the unwelcome intruders who had stolen their passages.

None knew better than the captain what the boys who had hidden themselves in some dark corner of an outward-bound vessel would be called upon to endure, when discovered; none knew better than he the hourly dangers to which they would be exposed in the perils of the deep—the risks of foundering, of collision, of tempests.

As the days wore on, and no word came of the runaways, the old sailor's heart sank to the lowest depths.

'Father, we must trust him to God; it's all we can do,' a low, weak voice whispered; and the old man took heart again. He would trust his boy to that—

'Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave.'

Perhaps of all mankind a sailor has experienced most signal proofs of the omnipotence of God. Throughout the daily dangers they are exposed to is the underlying, as well as the overruling, sense of the Almighty Power that holds the heavens in the hollow of His hand.

The captain knew that his girl was right. What he and she had to do was simply trust Alick to his Father in heaven.

Then came Ned's missive with its startling news.

'You will go, father, and fetch him home?'

'Yes, yes! If I can find him. Please God I may!'

That same day the captain started for London, and with him went Philip Price, who insisted on joining in the search for the hapless Alick. The young tutor had proved himself a very friend in need in 'the day of trouble' that had befallen the Bunk. What more natural then that he should persist in helping the captain in what would be a ticklish piece of work, as both men knew?

Before the two set out, Philip Price brought his mother over from Brattlesby to establish her in Theo's sick-room. It was not the widow's first visit to the Bunk. The woman who never had a daughter of her own found in the serious, gentle Theo a realisation of those dream-daughters who had never been in real life.

And Theo, on her part, welcomed the quiet, soft-spoken widow—another bit of Philip Price, so similar were mother and son. It was a relief to the overwrought girl to restfully watch the household reins gathered up in other and abler hands than her own. As for the widow, she grew alert and brisk; so good is a little wholesome activity for others.

'We must have no fretting, no repining, dear Miss Carnegy,' she persisted cheerfully. 'Your young brother is sure to be found. The captain can't fail, now he has got my Philip to aid him in the search!'

The widow's text for every sermon was 'my Philip'; and it was one of which Theo Carnegy never tired, to judge by her intent listening to the subject-matter it produced.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN MULLINER'S RENTS

It was a hot, stifling summer day, and perhaps Whitechapel never looked more grimy, more squalid, more sorrowful, perforce from its pathetic contrast to the summer beauty of the skies.

The pavement was so hot that the heat seemed to rise up, flouting itself in your very face.

In one particular alley, known as Mulliner's Rents, the heat seemed almost tropical. Possibly the dense overcrowding of this quarter with human life enhanced the burning sensation of the thick air breathed out and breathed in again, unrefreshed, by multitudes of lungs. Here, there, and everywhere human beings stood about idly. Groups of untidy women, in twos and threes, gossiped; lazy men lolled against the houses, smoking in sullen silence; and for every grown-up person there were fully a dozen of squalid children playing, shouting, staring, and squabbling with a vigour no heat could abate.

There was little traffic, so to say, in Mulliner's Rents; it was quite select in that one single respect. Nothing on wheels penetrated the unlovely quarter save a coster's barrow of fruit; unwholesome little yellow pears and cruelly green apples of the lowest type of apple-kind being the wares of the moment. It was truly a sad and sorrowful haunt, this of the man-made town; and so it seemed to the two travellers fresh from the God-made country—from the wholesome breezes of the *caller* salt air of Northbourne—when they plunged into its midst.

'Courage, captain!' said Philip Price, when he noticed the blanching of the elder man's brown face and the unutterable loathing of horror that spoke out of every feature. 'We've got to put our shoulder to the wheel, and leave no stone unturned to find Alick, and carry him out of this pestilent hole.'

Philip Price, before his health broke down, had been for a few months doing duty as curate in a still more squalid colony of human nests than even this. When the sailor flinched, and hung

back, Philip strode forward, determined to conquer, unheeding the battery of stares turned upon himself and his companion by the inhabitants, and the free-and-easy comments, of which they were by no means chary.

Already the captain and Philip had that day spent many fruitless hours in the search, when they hit on a fresh clue and an address in Mulliner's Rents. But here, even, difficulties bristled, and the tide of hopelessness was setting in upon both men when a wretched old crone was dragged out of a public-house to confront them, with dazed eyes and with a hateful odour of gin oozing from her whole person.

'Yes—well, yes,' she grudgingly admitted, in answer to the eager questions of the searchers; 'I does know a boy down with fever. What o' that? I ain't done no harm to him! He's 'ad the best I could offer; and five shillin's don't go far when there's sickness,' she ended, with a whimper, for she was maudlin with drink.

'Take us to that boy at once!' commanded Philip Price; for the captain's agitation unmanned him for the moment.

The wretched woman, awed by Philip's tone, complied. Perhaps, also, she obeyed, half in fear of the policeman, who had stepped up to join the gentlemen, and half in hope of getting more silver to spend on more drink.

Before half an hour was over Alick Carnegy was found. It was a terrible shock to the captain to recognise his boy in the squalid, dirty, delirious sufferer tossing wearily on a heap of sacks, on the grimy floor of an attic at the top of an evil-smelling, dilapidated house, to which the crone stumblingly conducted them.

'Merciful powers!' he groaned in dismayed horror.

'Hush!' enjoined Philip. 'Be as calm as you can. I believe the poor little chap is off his head; but, if there's a gleam of consciousness, it would send him over the precipice again to witness your agitation.'

There was small fear of the captain doing any further mischief; he was stunned into helplessness, and stood mute, trying to force himself to believe that the huddled heap of squalid misery was his very own son—smart, manly-looking Alick Carnegy. Though the captain was thus helpless, Philip Price seemed to know exactly what to do, and how to do it.

Getting the address of a doctor, he rushed off, in the first place, to fetch him. Then a bedstead and clean bedding were hired in. In an hour or two more the grimy room was swept and tidied as far as possible; the window propped up to stay open; the hapless, dirty sufferer cleansed and made straight; and beside his bed sat a gentle-faced, trained nurse, whose wholesome presence seemed to transform the room.

'Now, captain,' cheerily said Philip, who looked another man in the excitement, 'you are going to take a bit of advice from me, I hope. You will go straight back to Brattlesby by the night train. Your invalid at home must not be forgotten; anxiety is not the best sort of tonic for her. And I mean to remain here with your boy.'

'God bless you, Price!' The old sailor's voice trembled as he wrung Philip's hand. 'I never knew it was in you! Man, how one can be deceived! I thought your head was in the clouds, and that you didn't know your right hand from your left, practically speaking. Yes, yes! I'll run down to-night, and to-morrow I can return. I can trust my boy to you. Let nothing be spared; there's my purse. The doctor seemed a downright good sort of chap and *she* is worth a gold-mine!' He pointed to the nurse, who was deftly bathing Alick's burning brow.

'What a splendid lad that Price is! He's the very salt of the earth!' murmured the old captain, as he threaded his way later through the unsavoury streets, now ablaze with lights that enticed and beckoned forth misery to stalk out from every dark corner. 'He is a true Christian—that's what it is! To think how my boys have ill-treated him, and here he is caring for Alick so tenderly that the poor boy's mother couldn't have done more, had she been spared! That's what you call returning good for evil, with a vengeance! Well, well, please God, I'll mend my own ways too! If I have my girl and my boy both restored to me, I'll be a different father to them from what I have been.'

It had been borne in upon the captain's mind, during the cloud of sorrow overshadowing his home, that he had, somehow, failed in his duty. And, with the courage that belongs only to the brave heart, he admitted his shortcomings.

There was tremendous excitement in Northbourne when it was known that Alick had actually been found. The Bunk was besieged by an ever-growing crowd, anxious to have the news verified. And where was Ned Dempster? The captain himself had to assure them his next step would be to discover the hapless Ned. Yes, yes; Ned also should be found and brought back. Not a stone should be left unturned until he rescued Ned likewise.

And the old sailor kept his word. On his return to London he and Philip Price took it in turn, between their spells of watching beside Alick's sick-bed, to seek out the wandering half of the

show-circus. Time went on, but they were still unsuccessful, however. Not until the fever died out, and Alick, weak and exhausted, almost beyond building up, began to show faint signs of interest in his surroundings, could any questions be put to him. It was Philip Price who managed, without agitating the sufferer, to win from his feeble lips the name of the show. After that it was a tolerably easy matter to unearth its whereabouts.

On demanding Ned's release, a series of denials met them as to the boy being with the establishment at all. A storm of furious resistance which followed had to be quelled by the stern detective who accompanied the captain in his raid upon the show. Back in triumph to the Whitechapel attic they carried the trembling Ned, who had to be scoured and fed and clothed into his 'right mind' once again.

And this was running away secretly! thought each humiliated adventurer as they gazed, stony-eyed, at one another.

Shortly after, when Alick had crept sufficiently far out of the fever, looking a white shadow of his former self, the two boys were conveyed back to Northbourne, where a genuinely hearty welcome awaited them from the fisher-folk. Jerry Blunt, indeed, had suggested a triumphal arch with WELCOME in letters tall and wide. But that notion was instantly quashed by wiser heads.

'We be thankful to see 'em back,' judicially said Northbourne; 'but we ain't a-goin' to make "conquerin' heroes" of such young limbs!'

So it came to pass that the boys who thought it such a fine, manly thing to run away to sea, as boys will think, returned meekly, with shamed eyes, and hearts bounding joyfully at sight of the homes they had not dreamed were so dear until they had forfeited them, as they thought, for ever.

CHAPTER XIX

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

'Oh, Alick!

'Oh, Theo!'

After the first cries of greeting there was a silence. Theo's arms were tight round her restored brother's neck, and Alick rested his tear-stained cheek against his sister's. They were alone in the room, but, in truth, the boy would not have cared if all Northbourne had been looking on.

'Theo,' he sobbed out presently, 'it was awful!'

'Yes, dear, it must have been,' whispered Theo sympathetically, tightening her arms. 'It was not what you expected?'

'It was *awful*!' repeated Alick. As yet he could find no words to picture his experience of life out in the hard world. 'And,' he went on, lifting up his tear-stained face, 'I am more sorry than I can ever tell that I did it, Theo—sorry and ashamed.'

'Have you told God that, Alick?' asked Theo softly, in his ear.

'Yes, I have,' was the grave, equally low reply. 'I've put it on to the end of my prayers, night and morning. And—perhaps He will forgive me some day, if I—if I can do something, work out something, you know, to show that I *am* really and truly sorry. Don't you think I could manage something of the sort, Theo?' asked Alick earnestly, if awkwardly.

'No, Alick, I don't!' said Theo abruptly; and the boy's face fell. Of late the boy had been full of this new desire to efface his wrong-doing by some means or other himself. 'Most certainly, dear old boy,' went on his sister, more gently, 'you cannot "blot out" your transgression by your own efforts. Don't you know that we have, each and every one of us, in the heavens, that great High Priest who is interceding for us always, always? He, our dear Lord, has already done that "something" which you are groping to do in your weak, small way. *He* has worked out your redemption—yours and mine. What you have to do is to carry your sins to the foot of the cross, where the great "something" was accomplished for us. You remember the hymn—

> '"I lay my sins on Jesus,
> The spotless Lamb of God."

Oh, Alick! I'm only a girl, and I can't say the words right; but you must lay *your* sin on Jesus, who has promised to bear it. Tell Him of your sorrowing repentance. That's all you have got to do; He

does the rest!'

'And, Theo, there's Price,' Alick lifted his head to say presently. 'Oh, I can't tell you what he has done for me! He nursed me all through in that slum of a Whitechapel—me, of all people! And when I begged his pardon for all my bad conduct you should have seen his face! Theo, if you'll give me your word never to tell it to any one, I cried like a baby; for Price looked for all the world like Stephen looked when they were stoning him. But you'll never tell I said so? I was a cowardly wretch to insult him as I did; and to think how he has paid me back—"coals of fire" are nothing to it!'

'Well, I always told you, Alick, that he was a true Christian gentleman; I was sure of it.'

'I know you did. I've found it out for myself, now. Theo!' energetically added Alick, 'I shall never be the same again, I hate my old self! I mean to be so different. I shall work, and study, and ——'

'And try "to do your duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call you," I hope,' put in Theo quietly. 'But, Alick, you must ask His help to hold you up, and to prevent your footsteps from sliding,' she added reverently. 'You can't do it in your own strength, dear!' As Theo ceased there were tears on her face, and Alick's also. For a long time no other words were spoken—none were needed.

The sun was setting over the bay, and the fisher-folk, busy with their preparations for the coming night's work, were cheerily shouting from one boat to another. It was good indeed, Alick felt, his heart throbbing with gratitude, to be once again in the dear old home, in the clean, wholesome country.

By and by the rest of the family crowded in, and, bit by bit, Alick's tale was told to his wondering hearers.

'Well, well, boy,' said the captain, putting his arms round the neck of his prodigal son, 'your precious escapade has taught you one stern lesson among others, and that is, there's no place like home as yet.'

Alick hung his head to hide his shamed face. How good everybody was to him! The kindness seemed to stab him through and through. Father's arm round his neck; one hand clasped by Theo's, and the other hugged up in both of Queenie's fat, warm little hands; and Geoff devouring him with eyes dilated with joyful pride over his brother's safe return. And never a harsh word had passed any one's lips! Such treatment to a character of Alick's type was the keenest of punishment.

Under another Northbourne roof another penitent was confessing his folly that same evening.

'No, granny, never, never will I stir out o' Northbourne, now I've had the luck to get back to it!' ended Ned, after relating his adventures in his absence.

'Not even if so be as they can't find the North Pole without 'ee to help 'em, eh, my lad?' asked granny slyly, across the supper-table. The old woman had much ado to hide her joy over Ned's return.

Ned coloured, and hung his head abashed. 'Oh, well, I expec' they can manage without me and Muster Alick!' he stammered at last.

'That's true enough! Depend upon it, Ned, if the Lord needs you, He will shape the way for you, plain as plain. Meantime, it looks as if He meant you to bide here, seein' as how in His goodness He has bringed you back to us. And you just try to remember all your life through, my lad, what the Book tells us—that "Godliness with contentment is great gain."'

It is a year ago exactly since 'The Theodora' sank to the bottom of the blue waters in the bay where she still lies. Time has wrought and brought many changes in Northbourne, as time will. Over at the Vicarage is the greatest change, for the good old parson has gone home to—

> That sweet and blessed country
> That eager hearts expect';

and his frail, ailing widow has been taken away to dwell with distant relatives. But Binks, under a new master, is still the handy-man; while Splutters and Shutters have become sedate members of society, for their new proprietor is Philip Price, than whom few know better the true secret of ruling.

Yes, the young tutor is now restored to health and strength. The fine Northbourne air, the restfulness of country life, and God's goodness, have combined to set up Philip Price as a robust

man. He had been ailing so long in the old days, that he had got well-nigh accustomed to being a semi-invalid. But, nowadays, he has become so strong that he has forgotten what ailing means—in his own person that is, for he is a man of keen sympathies with all concerning his fellow-men.

With renewed health he had thrown himself more vigorously than ever into his work of teaching; but other things were in store for him.

On Mr. Vesey's unexpected death, the living of Northbourne was vacant, of course. Philip Price did not dream of more than a fleeting wish than it might have fallen to himself.

Other people, however, went a step further than wishing. The captain, it so happened, was a cousin of the patron of the parish. With all his energy he set about procuring the living for one to whom he would ever feel bound by ties of gratitude.

'If he be a thorough gentleman, a Christian through and through, and an honourable man, why—let him have it!' said the patron testily. This unexpected compliance was so astounding that the old sailor felt thrown back on himself, as it were, and returned slightly bewildered by his own success.

In due time the new vicar and his mother, two proud and happy people, settled down in the Vicarage house which stares across the bay at the Bunk.

In the Carnegys' home the only changes are most happy ones. Since the captain gave up allowing his hobby to be his master, and has taken a keener interest in his boys' and girls' daily life, all things are brighter at the Bunk. The old naval officer is never happier than when on the water with his family-crew, and has presented each of his boys with a canoe, to the pride and glory of not only themselves, but the entire fishing community.

Theo still pulls Queenie and Queenie's ever-increasing doll-family about the bay, but in a new 'Theodora.' But the tall, sweet-faced sister, of whom the Carnegy boys are so proud, seldom rows across to the Vicarage nowadays. Some folk wonder why. Others, who are wiser, smile and say that perhaps 'Miss Theedory' will go across some day and land for life at the Vicarage. And less likely things have happened. Indeed, Jerry Blunt is engaged in training a young bullfinch as a wedding-present, though nobody can induce him to say for whom. But people cannot help shrewdly guessing, when they remember that Theo gave away the first bird-singer Jerry presented to her to Mrs. Vesey, as a Northbourne keepsake, when she left the Vicarage.

And the Carnegy boys?

Well, they are making the most of their freedom this summer, as next term they set out on a public-school career. They have not been idle this past year, and Philip Price knows they will not disgrace him when confronted with more strict examiners than himself. Alick, in particular, has been diligent, and being endowed with plenty of brains, his father and Theo are full of hope regarding his future.

Better still, Alick's heart is a changed one. By God's grace his footsteps are set in the right path. No more rebellious outbursts will there be against those whom the will of God has set over him. A sharp lesson taught him the world's cruel hardness to the defenceless, and showed the true value of a good father and a pure home.

Geoff, ready as ever to take his colour from his surroundings, has been treading steadily on his altered brother's heels in the 'narrow way.'

And now our sojourn in breezy little Northbourne is over, and we must say farewell to its fisher-folk. Some of us may, perchance, meet the Carnegy boys on life's journey; who can say? But the stay-at-homes—the stalwart, active Ned Dempster, now one of Fletcher's boat-crew; the bird-trainer, Jerry Blunt; the families of the Bunk and the Vicarage,—to one and all we must say good-bye, which is 'God be with them!'

THE END

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