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Adapter: Edward A. Rand

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Frontispiece—*"Away went the shot"* (p. 319).

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FIGHTING THE SEA

OR

Winter at the Life–Saving Station.

BY

EDWARD A. RAND

AUTHOR OF

"HER CHRISTMAS AND HER EASTER"; "UP THE LADDER SERIES,"—"THE KNIGHTS OF THE WHITE SHIELD," "THE SCHOOL IN THE LIGHTHOUSE," "YARDSTICK AND SCISSORS," "THE CAMP AT SURF BLUFF," "OUT OF THE BREAKERS", "SCHOOL AND CAMP SERIES,"—"PUSHING AHEAD," "ROY'S DORY AT THE SEASHORE," "LITTLE BROWN–TOP," "NELLIE'S NEW YEAR," ETC., ETC.

New York
THOMAS WHITTAKER
2 and 3 Bible House 1887

[3]

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Dedicated

TO THE

BRAVE SURFMEN

OF THE

U.S. LIFE SAVING SERVICE

AND

THEIR EFFICIENT SUPERINTENDENT,

HON. S. I. KIMBALL.

PREFACE.

Visiting a Life Saving Station on our coast, and passing a night there, I became deeply interested in the work of the hardy crew. I have examined with an absorbing gratification various reports of the Service. We may fittingly have a national pride in the intent and achievement of this department. The element of the heroic runs through and makes luminous the pages of what on the face are only ordinary governmental reports. May the accompanying story interest our young people in the work of the Life Saving Service. While they accept, make theirs, and build upon the principles of honesty, reverence, and temperance laid down in this story, may they extend their sympathy and prayers also to the brave men who watch the sea while we are sleeping, and whose generous daring may well provoke us to courage and self–sacrifice in other spheres.

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FIGHTING THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN ON THE STEEPLE.

"Oh—oh, grandfather! There's—that—man—on the—steeple—and he—can't—get—down!"

"Why, yes, he can! He's got a ladder!" said the old boat–builder, Zebulon Smith, looking up from the boat he had partly framed, and addressing his grandson, who had run excitedly into the shop and was now making an almost breathless appeal.

"No, he—hasn't;—he dropped—it!"

"Ladder dropped from the steeple?"

"Yes—gone—all—all—to smash!"

"You don't say, Cyrus!"

Feeling it might be the man who had come down thus abruptly, and "gone all to smash," the boat–builder ran outdoors and gave a [8]
hasty look up at the steeple. He breathed more easily when he saw the man far up the steeple, clinging to a ball that supported the vane. The steeple, though, was bare of any ladder, for this lay in fragments on the ground.

"That is interestin'!" exclaimed the boat–builder.

Of course it was. Is it not exceedingly interesting, the situation of a man on the steeple of a church, without ladders, rope, or staging, that may have taken him there? What if he grow dizzy and—but who likes to think of the consequences of such dizziness? Let me tell how this man got there, and why there.

Zebulon Smith lived near the church, and was its sexton. Besides the church, he had no neighbor for three quarters of a mile. A stranger called at the boat–shop one day, and inquired the price of Zebulon's wares. He added, "I b'long to a life savin' station crew, and am interested in that thing, you know."

"The station beyond us?"

"Ezackly! And see here! Don't you want somebody to fix your vane on the steeple of the church, for I s'pose you go there. I'm used to climbin'. I have been a sailor."

"Yes, I go there. I'm the saxton. That vane does need fixin'; but I can't seem to get at it. It's fearfully twisted. I s'pose you'd want [9]
suthin for it."

"Oh, I wouldn't ask much. I won't ask nothin', if I don't fix it."

"All right. Cyrus, you get the ladder back of the shop."

Cyrus was a boy of sixteen, on a day's visit to his grandparents, and he had met there by appointment a boy living in another direction and a good half–hour's walk away, Walter Plympton, the hero of our story. The two boys were interested in archery, and had brought their apparatus to this accepted meeting–ground for a trial of skill. They suspended shooting when they knew the church–steeple was to be climbed, and carried the ladder across the road to the little white church on the edge of a grove of tall pines that at every touch of the wind stirred and murmured softly, musically, in response, as if an orchestra were hidden away in their spreading, fan–like branches. Zebulon and his assistant mounted the stairs leading to the belfry. There was a little railing outside the belfry, and planting his ladder inside this railing, the stranger climbed up to another railing surrounding the base of the steeple. Here he pulled up his ladder, and planted it now against the steeple.

"I shan't want you any longer," called out the stranger. "If you're [10]
busy, you can go back. I can manage."

"Got your hammer?" asked Zebulon.

"Yes, the one you lent me. I'll knock that vane into shape."

The boat–builder was indeed anxious to resume his work, and he now returned to his shop. The man from the life saving station had planted his ladder so that its summit rested between two projections of the wood–work of the steeple, that promised to firmly hold it in position. He then climbed his ladder, and from the topmost round he could reach a gilded ball beneath the vane. He had planned to draw himself up to the ball, sit astride this gilded throne in the air, there swing his hammer like a king flourishing his scepter, and knock that rebellious vane into an attitude of obedience. Alas, our best expectations sometimes fail us! Was not that ladder an old one? How could it help growing old, when its owner, Zebulon, was

growing old himself, and complained of rheumatism in his joints? Rheumatism! That must have been the trouble with the topmost round of the ladder. But who really expects that an old ladder will give way to–day? It may to–morrow; but it has served so many years, it will certainly not fail us this one day. But, the day had come when [11] that ladder was bound to give way. Zebulon did not anticipate it, or he would never have assigned it to any steeple–duty. The stranger of course was not looking for it. The ladder kept its own secret however, and having, made up its mind to break that very day and hour, when the man grasped the ball above and springing violently gave a corresponding push to the ladder–round, it broke out into open rebellion. It cracked, split, parted hopelessly! That was not all. The ladder was jarred and pushed out of position, and as the man went up, and seated himself upon the ball, the ladder went down and took a position on the ground! As the ladder struck, various rheumatic joints parted, and this old servant of the sexton lay there at the foot of the church–tower in fragments.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed the man on the ball. "That's a poser!"

He thought a moment.

"Well," he exclaimed philosophically, "I'll do what I came here for!"

Swinging his hammer, he knocked the vane into proper shape. Zebulon heard the rapping of the hammer, as orderly and musical as the sound of any hammer strokes down on the ground. He was [12] surprised when he was summoned to see the hammerer up in the air and the broken ladder on the ground.

"Oh, Zebulon!" shrieked a voice. "Git a ladder! Why don't ye?"

"That's Nancy!" he said to himself.

Yes, after this voice came a woman, and Zebulon's wife, rushing up to his side, put her hands up to her eyes to fence off the sunlight, and then looked at the occupant of that gilt ball on the church–steeple.

"Git a ladder?" the old sexton murmured. "Where?"

Yes, where? There was no other about the premises, and to visit a neighbor for that purpose would use up a half–hour, and in the meantime what if—a person does not like to think what might happen.

"Oh dear, Zebulon! What did you let him go up for?" asked his wife.

"If—if—you had asked that question afore he went up, there would have been some sense to it. He wanted to go," replied the old sexton impatiently. "The thing to do now, is to git him down."

"Git him down! What if he should come down whether he wants to or not? What if he gits dizzy? Oh my!" [13]

"You don't ketch me jest a lookin' at him. I'm a goin' to bring a ladder, find it somewhere."

"Hold on, Zebulon! Hark, boys!"

The boat–builder and the two young archers, thus addressed by Nancy, now listened in silence, and at the same time looked up. There they all stood, with upturned faces, and the man above called down to them:

"Sho—o—o—t! Send—a—string—g!"

As he thus called, his hands let go their hold upon the rod that bore the vane, and clinging with his feet alone, he went through the motions of one shooting an arrow from a bow.

"Oh—oh!" shrieked Nancy. "He's beginnin' to fall."

With a horrified expression of countenance, she turned away and faced the other side of the road.

"Oh, no!" cried Walter Plympton. "He is not falling. He is making believe shoot. I see what he wants."

"What?" asked Zebulon.

"Why—why, shoot with our bows and arrow up there, tying a piece of string to it. It is not a very high steeple."

"Yes," said Cyrus, "and he'll pull it up, and then a stouter one." [14]

"Oh, yes! Good! Well, boys, get your bows, and I will get the stuff," said the boat–builder.

How carefully those young archers shot steepleward their arrows, first attaching to the latter a long, stout thread!

Oh, hands of the archers, tremble not! Oh, winds above, blow not! And—and—over, yes, just across the vane went the thread

fastened to Walter Plympton’s arrow! A cord was now tied to the thread, the man carefully pulling it up, and then there went to him a new clothes–line, and down he came.

“Much obleeged to you!” he said.

“And we are obleeged to you!” replied the sexton. “And here’s your money for the job.”

As the stranger turned to go away, he laid his hand on Walter’s shoulder, and said, “I saw it was your arrer that did the work. I won’t forgit it.”

Away he walked, disappearing down the road that wound its dusty line through the green forest.

All the time he had been with his new acquaintances, he had not given his name. Indeed, nobody asked for it. Walter remembered him only as a man with a bushy beard.

“Wonder if I shall ever see him again!” thought Walter. [15]

We shall find out.

The weeks slipped by, and winter at last powdered the land as if it wished to give the earth’s bald head a white wig.

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[16]

CHAPTER II.

THE WINTER RIDE.

"I'm going to be warm," said Walter Plympton's father, a man with rather sharp features, of slender build, and nervous, sensitive temperament. "Yes, I'm going to be warm, and bundle up accordingly."

"You will look like an Eskimo," replied his wife, who in her very laugh, so easy and deliberate, as well as in her stout physical build, was the opposite of her husband. "Those who see you, Ezra, won't fall in love with such a stuffed creature."

"They may keep the love, Louisa, and I'll hold on to the comfort. I believe in going warm like the Chinese, who are said in cold weather to increase the amount of their clothing, rather than their heating apparatus. How that may be, I don't know; but I do know that I mean to be warm. Kitty harnessed, Walter?"

"Yes, father, and she's waiting in the stable." [17]

"We will go out then. Oh, the family umbrella!"

The family umbrella was an immense institution, suspended like a big blue dome above its holder, and promising to make a good parachute. It had been bought at an auction, and was one of those peculiarities often coming up to the surface at such sales. For years, it had proved a good friend on rough, rainy days.

"Do you expect a rain, father?"

"No, but I want to hold it up against the wind. Hoist the sail, and our craft will be off. Good–bye, Louisa. We will be home to–morrow night, if a possible thing."

"Good–bye, mother."

"Good–bye. Do take care of yourselves." And after she said this, she watched the departing team as Kitty slowly pulled the sleigh through the white snow that had not settled since its fall the day before, but stretched its diminutive drifts in almost uninterrupted succession across the road.

Kitty patiently plodded on, but she found the snow deeper than she liked to pull the sleigh through. The wind blew keen and strong, and was like an axe–blade wielded by winter; but the riders in the sleigh were safe behind the blue umbrella.

Walter Plympton differed, as well as his mother, from Mr. [18] Plympton. He was in looks a "mother's boy," though his character was varied with some of his father's features of mind. He was a stout, heavy youth of sixteen, one of those growing boys too, from whose feet their trousers, recently new, are soon discovered to be running away, and whose wrists persist in getting far below their coat–sleeves. He had his mother's round, full face. His complexion was a rich brown, rather than fair and white. His eyes were a bright hazel, and his hair of a shade between brown and black. His voice was rather heavy for one of his years, and was certain to be heard among those shouting at "baseball," or "fox in the wall." He shared in his father's sensitiveness of temperament, and like him was enthusiastic. Unlike either father or mother, the imaginative element was strongly developed in his character. As to other qualities, he was generous, rather thoughtless, and his strong, ringing voice put him among those unfortunate boys who are often told, "Don't speak so loud." He had a very good sized estimate of himself, was quite sure to be among the speakers—and successful speakers—at a school exhibition, and was ambitious to throw, in after years, as large a shadow across the surface of life's events as [19] Walter Plympton's abilities would possibly permit. There was no concealment in his moves or motives; but open, honest, and naturally confiding, he was sometimes the dupe of boys cunning and suspicious. He was too bright to be a dupe twice in the same day, and when he discovered an enemy's tricks, would resent an invasion of rights as promptly, stoutly, and noisily, as anybody. His good nature and sociability made him popular. He was rather fond of his books, was not afraid to ask questions, and this made him an interesting, intelligent companion. While there was a large lump of the "boy" in him, he was a youth of promise, and bade fair to be in after years a success. His mother stated his greatest need, when she said, "Walter needs a rudder to steer him. He needs conversion, that is it. He prays, and once in awhile reads his Bible, and has no really

bad habits. I want him to go farther. I would like to see him beginning an active religious life, openly, avowedly; and I do hope soon he will confess his Saviour."

Motherly Mrs. Plympton! How her thoughts and her prayers went after her boy, like the wings of a mother bird, flying after and hovering over her young. And this winter morning she had not forgotten to put up the often ascending prayer for her boy's better life. She stood at the window awhile, watching Kitty and her load, and then stepped back to her kitchen duties. [20]

"Pretty hard going, father," said the younger occupant of the sleigh.

"It will be better out in the main road, and we shall strike it soon. I wouldn't start to–day, but this is the last chance for going to the life saving station as I promised, before you leave for school; and you leave day after to–morrow, and it is evident we must go to the station to–day, if we go at all. But I think it will be all right out in the main road."

"Don't the trees look handsome?"

"Yes, I never saw them prettier."

The late fall of snow had draped forest and field.

As our travelers proceeded on their journey, the drifts deepened, rather than lessened. It was toilsome traveling. By and by, they came to a road skirted with telegraph–poles. Here they were obliged to jump out and push the sleigh.

"Father, let us begin to count the telegraph–poles. That will help pass the time."

"All right. One!" shouted Mr. Plympton, as they passed the first of the long line of tall, wooden travelers lining the highway, and stretching ahead into the dark, green forest. [21]

"Two–o–o!" cried Walter, so glad when he could count off a single pole. They trudged through the snow, pushing the sleigh, pulling Kitty forward, calling out at intervals, "Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight!"

"Look, father! See those men!"

"I notice. I wonder what they are doing!"

Two men, a little distance ahead, ran out of the woods dragging a long piece of timber.

"I guess they're going to fix the telegraph wire, Walter. The storm broke down some of the wires."

The men dropped the long timber directly across the road and then darted into the woods again.

"That's cool, Walter! What do they want to drop that in our path for?" The men were now back again, sticking forked branches in the snow; and they then laid the timber in the forks.

"Can't we go through?" asked Mr. Plympton in a somewhat provoked tone.

"I wouldn't advise you to, Cap'n," replied one of the men who wore a red woolen jacket. "You see the snow up 'long, is piled higher than your horse's back. We know, 'cause we've been breakin' out the road; but the snow does blow in wuss than pizen, and we concluded to quit until the wind quits. Where you goin', Cap'n?" [22]

"Down to the life saving station."

"Wall, that's your right road to take, the one to the right, Cap'n. Of course, you can go ahead, if you wish, but we don't advise it, as we have been thar, and know how rough it is. That t'other road is the one you want to take."

"Thank you, sir."

"Father, I want to ask—"

Mr. Plympton laughed, knowing Walter's disposition to ask questions, and that the process once begun might be protracted too far for the convenience of travelers.

"I will hold on if you will only ask *two* questions."

"I—I promise," and laughing, Walter leaped out into the snow, and walked up to the men. He did not like to be limited to two questions, but he submitted to his chains, and having inquired about the depth of the snow and the length of the road, he returned to the sleigh.

"Only three miles by the road we take, father, to Uncle Boardman's." [23]

"It is a new way to me. I have been accustomed to travel by the

road that is blocked, but if this is a better road I am glad."

As Kitty began to jingle her bells again, Mr. Plympton said, "There, Walter! That's a good lesson. I call that a lesson about God's providence, which stops us from taking a certain course, and we may feel as I did when those men stopped me; but we are led to take a better way. Left to ourselves, just now, we would have run into a big drift."

"I see, though in this life Providence does not always make explanations, father."

"No, we must wait till we get into another life, to have all things explained."

The road led through a forest of pines, heavily coated. In a slow, stately fashion, these swayed their tall, plumy tops. Beyond this forest, the road was drifted once more. The travelers had now a long tug at road–breaking, but the drifts were all conquered. The country grew more and more familiar. "The last woods!" said Walter, as they passed a strip of trees, whose trunks, coated on one side by the storm, seemed like marble pillars, bearing up a roof of green porphyry. Just beyond this, Walter cried out, "Look, father!"

Mr. Plympton raised his eyes, and beyond the white glitter of the [24]
snow, saw a strip of vivid blue.

"The sea, father!"

"Ah, so it is!"

The sea stretched far away under the cold, dark, frowning sky, and out of its waves rose distant snow–covered islands, like frosted cakes on a very blue table.

"There is Uncle Boardman's, too, Walter."

This was a farmhouse located near one corner of the forest.

"Wonder if Uncle Boardman knows we are so near, Walter?" asked Mr. Plympton, as Kitty pulled the sleigh up to the open space between the road and the green front door.

"Knows?" At that very moment, Boardman Blake's much loved, but much worn old beaver, was about turning the corner of the house, and under the beaver was Boardman. Aunt Lydia's spectacles were already at the front door, and it was now swinging on its hinges.

"Land sakes! Where did you come from? I seed you from our back winder the moment you turned out of the woods," shrieked Aunt Lydia. "I told Boardman it was some of our folks, but he thought he knew better."

"Well, well," said a deeper, more agreeable voice, under the [25]
beaver, "what are you up to? Why didn't you wait till six feet more of snow had fallen? Come in, come in. I'll look after your horse."

The green front door quickly closed on the travelers, and soon after Kitty disappeared behind a red barn–door.

The wind had its own way once more in the road, and undisturbed, kept the light snow whirling, as if its mission were that of a broom, to sweep if possible the open space before the home of that honored couple, Boardman and Lydia Blake.

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[26]

CHAPTER III.

THE LIFE SAVING STATION.

"Here we are," exclaimed Mr. Plympton, entering with Walter the life saving station. "Jotham, how are you?"

"Ezra, I am really glad to see you," replied Jotham Barney, the keeper of the station, with much heartiness. "Take off your riggin', and make yourself at home."

"Cap'n Barney," as he was often labeled, was a person about forty–five years old. He was a sandy haired, sandy whiskered man, with a light complexion, sharp, prominent nose, and blue eyes that had a way of letting out flashes when he spoke. "Cap'n Barney" was a very social, talkative man, who had been "about considerable," though not always in first class conveyances, and was ready to talk on almost any subject. What he had not seen, what he did not know, [27] was not worth the seeing or knowing. He thought very much of his own opinion, and liked to brag; but he was a kindly natured man, and people bore with his conceit, because he was so chatty and pleasant. The station to which "Uncle Sam" had appointed him as the "keeper," was a yellow building about forty–five feet long, and perhaps eighteen wide; and how tall was it? The roof supported in its center a little railed platform called the "lookout," and this was between twenty and twenty–five feet from the ground. In the rear of the station was the living–room, through whose preface of a little entry, Mr. Plympton and Walter passed; then, entering the apartment which was not only a kitchen, but a dining–room; and not only a dining–room but a sitting–room, a parlor, and everything, except an apartment for sleeping. This living–room was a little, unambitious place, lighted by two windows toward the east. Between the windows, was a cook–stove; and over this was a wooden rack, from which hung a row of towels. A clock stamped "U. S. L. S. S." was ticking steadfastly on one wall, and near it was a barometer. In one corner, was a case marked "U. S. L. S. S. Library, No.—." Two patrol lanterns were suspended below, and there were [28] also two sockets for Coston signals. Around the walls in different places, were the overcoats, hats, jackets, comforters, the station crew had shed. Upon the entrance door, that served as a kind of handy bulletin–board, were tacked various circulars: "Merriman's Patent Waterproof Dress and Life–Preservers," "Watchman's Improved Time–Detector"; circulars from the Treasury Department about care of "Marine Glasses," upon "Leaves of absence," and other matters. The only other interesting objects in the room were human, and these were members of the station crew. They were all young men. One was weaving a net. Two were playing checkers. A fourth was officiating as cook; and he was now cutting up salt fish.

Walter noticed everything with eager curiosity. His father and the keeper had once been schoolboys together, and as they were very busily talking, Walter's eyes could without interruption travel from one object to another.

"Three doors in this room," thought Walter; "and one goes outdoors; and I wonder where the other two go."

He was relieved when the keeper said, "Ezra, come upstairs, and see how we bunk for the night. Then I will show you the boat–room." [29]

"That disposes of those two doors, I guess," reflected Walter.

One of these, approached from the kitchen floor by a single step, the keeper was now opening.

"Tumble up, Ezra, and see where we stay nights," was the keeper's ready invitation. Up the brown, unpainted stairs, they passed into a little room, which seemed to be also an entry, connecting the keeper's room, at the left over the kitchen, and the men's quarters, at the right.

"Here is my den," said the keeper, turning to the left. "Plain, you see everything is, but at night when a feller is asleep, he doesn't know whether a Brussels carpet is on the floor, or whether it is unpainted, like this. That is my bed in the corner, and there you see I have two windows toward the east, so I know when it is sunrise. There's my writin' desk, they allow me a chair or two, and so on."

"Who rooms with you?" asked Mr. Plympton.

"The clock up there! That is my chum; always makin' a noise, yet never in the way."

“Oh! Then this is your room wholly, Jotham?”

“Of course,” said Jotham, turning away with as much dignity as a [30]
sovereign leaving a bed–chamber hung with royal purple.

“Now we will come back into the little entry again at the head of the stairs.” It was an entry that was also a narrow room.

“Here’s a bed, you see, in the corner; and I have had the stove that was in my room set here. It throws the heat into the men’s quarters. We have a store–room on this floor,” said the keeper, opening a door in a wooden partition; “and we chuck various things in there. Step into the men’s room.”

They passed into a long, low room in the western end of the building. Here were six wooden cot–beds ranged along two sides of the room; and under the thick army blankets that covered them, it seemed as if any tired surfman would be comfortable. Near each bed was either a blue chest or a trunk. At the two ends of the room, were various articles suspended from rows of hooks. Here were trousers, and coats, and shirts; and one man, who could not have believed in the beard movement, had here hung his shaving–mug and razor–strop. Near the windows in the western gable of the sloping roof, was a row of paper signal–flags.

“What are those?” asked Walter.

“They are only pictures of signals that one of the men cut out of [31]
the signal–book. The real signals, the cloth ones, we keep under the lookout.”

“Could I see them?”

“Sartin. Come up this way,” and the obliging keeper turned to climb a wooden stairway running up from this room to the “lookout” on the roof. Before they reached the lookout, Walter saw in a little recess under the roof, a box.

“There,” said the keeper, pulling the box forward. “This is all full of little flags, or signals, by which we can communicate with any craft on the water. We keep ’em here, because it is handy to have the signals where they can be taken out to the lookout, and run up on the flag–staff quick as possible.”

Walter looked up through the open scuttle, and saw the lookout with its railing, and above all rose the tapering flag–staff.

“We have one more room,” said the keeper.

“What’s that, Jotham?” inquired Mr. Plympton.

“The boat–room. Come downstairs.”

They passed from the living–room directly into a treasure house, whose contents made Walter’s eyes sparkle with eager interest.

“That the boat!” exclaimed Walter.

“Yes, she’s a beauty,” replied the keeper, fondly stroking its [32]
gunwale as if it were a thing of life, and would feel every touch of his caressing hand. “That’s our surf–boat.”

The surf–boat had the place of honor in the room, occupying all its center, and reaching almost from the wall of the living–room to the big door in the western wall.

“It must be over twenty feet long,” thought Walter, who began to fill up with questions, until his brain seemed charged as fully as a loaded mitrailleuse. How many articles there were in that boat–room, adapted to the life–saving work, and in such readiness, that a wreck near shore might be sure of a visit and of rescue, if there were any possible chance for such relief! There were guns for throwing lines, and there were the lines to be thrown. There was a life–car, that could be swung along a line to a wreck; and there was a breeches–buoy, and there were—Oh how many articles! The desire for information was swelling to an intolerable size within Walter’s soul, and he was about to gratify the longing, when to his great disappointment, a door opened, and a face with a bushy beard was thrust into the boat–room from the living–room.

“Cap’n!” called out Bush–beard.

“What say?” [33]

“Could I see you ’bout my patrollin’ to–night, one minute?”

“Why, father,” said Walter, in a low voice to Mr. Plympton, “that is the man that fixed the vane on the steeple!”

The man of the steeple had recognized them, and was now saying, “How d’ye do?” at the same time he advanced, and held out a broad, brown hand to the visiting party.

“Glad to see you,” said Mr. Plympton.

“You know Tom Walker?” asked the station–keeper.

“Guess I do,” replied Walter, readily gripping Tom Walker’s brown hand.

“I s’pose, Tom, you want to see me about your beat. Let me see. You are on watch from eight till twelve?”

“That’s it, Cap’n. All right, if you understand it. That is what I wanted.”

“I—I wish—” Walter stopped.

“What is it?” asked Mr. Plympton.

“Why, I was thinking I would like to go with Tom Walker, a while you know, just to see what it is like.”

“You can, if you wish and your father is willing. Tom would like ’mazin’ well to have company,” said the keeper.

“Sartin!” cried Tom eagerly. [34]

“I’m willing, Walter,” said Mr. Plympton. “Only don’t be gone too long, as your Aunt Lydia would like, I guess, to have the house shut up before twelve. We will go over there now. Thank you, Jotham, for showing us round.”

“You’re welcome. I will expect your boy to–night. He’d better be here before eight.”

“I’ll give him a welcome,” added Tom. “I haven’t forgotten a kindness he did me.”

“I will be on hand,” declared the happy Walter.

Mr. Plympton and Walter turned away from the station, and took a narrow lane running from the beach up to Boardman Blake’s; and there the lane was promoted, and became a highway. As if to acknowledge that promotion, and wave the road a graceful, stately wish for success on its travels, a single elm had been planted where the way widened. The Blake home had been standing there about fifty years; having been built by Boardman Blake’s father. It was a two–story house; its green front door piercing the wall exactly in the middle. On one side of the front door was the parlor, open only on great occasions, like funerals, or “comp’ny.” Behind this was the kitchen. On the other side of the front door, the right, was the store; [35] and in its rear, the sitting–room.

“I like to have things handy,” said Uncle Boardman to Walter’s father; “and I can jest slip from our sittin’–room to the store and ’tend to customers, and then slip back.”

It was in the sitting–room, that Uncle Boardman, Aunt Lydia, and the Plymptons were gathered before the large, open–mouthed fire–place. Supper had been spread at an early hour on the round dining–table in the kitchen, and the light had not wholly faded from the west, when the Blakes and their guests withdrew to the sitting–room. One could look from the fire on the hearth, to those flames the sun had kindled on a rival hearth, about the western hills; but the glow of the latter went out, leaving only ashy clouds behind; while Boardman’s fire continued to flare and crackle into the night.

“You did have courage to start to–day to come down here,” said Aunt Lydia to Walter’s father, having adjusted herself in her easy rocking–chair, and having adjusted also in her waist the corn–cob that held and steadied her knitting.

“Yes, but it was our last chance before Walter went away. Then when I started, I did not know it was so bad. I thought when I struck [36] the main road after leaving our house, we could get along easily enough. I think, too, over this way, you have had more snow than we. I didn’t know these facts; and when one has begun, you know he don’t like to give it up.”

“There, if that isn’t Boardman!” exclaimed Aunt Lydia, throwing down her knitting–work in her lap as if to emphasize her point. “There has been a man round, Bezaleel Baggs (I call him Belzebub), and he wants to buy up a lot of Boardman’s woodland. Boardman has got the idea he’d better sell, and he does hate to give it up! I don’t like that Beza—no, Belzebub. I don’t like his looks or—”

“Tinkle, tinkle,” went a little bell in the direction of the store.

“Store, store!” now shrieked Aunt Lydia in the ears of her spouse, and there was need of the shriek. Uncle Boardman had contentedly folded his hands in his ample lap, and his head was rising and falling with as much regularity as the tides out in the adjacent ocean; but of course much oftener. “Store,” though, was the magic word that could bring Boardman any time out of the depths of the most profound evening nap. Rising promptly, he made

his way to the sitting–room door, and then into the store lighted by its one kerosene lamp on the scarred wooden counter. Aunt Lydia followed him softly to the door, and thrust forward her sharply featured face. She came back with a pair of flashing dark eyes, flashing all the brighter behind her spectacles; and holding up one hand significantly, said in a half–whisper, “I took a peek! It’s *he*! I knowed as much.” [37]

“Who?” inquired Walter’s father.

“Belzebub—there, Boardman says I ought not to call him that! Well, it’s the same old fox, that Baggs.”

“You don’t like him?”

“No, not one bit!” and in her intensity of feeling she sat down forcibly on the corn–cob, that ally in Aunt Lydia’s knitting–work, and carelessly left in her chair.

“There!” said she jumping up. “I’ve broken that ’ere cob. I wish it had been Bel—there, I s’pose I ought not to say that.”

Walter felt that the situation at Uncle Boardman’s had suddenly become very interesting; but he remembered his appointment at the station. He rose and began to put on his overcoat.

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[38]

CHAPTER IV.

THE PATROL.

Walter was sitting in the living–room of the station. It was almost eight o'clock. Two men came stumbling downstairs, and with a sleepy air entered the room. Seating themselves, they began to put on their huge rubber boots. One of the men was Tom Walker.

"How are ye?" he said, nodding to Walter in a friendly way. "Goin'?"

"That's what I am here for."

A footstep in the entry was now heard. A man entered, wearing a stout, heavy black coat, and black trousers, and he carried a lantern in his hand. It was the patrol from the easterly end of the beach.

"Cold!" was his one word of greeting, as he set his lantern on the table. He also deposited there a leather pouch attached to a long leather strap.

Another step was heard in the entry, and a man appeared who [39] wore a thick blue blouse and blue trousers, and had a very much padded look. He was the patrol from the westerly end of the beach. He expressed his opinion that it was cold by silently going to the stove; and there he stood rubbing his hands in the warm atmosphere. He had already deposited a leather pouch on the table. Tom Walker and the other arrival from upstairs, were dressing for their duty as patrolmen in the place of the two whose chilling wintry beat had just been accomplished. Tom put on a Guernsey jacket, and then drew over it a short, thick sack coat. He pulled a cap of shaggy cloth down over his hair, drew close the ear–laps, and then took up a pair of thick, warm mittens lying under the stove.

"Here," said the keeper to Walter. "Before you start, let me show you what the men take with them."

As he spoke, he lifted a leather pouch that had been deposited on the table. It was a circular case of leather, about four inches in diameter, containing a "time–detector"; its works resembling those of a chronometer. Taking out a key and opening the detector, the keeper said, "I thought you might like to see this. There, I have put [40] this round card in the detector. You see it is marked off into hours, and ten minutes, and five minutes, and is called the dial. The patrol takes it with him, and at the end of his beat he puts a key in that hole you see, and gives the key a turn. A kind of punch, stamped like a die, is forced down on the dial. In the morning, I open the detector, and there is the dial that tells if he has done his duty. These dials I forward once a week to Washington."

"Supposing the man don't want to go his beat, and turns the key somewhere this side of the end of the route?" asked Walter.

"Ah," said the keeper, "the feller can't play 'possum that way. He must go to the end of his beat to get his key. It is at a house there. He must go that far, you see, anyway."

"As any feller of honor would, key or no key," growled Tom Walker.

"Oh, sartin, sartin, Tom," replied the keeper. "They didn't get it up for you, but for the fellers in some—some—other station."

And Tom's growl changed to a pleasant laugh. "Where's my Coston signal?" he asked.

"Here it is," replied the keeper.

"What's that?" asked Walter.

"It is for signaling to anybody on the water in the night, and this [41] burns a red light."

The Coston signal was a few inches long, marked on the bottom with the word, "Patrol."

"This," said the keeper, "fits into a socket on one end of this wooden handle which you see I have. At the other end is that brass knob. When I want to use my signal, I strike that knob, and it forces a rod up into a little hole in the end of the signal. That strikes a percussion cap, and ignites a fusee, and out flashes a red light. That is my explanation of it."

Out into the cold, shadowy night, they went. Tom led off, slouching along heavily, carelessly yet doggedly; as if he had a duty before him which he did not wholly relish, but meant to put it through, like a horse in a treadmill, whose greatest concern is to put

one foot before the other, and to keep putting until lunch time. There was a bright glitter of stars in the sky, and the land was white with the pure snow; but where the sea stretched toward the east, was one vast mass of blackness. Out of this blackness, came a voice, that shouted all along the shore, “Ho—ho—ho—ho!” The sea was very smooth, and the sound of the surf was not heavy enough to [42] interrupt the conversation between Tom and Walter.

“I suppose,” began Walter, “these stations are scattered all along the coast.”

“They are all over the country in spots. I ’magine in some places they are few as muskeeters in December. Then again they are pretty thick, say on the Jersey coast. Government takes care of ’em all. So many stations—more or less—makin’ a deestrict, under the care of a superintendent. Then all these deestricts are under Gen. Sumner I. Kimball at Washington. Every deestrict, too, has its inspector.”

“How many men do you have to have at this station?”

“There is the keeper, Keeper Barney—we Cap’n him jest among ourselves—and there are seven surfmen here. We have a cook also. I am a surfman and then I am called a patrolman too. I’m a patrolman now, but just let a vessel show itself off there, and I should be a surfman in less than no time.”

“You don’t stay here all the time?”

“Through the year? No, we come on the first of September, and we go off the first of May. They don’t have the same dates in all the stations. The idea is to be here when there’s the most danger. Our [43] keeper, though, has to be lookin’ arter things, comin’ here now and then, through the year. He’s keeper, summer and winter.”

“How do you like your work?”

“Well, I like the pay, fifty dollars a month, but it’s hard, resky work.”

“How long have you been on?”

“Nine years.”

“What is your worst kind of weather?”

“Well, it’s tough when there’s a light snow, and a stiff nor’–west wind keeps it a blowin’, or a nor’–east storm, when it hails and comes slashin’ into your face. It’s bad most any time when the lantern goes out. You see we have to pick our way; good enough on the sand when it’s hard, but among the rocks, it’s hobbly; and it may be pretty snowy if you can’t foller the beach.”

“Does your lantern go out?”

“Sometimes. You have to grope your way the best you can, then.”

“You must have seen some tough times.”

“I’ve been an hour and a half goin’ a mile,” exclaimed Tom with the air of a veteran who has fought his hundred battles, and won at least ninety–nine. “Poky work, I tell ye!”

“How do you divide your watches?” [44]

“We have four watches, and two men go out at a time. I go to this end of the beach, and t’other man goes to t’other end. Where two station deestricts join, the patrolmen from the stations meet, and exchange what they call ‘checks,’ that they give to their keepers.”

“How is it your watches run?”

“Oh, the hours? From sunset till eight, is the first watch, and from eight to twelve is the second, and from twelve till four is the third; and then there’s from four till sunrise. Then by day, we have to watch. If it’s thick weather, fog, or rain, or snow, if we can’t see two miles each way from the station, we have to go out agin. If it is clear weather, we just watch from the lookout, on the buildin’. One man has to be on the lookout, and he reports all vessels goin’ by. You saw the lookout?”

“Oh, yes. Do you ever use that Coston signal?”

“Yes, though not much this winter thus far. I have only used mine twice thus far. A fishin’ vessel was the last one. She got in too near shore, and I burned my light, so that she might take the hint and haul off.”

“The ice must be piled up bad on the beach, sometimes.”

“Yes; I’ve seen it twenty feet high. The wind drives the snow [45] down on the beach, and the sea washes over it, and it freezes; and then more snow may come to be washed and to freeze over, and so on.”

“Out in a cold rain or hail, don’t it bother you?”

“Yes; take hail, and it’s tough. Why, I’ve seen a man come into the station, and his clothes would be so stiff and frozen, he—he—couldn’t get ’em off hisself.”

By this time, Tom had reached the end of his beat. He slouched along in the rear of a barn, turned its corner, and then stopped before an object that shone in the light of the lantern. It was a key attached by a chain to the wall. Tom took the key, put it into a hole in his detector, turned it till a sharp click was heard; and then Walter knew this faithful recorder had made its mark on the dial. The patrolman turned, and began the journey back to the station. Crossing a field of snow, they struck the shore rocks once more, and then moved out upon the wet, sloping sands. A short walk brought them again to the upper rim of the beach, strewn with snow.

The lantern flashed its light down upon a footprint.

“Whose is that?” asked Walter.

“T’other patrol’s; one afore me. He’s got a foot big enough to [46] cover up a pumpkin hill.”

Slowly, Tom and Walter returned to the station.

“I suppose I must say good night, and go to my aunt’s now.”

“Wish *I* had an aunt’s to go to, now. My beat is short, and I must go over it twice more, afore I turn in at twelve. If you are down at the station in the morning, you’ll see on my detector the proof that I’ve been faithful; but I would be, without the thing,” said the sensitive knight of the beach. Walter watched Tom as he turned his face again toward the dark sea and the lonely beach. The light of the lantern steadily dwindled till it seemed like that of a star about to dip beneath the waters of the ocean and disappear; and dip and disappear it did, as Tom stumbled over the shore rocks down upon the beach. Walter went slowly along the lane to Uncle Boardman’s.

In the morning, he was at the station again.

“Do you want to see me open the detectors?” said the keeper to Walter. “Come here then.”

Walter watched the keeper as he opened one of the detectors.

“There,” he said, removing a card or dial. “Do you see those marks?”

“And we might have had to run out the boat” (p. 47).

Walter could detect little stamps in the form of a cross. [47]

“There is Tom Walker’s record,” said the keeper. “One stamp was fifteen minutes of nine, when you went down; another at ten minutes of ten, and the third at eleven. That shows that Tom Walker did his duty.”

“And he would have done it anyway,” growled the sensitive Tom. “I don’t like to have that thing nag me round. I do my duty.”

“Oh yes, yes, sartin,” replied the keeper in a mollifying tone.

“Did you burn your light after I left you?” inquired Walter. “I mean your signal.”

“No, nothin’ turned up.”

“What would you have done if it had?” inquired Walter. “Say, if you had seen a wreck, what then?”

“What would he have done?” said the keeper, answering for the surfman, and answering in an oratorical fashion. “What would he have done? My! Wouldn’t he have flown round! He’d have out with that signal and burnt it in less than no time. Then he would have run to the station, big rubber boots and all, roused the crew, and we might have had to run out the boat and get a line to the wreck,” and [48] the keeper, as he proceeded, seeing the effect his earnestness had

on his young auditor, grew quite dramatic in his gestures.

“Wish I could see it!” thought Walter. But that was not possible. His return home must be effected that very afternoon.

“I am leaving so many things behind,” he reasoned, “that I really ought not to go. There are so many things about the station I would like to understand; and what a funny store Uncle Boardman has! And there is that man, ‘Belzebub’ Baggs; I wonder if he will get Uncle Boardman to sell him that land!”

There was no alternative; Walter must go. He left behind, Uncle Boardman, and Aunt Lydia, the store, “Belzebub” Baggs, the station, Tom Walker, Capt. Barney, the crew, the wide, blue ocean so full of unrest and storm.

“Get up, Katy!” shouted Mr. Plympton. “Now, home with ye!”

CHAPTER V.

TURNING THE CORNER.

The journey home was not a difficult one for Katy, as the roads were broke out thoroughly by this time. The journey, the subsequent day however, was a hard one for Mr. and Mrs. Plympton, as they went with Walter to the cars to see him safely started for his ride to Franklin Academy.

"Oh!" said Walter, who was not so absorbed in school–plans but that he could see two pairs of misty eyes when he chanced to turn suddenly toward them, "don't feel bad, father and mother. You know I shall be back by the first of August, and you know, father, what you said about time going like a sled, the iron on whose runner is rubbed smooth."

"Yes," said his father soberly.

"Be a good boy, Walter," was his mother's last reminder. About fifty had preceded it, but she kept this as the last. The next minute, [50] there were two solemn faces on the platform of a country station, gazing intently at a car window that moved off rapidly and framed but for a moment a young, eager, ambitious, hopeful face.

Walter's stay at Franklin Academy was not an eventful one outwardly. There was the usual course of instruction for a boy of sixteen, and Walter acquitted himself creditably. There was the usual proportion of "bad boys and small scrapes," but Walter had no affinity for them and was known as a warm–hearted, enthusiastic youth, but not at all as a wild one. He gained some note as a fine gymnast. Day after day the academy bell tinkled out its mild warnings that study or recitation hours had arrived, and day after day, the same flock of boys and girls passed along the shaded walks traversing the academy yard. Outwardly, as already asserted, Walter's academy course was without special incident. In the boy's personal private history though, a very important corner was turned. That which led to the turn was singular also.

It was "composition day" in the academy, and various young essayists had read their opinions upon "School days," "A Summer landscape," and "George Washington." Then came May Elliott's [51] piece of pen–work. May was not very generally known by the students. Her home was not in town, and the people with whom she boarded lived two miles away, so that the students did not see very much of her apart from her class hours. Although not pretty, yet her face interested you. Her blue eyes had a certain bright, positive look, as if she had something to say to you, and they arrested your attention. The subject of her composition was this, "What are we living for?" Her course of thought was to specify the aims of different people in life, their worthiness and unworthiness; and then she closed in this fashion: "The life that does not take into account the need of those about us, that does not take into account another life, that does not take God into account, is making,—"

Here May looked up in her bright, positive way. It was a chance look that she gave in the direction of the north–east rather than the north–west corner of the schoolroom. "Making—a serious mistake," said May. In the north–east corner sat two students on opposite sides of the same aisle, Walter Plympton and Chauncy Aldrich. Each student said, "Does she mean me?" May Elliott did not mean either individual. It was a chance movement of her eyes, but like many of [52] our movements that without intent are very significant in their results, the look set two young men to thinking. After school, they discussed the merits of May's theme and treatment. Chauncy was the first speaker. He was a very forcible looking young man, one who seemed to come at you and collide with you, although he might be a hundred feet off. He brushed up his hair in a mighty roll above his forehead, and that gave his head the look of a battering–ram. He was nicknamed "Solomon," as he talked and acted as if he carried more native and more acquired wisdom in his head than all the students, all the teachers, and all the trustees of Franklin Academy bunched together. And yet he was rather liked in school, as he had a bright, pleasant face, was generally smiling, and combined with a really selfish nature, an apparent readiness to help everybody that came along.

"Walter," said Chauncy, as they went away from the academy together, "What do you think of May Elliott's composition?"

"I thought it was quite good. Anyway she looked over in my corner as if she meant me."

"That's what I thought. I didn't know but she was looking at me, as much as to say, 'Chauncy, this is meant for you.' However, Miss [53] Elliott, you may keep looking all day, and I shall only take what I please of it, and you may dispose of the rest in what market you please." Here Chauncy pushed back his hat; and his front knob of hair came into prominence, and looked very belligerent, as if warning Miss Elliott to be careful how she threw her ink–arrows in that direction.

"Oh, I didn't suppose she really meant anything personal, Chauncy."

"Perhaps not; but my motto is to be on the lookout, and not take people as meaning to give you a higher per cent than human nature is inclined to allow you."

Chauncy was professedly preparing himself for a "business life," and terms like "per cent," "market," "stock," were favorite words in his vocabulary. The wise man now resumed his conversation.

"The fact is, with regard to what she said about other folks' need, and another life, and so on, those things of course are so; but as for my needy neighbor, why, look at my needy self—ha—ha!"

Here Chauncy gave one of his quick, ready laughs, that had something of the sound of a new half dollar when you throw it on a counter; ringing, yet hard and metallic. "There is my Uncle Bezaleel. [54] His motto is, 'Don't forget number one,' and how he has pulled the money in! Nobody stands higher in the market."

"Bezaleel?" asked Walter, catching at the word.

"Yes, Bezaleel Baggs."

"Beelzebub your uncle?" Walter was about to say, remembering Aunt Lydia's habit of speech; but he checked this imprudent phraseology and remarked, "Bez—Bezaleel Baggs your uncle?"

"Yes, and a smart one. He is a great land–owner, buying up whole forests, and he runs mills and so on. He expects to give me a lift, perhaps take me in business with him. That's my uncle."

"Indeed!" thought Walter.

"Oh," resumed Chauncy, "we were speaking of May Elliott's composition. Well, I was going to say about her pious remarks at the close, that they are well enough in their place, of course; but if she meant me when she looked our way, I only want to say that there will be time for that by and by. *You* can think them over, if you want to."

Walter made no reply and the two separated.

It was a casual remark, "You can think them over," and at [55] another time, Walter might quickly have forgotten the words. Somehow that day, the words stayed with Walter. They seemed to have roots, and they took hold of Walter's thoughts, and went deep down into his soul, and there they clung.

"I don't know what the matter is why I keep thinking of that composition," he said, later in the day.

"You look sober, Walt," observed Chauncy.

"Thinking," replied Walter laughing.

"About that composition—eh? Well, here is one who is not," and the wise man gave two or three satisfied little chuckles.

"Why should he fancy I was thinking about that composition?" Walter asked himself. "I am, though, and can't seem to get rid of it."

He went to his boarding–place, passed directly to his room, and sat down in a chair by the western window. There was an outlook across a stretch of green fields waving with grain, up to a round–topped hill, bushy with vigorous oaks. Over a shoulder of this hill peeped another, but so distant, that a veil of blue haze covered it all day. The stillness of the hour, for it was at twilight, the sun going down behind hangings of crimson along the blue hill, made a quiet [56] in Walter's breast, and suggested thoughts that in the hurry and noise of the day are not likely to be fostered.

"Oh, that composition, 'What are we living for?'" thought Walter. "Well, what *am* I living for?"

Was he living for others? He did trust he was a help to those at home, and yet he had no conscious, definite purpose to give himself for their welfare; and as for those outside, he certainly hoped he had done them no harm, and he ventured to think he might have granted a few favors, but he had not thought in a very special way about

anybody except Walter Plympton. He had gone on in a boy's careless fashion, meaning in a general way to mind his parents and consult their welfare; and to do "about the fair thing by outsiders," was also his thought. As for that other life which we must all meet, the whole subject to his mind was in a hazy condition like the distant blue hill he was looking at. Once a week, while sitting in St. Mary's at home, the old rector saying some solemn thing in the pulpit or the choir singing a plaintive tune, he was quite likely to think of another life. The other six days, he was thinking of school, and farmwork, and his duties at home, or play, outside. And as for [57] thoughts about God, they would chase through his mind like the shadows of clouds across a green summer field. They might visit him at family prayers, or on Sunday, in church, or when praying by himself at home; but like the hasty cloud–shadows, such thoughts were soon gone. His general attitude toward all these subjects was that of a thoughtless indifference; and any particular attention he paid now and then was the result of a mere habit of going to church, or the saying of hurried prayers, rather than a direct preference and purpose of his heart.

"I don't think I am where I ought to be in such matters," was Walter's conclusion, and if he had a comfortable satisfaction in himself when he began to think, it had now melted away like a snow–bank in a spring rain.

"The sun has been down, some time," he said at last, "and the bright colors have all faded out of the sky. It looks pretty sober over there now."

Walter felt, as the sky looked, "sober." The distant blue hill had quickly turned to a dark, undefined mass of shadow. The hill near by went behind a veil. Soon, the fields shrank out of sight, like green scrolls rolled up and taken away. Walter rose and left the room. He did not leave his thoughts behind. Those went with him. For several [58] days, he was thinking upon that subject: "What am I living for?" The longer he thought, the more deficient seemed his life. There came another night when he bowed his head in prayer as never before. Feeling his unworthiness, how poor and mean his life had been, he asked God to forgive him. Feeling that his life had been without a strong, definite, acceptable purpose, he asked God to take him, and help him live for the highest ends. And there rose up before him Jesus Christ, as the expression of God's readiness to forgive a past, deficient life, sincerely regretted; Jesus Christ, as the perfect, divine Guide by which to direct all our lives in the future; Jesus Christ, his Saviour from sin. A letter arrived for the Plymptons one day, and it read thus:

> "*Dear Father and Mother*: I suppose you will be surprised to get this, but I wanted to tell you of something that has interested me and I know will interest you. I have made up my mind, God helping me, to be a different person. I hope I haven't been what people call a bad boy, but still, I might have been better, and thought more of your interests, and tried hard to do my duty toward God. You will forgive me for all my thoughtlessness, won't you? And you will pray for me, please, won't you? Your affectionate son,
>
> "WALTER."

[59]

"The dear boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Plympton. "Yes, father and I will pray for you, won't we?"

Mr. Plympton could only nod assent, for the tears filled his eyes. Indeed there were two people in that house who often looked at one another with red eyes that day, but it was the redness that goes with happy hearts, with the bright hopes of a morning sky, and not the glare of a sad fire that destroys our dearest interests.

It may have been two weeks after the arrival of the above letter, that another came.

"Here is a letter from your brother Boardman," said Mr. Plympton, entering the kitchen, where his wife was cooking her weekly batch of pies. "Open it, please, and see what he says."

Mrs. Plympton wiped carefully her floury hands, adjusted her spectacles, and sitting down by a window where the light streamed in across the hollyhocks and sunflowers in the yard, began to read:

> "*Dear Ezra and Louisa*:—We are all well, and hope you are the same. I suppose you are expecting Walter home before long, this summer, and I got the impression from you that he was not going back again. I think I can give him a job this fall and winter if you agree to it, and I'll see that he has good wages. I have always, with Lydia's

help, as you know, managed my store and post–office myself, but I expect I shall need the help of a clerk. I have sold a lot of land, timber land, to Mr. Bezaleel Baggs; and I am putting up a steam mill, and I am interested in it, and it is going to take me away from the store a good deal. Then I have engaged to supply the crew at the life saving station with provisions, and also to take their mail to them. So you see somebody has got to go and look after their orders, and fetch their goods, and it is more than I can conveniently look after. What do you say to letting Walter come here the first of September? Please let me know soon. [60]

"Your affectionate brother,

"Boardman Blake."

"Well, Ezra, what do you say?"

"I—I—don't know. I sort of hate to have him away, Louisa."

"So do I."

"I suppose though, he must start some time to be doing for himself."

"Oh, here is a postscript! Tucked away up in one corner. I almost lost sight of it."

"What does it say?"

"'P. S.—He can come home every week.' That makes it different, Ezra."

"And it's only ten miles away. I suppose he'll be just crazy to see that life saving station."

"So he will. When he came back last winter, he said it was just aggravating to think he could not stay longer." [61]

"Let us write to Walter and see what he says."

The result of all this was that the first day of September, when the life saving station was opened for the season, there appeared at the door Uncle Boardman's new clerk, to receive the daily order for the crew's provisions.

"I am beginning a new life," thought Walter.

It was a new life in many ways. About six months ago, the careless, laughing, kindly–natured youth at home, had left it to assume new responsibilities elsewhere, at the academy. He had come back still happy and laughing, but a new and earnest purpose had entered his soul, and was controlling him. He had since been confirmed, in the little village church, openly acknowledging his Saviour. He had entered his uncle's neighborhood to meet and assume fresh responsibilities. He would come in contact with the men at the life saving station. He would meet others in his daily business duties. Would he keep and increase the religion he had brought with him? Would it lessen?

"I shall try hard to do my duty," said Walter, in his thoughts.

We shall see what he did.

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[62]

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORE.

The morning after his arrival at his uncle's, Walter began his new duties as clerk, and opened the store. It was in the south–western corner of the house, and was also in a corner made by two roads. One was the lane that came up from the life saving station, widening into a road which went to the outside world. The second, starting at the store, continued its travels in an easterly direction, and ended them in a little fishing village overlooking the sea. Opening from the store into these two roads, as if to solicit and take up all passing custom, were two doors, and each was bordered by two windows. Above one of these doors, that on the road to the outside world, was a small sign, and it said, "B. Blake"; but said it very faintly. The sign once was black, and the name had been painted in gilt letters; but [63] the rains had been scouring the sign for years, and the sun bleaching it; and between the scouring and the bleaching, there had resulted a surface of shabby, blackish gray, streaked with dim, yellow lines. The store, as well as the sign, looked old. The entire house looked old. So did its owner, Boardman Blake; and the great, dark forest of pines beyond the house seemed to murmur day and night, "Growing old, growing old!" As one entered the store, in a very hospitable location between the two doors, he saw a rusty box stove flanked by two benches. The benches in winter rarely were without an occupant. In the spring, summer, and fall, these occupants in part were out on the sea, pulling into their uneasy boats, cod, hake, or haddock; while some were following the plow, hoeing corn or pitching the fragrant hay into bulky carts. Behind the benches, on the wall, were posters, announcing to a generally neglectful and ungrateful world, that "Vandyke's Life–Bitters" would cure dyspepsia; that "Peaslee's Liniment" never failed to take the stiffness out of a horse's joints; while "Payson's Hair Elixir" was sure to vitalize a bald head into the manufacturing of rich, luxuriant locks. The counters bordered two sides of the store, and sustained the weight of a desk in one corner where Boardman attended to his [64] scanty book–keeping. Then there were two faded old show–cases whose store of peppermints, lozenges in gaudy wrappings, and gumdrops of every known rainbow–tint, excited the admiration of every schoolboy. There were also several pairs of scales, and a cheesebox. Behind the counters, ranged on shelves that began in some mysterious space below the counters' level, and reached to the dusty, fly–specked ceiling, was an assortment of goods that only a country store can produce. There was not very much of any one article, but so many articles were gathered there that variety made up fully for quantity. There were dry goods, and goods that were not dry, such as bottles of medicine and essences; there were outfits for the farmer, and outfits for the fisherman. Hardware was there, like hammers and planes; and software, like sugar and meal. Goods were there, like boots and shoes; and goods like caps and clothing. As the storekeeper generally had only one suit of clothes on hand at a time, there was but little range of choice for the customer, and if compelled to take what he could find, a giant might have gone away wretched in the suit of a dwarf, or the dwarf departed only to be lost in the apparel of a giant.

The store excited Walter's interest, and as he opened it that first [65] morning, his eyes made a rapid inventory of its miscellaneous contents.

"And what is that?" he asked, noticing a shelf on which were clustered a few books. They were not for sale, but their titles and well–thumbed condition showed that they were for reference. One was a state gazetteer, another a volume of state laws, a third a small English dictionary, and a fourth was a Bible. The latter was bound in old leather covers, and its type was antique. It seemed to be a kind of safe, as well as aid to devotion, for various documents were there, like deeds and bills.

"What is this?" exclaimed Walter, as a piece of paper fluttered out of the old Bible when he chanced to lift and open the book. "Uncle has a lot of papers in it, and I must look out. I must put this back."

He could not but see the figures, five hundred, in the left hand corner of the document, and carelessly had read, "For value

received, I promise to pay Bezaleel Baggs, or order, five hundred dollars." Walter stopped.

"I must not read that, and did not intend to," thought the clerk. He could but notice a blot in one corner of the bill. It was a singular blot.

"It looks like an animal. There is its body, and those four streaks [66]
below would make good legs for a small animal. Pig, I guess. Now, I will put that away and attend to my work," thought Walter. "Hullo! Who's calling? Who's here at six o'clock?"

Walter noticed that the time by a clock secured to a post, was very near six o'clock.

Somebody without was apparently shouting for the storekeeper. Stepping quickly to the door, Walter noticed first a gaily painted wagon. Its wheels were scarlet, and its shining black body was striped with scarlet. He was about saying to himself, "It's a young fellow aboard," when this same young fellow lifted a round–topped felt hat, disclosed a wall of hair, and shouted, "*You* here? You don't say!"

"I didn't say anything about it, but I am glad to see you, Aldrich. What are you up to?"

"This morning, I am up to bringing my uncle down here. He is out in the yard, the barnyard. I am clerking it with him, and shall be a neighbor of yours this winter; that is, a mile off, up at the office of my uncle. It is near the mill you know, that your uncle has put up for the sawing of the timber round here. A feller gets a good [67]
apprenticeship with Bezaleel Baggs, I tell you. Oh, he is bright on a trade! I have learned a good deal by being with him, already. Say, what kind of a store have you in there? Most everything, I suppose."

Walter, who was out on the doorstep, here turned to the store. The upper part of the door was of glass, and one who occupied Walter's position, could easily see within.

"Is that a man in the store?" thought Walter. "Is it a man behind the counter?"

He could not make out anything very distinctly. Besides, Chauncy was calling out to him, "Look out here, not in there? Do you expect the Hon. Boardman Blake is in there trading with himself? That would be handy, for he could be as sharp as he pleased, or as easy as he pleased. Really, he is out in the barn, for I saw him there a moment ago."

"I thought I noticed somebody in the store, but I guess it was only a shadow."

"Come, tell me about your plans," said Chauncy, who seemed anxious to catch and hold Walters attention. "Tell me what you are up to?"

"Why, I am clerking, am I not?"

"Oh, yes. Of course you are. Well, do you like?" [68]

Walter did not answer at once. He could not rid his mind of the impression that something was not right in the store. He finally said, "This is my first morning in the store," and was about to add, "I think I shall like here," when he chanced to look again into the store. A golden ray of sunlight, as if an auger, had bored its way through the shadows behind the counter, and it fell upon the shelves that held the Bible and other volumes. In that light, Walter saw a form, that of a man, though of no one that he had ever seen before, —a short, heavy man, with broad shoulders, hatless; and was his hair light, or did the sunray brighten it as it fell upon it? He noticed that the man's side whiskers projected into the sunlight, and also that he leaned over. Walter was about to lay his hand on the latch of the door when a terrific yell from Chauncy delayed him.

"Ah–hoo! Ah–hoo!"

Was Chauncy calling to him, or shouting to somebody in the store that he had already discovered, and perhaps might wish to notify? If such a thought came into Walter's mind, it did not come clear as a ray of sunshine, but it was so confused and dim a suspicion that it made little impression upon him, and he turned one moment as if in [69]
obedience to Chauncy's call, who was now shouting, "Ah–hoo–hoo! Plymp–ton!" Then he laughed heartily: "Ha–ha! You did not recognize my Indian yell that I have for folks. See here! I only wanted to say, if you were going into the store, and you have any—any—any—"

It took Chauncy some time to tell what he did want, but fumbling in his pocket, he produced a ten–cent piece, and said, "Oh,

anything! Bring me some candy!”

“There is a customer in here, and I’ll bring it to you quick as I can.”

“Customer, boy! You are demented! I don’t believe anybody is there, unless it is the Hon. Boardman, as I said before.”

Chauncy was right. When Walter entered the store, no one was there! He went behind the counter, and then he looked under the counter. The usual row of dumb, unintelligent soap–boxes, and spice–boxes, and candy–boxes, could be seen there. He went to the shelves on which were the books. The sunshine, as well as the visitor, had mysteriously vanished. A fly crawling over the books suddenly buzzed in Walter’s face, as if to ask, in the fly–tongue, “What does this fellow want here?”

“If this is not strange!” thought Walter.

“Where did that man go? Am I getting ‘demented,’ as Chauncy said? Could anybody have gone to the sitting–room from the store?” [70]

From the store, one could directly enter the sitting–room. Walter hastily looked into the sitting–room. The sunray might have retreated there, and in the rich overflow of light entering two eastern windows, it certainly would not have been noticed as a separate ray. But had the rich, strong flood of light swallowed up the man, as well as the ray of sunshine? If he had gone into the sitting–room, where was he?

“Nonsense!” thought Walter, for he heard the cracked voice of Aunt Lydia piping an old love–song of her girlhood, as she ironed the week’s wash in the kitchen opening out of the sitting–room. “Nonsense! If anybody had come here, of course she would have seen them. She don’t act as if she had seen anybody.” No. Aunt Lydia was singing in sharp, slender strains that old love–ditty, as free from any agitation as if it had been her uninterrupted avocation that morning.

“Plympton! Plympton! Where’s that candy? Have you gone to get your folks to make that candy?” Chauncy was now calling from the store door, which he had opened. Walter returned, went to one of the show–cases, took out the quantity of candy ordered, and handed it to Chauncy. [71]

“The queerest thing!” exclaimed Walter. “I am sure I saw a man in here; but where he has gone, I don’t know.”

“Saw a man!” replied Chauncy, with an incredulous air. “Nobody has been round here except you and me. Here’s your uncle up the road.”

And there indeed Boardman Blake was, slowly moving along toward the store in his careless, abstracted way.

“There’s *my* uncle, and you can see him down at the fish–house,” continued Chauncy. “He would like to find *your* uncle. That’s what I brought him down here for. Don’t you see my uncle?”

The fish–house was a black little building, that the rough, strong sea–winds for the last twenty–five years had been trying to push over, and had partially succeeded. It had been found necessary to prop it on one side. Here, the storekeeper accumulated every year a stock of dried salt fish, purchased of the fishermen and then sold out to customers from the surrounding country. Chauncy’s uncle was walking about the fish–house as if trying to find somebody. [72]

“Is that the man I saw in the store?” Walter asked.

“Haw–haw!” laughed Chauncy noisily. “He’s been down at the fish–house trying to hunt up your uncle, all the time I have been here. Come out and see him, and let’s ask him.”

Walter stepped back to say to Aunt Lydia that he wanted to go to the fish–house, and would be back very soon, and then crossed the road with Chauncy to the fish–house.

“The man I saw in the store was sort of built that way, heavy, and short, and broad at the shoulders, and was leaning over. I wish this man would lean over, and let me see how he looks,” thought Walter. The suspected party now turned his face to the young men, as if aware of Walter’s desire to inspect it. It was a face round and full, flanked with thin, gray whiskers. One of the eyes had a cast in it, which gave “Uncle Bezaleel’s” face a certain crookedness of look; but that does not necessarily mean crookedness of character. The eyes of some very honest people have an unfortunate squint. If though, any one looking at the upper part of B. Bagg’s face should say, “B. Baggs is a crooked fellow. Look out!” then the voice below entirely contradicted that impression. It was a mild, agreeable [73]

voice, kindly, and rather musical. It had a persuasive tone, and if the crooked eye was a misfortune, the voice of which B. Baggs was owner, had proved to be an excellent piece of property. It had coaxed many poor fellows on to their ruin. Its softness, its sympathy, its willingness to be your friend at any sacrifice, and its great grief if you possibly could think it was your enemy, had brought its possessor much money. It was this voice that had made its way to the softest place in the soft heart of Boardman Blake, quicker than the sharpest auger in the world.

"Uncle, have you been in Mr. Blake's store this morning?" inquired Chauncy.

"Why, no, child!" said Uncle Bezaleel in the most affectionate and bland of tones, at the same time winking maliciously with his crooked eye. "What made you think so?"

"Oh, I didn't think so. I knew you had been out here all the time, trying to hunt up Mr. Blake; but my friend Plympton here, uncle, thought you had been in."

"Ah, how d'ye do, Mr. Plympton," said Uncle Bezaleel cordially, addressing Walter by that title of manhood which goes so straight to a boy's heart. Here, with his fat fingers, he softly squeezed Walter's [74] hand. "I have been out here and round somewhat, admiring the tidy way you and your uncle keep things in. Now that barnyard looks trim as a dining–room. Thrifty as can be, I'm sure."

The barnyard certainly was very neat for such a place, but that tired, shabby, leaning old fish–house, and the aspect of the place in general, did not sustain B. Baggs' wonderful opinion of thrift. Walter, though, did not like to mistrust people, and this ready denial, the soft–toned compliment also, were irresistible, and Walter concluded it must have been somebody else that he saw in the store.

"Oh, I see, sir," he cried promptly. "It must have been another man. Excuse me."

"All—all right. I must have my little joke, and I guess you—you—ran into your uncle's cider barrels, this morning, and couldn't see straight."

"Haw—haw!" shouted Chauncy.

"Oh, no," laughed Walter. "I don't imbibe."

"That's right, young man. Don't touch it! Don't."

The crooked eye now gave a funny, wicked look at Walter, while Chauncy, behind Walter's back, executed with his features a look extraordinary enough to have fitted out a clown for his [75] performances. Uncle Boardman here arrived, and the upright, moral B. Baggs, proceeded at once to confer with him. But who was it that Walter saw in the store? He intended to speak at once to his uncle and aunt about it, but he was sent away to The Harbor, the fishing village in the neighborhood, and when he returned, other duties occupied his mind, and at last, like other matters we neglect, it went for the present out of his thoughts altogether.

Aunt Lydia, the evening of this call by Bezaleel Baggs, had a remark to make to her husband. They were alone in their sitting–room, Aunt Lydia knitting by a little, red, square–topped stand, that supported a kerosene lamp. Uncle Boardman was also sitting near the table, reading the weekly county paper. He had a pleasant face, one to which children, and dogs, and all kinds of dumb animals never made their appeal in vain. It was benevolent as the sunlight after three days of cloudy sky. He may have had brown eyes, but these watchers of the world had their seat so far under his bushy eyebrows, like overhanging eaves, that it was hard to tell their color. When he looked at another, one saw two soft, shining little [76] globes of light directed toward him. As he always shaved, his big, smooth face had a certain boy–look to it. When walking, he had a way of looking down, carrying his folded hands before him. He was likely to come in contact with all sorts of beings and objects; but no romping child that he collided with, no big dog bumping against the abstracted pedestrian, ever heard a testy word of remonstrance from him. He took kindly a knock from a fish–barrel, or a poke from a passing wheel–barrow. While people joked about him, everybody respected and trusted his integrity.

"He's good salt all the way through," said Nahum Caswell, an old fisherman at The Harbor. "He trusts other folks too much, and don't allers know on which side of his bread the butter is; but then he never takes other folks' butter from 'em. You can trust Boardman with a mint of money, and not a penny will ketch 'tween his fingers.

No, sir."

If Boardman's eyes, in their great charity, did not at once see into a man's mean motives, Aunt Lydia's did, very soon. Her bright, dark eyes looked deep, and did not look in vain. Bezaleel Baggs was uneasy the first time he met her. He felt that a very sharp, clear–seeing pair of eyes had fastened upon him a look that meant [77] inspection, and he avoided her in every possible way.

"Queer!" exclaimed Aunt Lydia this evening of our story. "Queer, that Belzebub Baggs—"

"Bezaleel," remonstrated Boardman mildly.

"Wall, he is pizen whatever he is; but isn't it queer he don't like to talk with me? He'll buttonhole you by the hour, Boardman, and palaver and make his soft speeches; but nary a word does he say to me if he can help it."

"Oh, he has business with me."

"The snake! I wish he had some with me, if I wouldn't jest scorch him."

Uncle Boardman let out one of his soft, easy–natured chuckles, and remarked. "He probably sees you are a dangerous character. Ha—ha!"

"Wall, if he don't keep away from my winders, I'll put some b'ilin' water on him."

"Keep away from what? What's he been doin'?"

"My advice to him is to keep away from my winders. There I was this mornin' at six o'clock, ironin' away, and happened to hear a scratchin' noise behind me—you see I was in the kitchen at the time, and my back was away from the sittin'–room—and I turned sort of [78] quick, and there was that Baggs at the winder of the sittin'–room—"

"Inside?"

"No, outside; and yet it seemed sort of queer. His head was turned this way, and it seemed as if he was a slidin' down outside the clapboards. I couldn't make it out what he was a doin'. For once in his life, he seemed awful glad to see me, and grinned at me, and really teched his hat. I don't want none of his grins or hat–techin's. When he had gone, I went to this winder, and I found this clingin' to the blind. It looks as if it had been torn from a coat. I jest tucked it in there, because I wasn't goin' upstairs to my rag–bag then, and knew it would be safe."

Every housekeeper is apt to have a "saving fever," but its style may vary extensively in different houses. One housekeeper will carefully cherish the scraps from the table. Another husbands the coal. A third burns no superfluous oil or gas. Another garners all bits of paper or cloth for the rag–man; and a fifth has two eyes out for all possible lessening of the consumption of butter. Aunt Lydia's ambition, was to treasure up every shred of cloth, all ends of threads, and every slip of paper. She had put the savings of the morning in a little tin box on the mantel, intending to transfer them [79] to the rag–bag the next time she journeyed upstairs.

"A piece of cloth!" said Uncle Boardman, handling the relic. "Did you think it came from Baggs' coat, though I don't see how? He wore this morning that blue frock–coat of his, with the big, silver buttons."

"It looks more like a piece of coat–linin'."

"Indeed! Oh, I guess it's all right," said Uncle Boardman, rising to deposit in the box on the mantel this mysterious fragment. About five minutes later, he was wondering if something were not all wrong. Taking a candle from the mantel and lighting it, he stepped into the store. It was very dark, and very still there, save that the clock was ticking sharply. The storekeeper passed behind the counter to the book–shelf, where Bible and gazetteer, dictionary and statute–book, kept one another company in the dark. He took down the Bible, laid it on the counter, and then proceeded to examine it.

"It's in here somewhere, I know," he softly whispered to himself; "for I tucked it away here, day before yesterday. He inquired for it, and I told him this morning I would get it, and send it to–morrow." [80]

The desired document was that promise to pay Bezaleel Baggs five hundred dollars, which Walter had noticed. It could not now be found.

"Perhaps it's in the Psalms. I read a good deal there," thought Uncle Boardman.

Many promises are in the Psalms, but none to pay B. Baggs five

hundred dollars could be found there.

“Maybe it’s in Daniel. I was a lookin’ at the prophecies there,” thought the bewildered storekeeper; but the prophet had no such treasures in his keeping. He now proceeded to make a thorough and deliberate hunt through the book. He began at Genesis, and was patiently turning over the leaves in Proverbs, when a sharp voice rang out overhead, and then came in definite tones down through a funnel–hole in the ceiling. “You goin’ to bed some time ’fore the millennium, Boardman?”

It was Aunt Lydia, in her chamber directly above the store; and she was using a very convenient substitute for a speaking–tube; a disused funnel–hole that passed through the ceiling of the store and the floor of Aunt Lydia’s room. Uncle Boardman started back as if the funnel–hole had been the mouth of a cannon, and Aunt Lydia sent from it a very effective shot.

“Massy!” he exclaimed inwardly. “I didn’t know she was up there. Comin’, Lydia!” he shouted. “Comin’ very soon!” [81]

Giving occasional looks at the funnel–hole as if to be in readiness to dodge the shot that might be expected any moment from that quarter, he hastily completed his investigation of the Bible. So good a book, though, was unwilling to promise so untrustworthy a man as B. Baggs anything without a good assurance of repentance, and Uncle Boardman, closing the book, placed it on the book–shelf again.

“That *is* queer!” he murmured. “Well, if anybody found it, the note won’t do ’em any good, and as for Bezaleel, I can write him another.”

Taking his candle again, he passed into the sitting–room, and then upstairs. It was time that he did so, for a fluttering of angry steps around the funnel–hole showed that Aunt Lydia was getting ready another and far heavier shot.

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[82]

CHAPTER VII.

STANDING FIRM.

Walter was enjoying a brief furlough at home in October. He was in his mother's sewing–room that opened out of the kitchen. It was a little nest that had room only for a sewing machine, a table, and two chairs. Walter was now occupying one of these chairs, and his mother sat at her table, busily preparing some work for her nimble little machine. It was a mild, autumn day, and through the opened window came the sound of the cricket's shrill piping, and the beating of the grain with an old–fashioned flail, by Farmer Grant, in his barn on the opposite side of the road. There was a crimson–stained maple near the house, that suggested to Walter the opening of his conversation with his mother.

"How soon that maple has turned, mother!"

"Oh no. It is time for it."

"Let me see. It is not so early for it after all. It's the fifteenth of [83]
October. The fifteenth! Why, that is the day Uncle Boardman said his mill would be done, and on my way back, I guess I'll stop there and see how it looks."

"That the mill where his trees are to be sawed up?"

"Yes, and I expect a lot more will come there. You see uncle built the mill, and Baggs buys up the timber where he can, and he and uncle run the mill together, and divide the profits somehow. But it has cost something to put that mill up. I know uncle had to borrow money to do it. I don't like that Baggs at all, mother. He took me in at first, he was so soft–spoken, but I think I know him now."

"He has been up in this neighborhood trying to buy woodland, and wanted your father to trade with him, but he wouldn't. We don't like his looks up this way."

There was a lull in the conversation. The cricket without still kept up his sharp, piercing song, and Farmer Grant patiently beat out an accompaniment to the cricket's tune.

"How long is it now, Walter, since you were confirmed?"

"Three months, mother."

"How are you getting along?" [84]

"Well, mother, I can't say that I am making much progress, but I am trying to hold on."

"Any progress we make in a religious life, comes from doing just what you say you are doing, holding on. If we are regular in our prayers and Bible–reading, if we patiently attend to our church duties, and just try from hour to hour to do our duty to those about us, that is all one can do. God will do the rest."

"I had an idea, mother, when I began this life I should make more progress, get along faster."

"Don't mind that. You must just stick to your purpose, and keep on. I remember what Mark Simpson, an old fisherman down at The Harbor said once. Said Mark,—'Going to heaven is like tryin' to row round B'ilin' P'int when the tide is agin you. If you stick to your oars, and pull ahead, you'll come round all right.' And I think Mark has shown that, if any one has. He has had all sorts of troubles, and he does what he advised, he sticks to his oars and pulls ahead. There's a good deal, Walter, in what I call religious habits; in being particular about your prayers, in reading your Bible, in your attendance at church. Get the wheel down into that track and keep going steadily, and you will find everything easier." [85]

"Yes, I suppose so, mother."

"And there is one thing which it is well for us all to know, Walter. It's the most important thing. I mean we must get hold of Christ, understand what He has done for us, what He will do for us, and holding Him before our eyes and in our hearts, try to do for Him, and be like Him. And Walter, there is this thing I want you to be particular about, to do some one specific thing for Him. Of course, you try to live for Him; but I mean a particular duty."

"What?"

"Well, may I speak of something? It sha'n't be very hard. Of course, you will go to church yourself; try to get everybody else you can. There, do that."

"Well, I will."

The conversation went on. By and by, his mother exclaimed, “If it isn’t eleven o’clock! And there is your lunch, but I will have it ready soon, and what time do you start?”

“Twelve, in the mail–wagon, you know. I go as far as Uncle Boardman’s mill, and I promised to stop there for Chauncy Aldrich, this afternoon, while he is away; and then I walk down to uncle’s at tea–time. It is not more than a mile to walk.”

Walter declared the lunch to be “splendid.” Then there was “a [86]
stitch” to be taken in Walters coat, for which he said he was “thankful.”

“That does me good,” thought his mother. “I don’t know as Walter notices it, but since he has begun his new life, he appreciates more what his father and mother do for him. It may seem to be foolish in me, but the religion that doesn’t come out in little things, won’t come out in great ones.”

Oh, patient mothers, hard working fathers, are you “foolish” to be affected by a child’s gratitude for little things? If children only knew it, such gratitude makes this a new world for parents. The mail–wagon soon rolled along to the Plympton farm and halted for Walter. He was passing through the front yard, hurrying along a lilac and rose–bordered path, to the waiting mail–wagon before the house, when his mother called out, “Oh, Walter! Wait a minute.” She ran down the path.

“I’ll say this for your father, who isn’t at home. It was his charge, you know when you were little: ‘Honest, boy.’”

Walter laughed. “I guess I have got all my bundles now, mother. Good–bye.”

“Good–bye, Walter.” [87]

As the wagon rattled away, carrying off Prince Alden, the driver, two mail–bags, and two passengers, Walter thought of these words, “Honest, boy.” It was an expression his father had used when Walter was a little fellow. The motto had an influence over Walter, not only because his father uttered it, but practiced it. Mr. Plympton’s daily life was the very crystal of honesty itself; honesty not only shining through his words but radiant in all his actions. After a ride of nine miles, came a group of buildings to which had been recently given the name “Blake’s Mills.” It was a part of the business transaction between Bezaleel Baggs and Walter’s uncle, that the latter should erect a “tide mill” at the head of “Muskrat Creek,” a mile from The Harbor. At the head of this creek, was a large tract of useless land belonging to Boardman Blake, easily flooded at high tides. Swinging backward and forward with the tides, were gates, placed in a dam that had been thrown across the head of the creek. Through these opened gates, swept a strong, clean, cold current from the ocean, at flood tide, and then the water was distributed over the low lands, to be held in check until needed to push the great wheel carrying the machinery of the mill.

“If you’ll build a mill,” said B. Baggs to Uncle Boardman, “and [88]
run it with me, I’ll agree to furnish you with logs.”

At one time, for the sake of his “dear friend Blake,” he talked as if he would build everything, take all risks and give all profits to that dear friend.

He did guarantee however, a stated, handsome income to Boardman. “Then,” he added, “you can run the mill for corn and flour, if you wish. However I’ll warrant you on logs a long, steady job; and it will pay you and me enough to make a handsome thing out of it. I’ll furnish logs for five years at least.”

At the same time, he made a great display of ready money, suggesting untold resources somewhere. He bought up the trees on extensive tracts of woodland far and near. Wherever he went, an immense business movement seemed to go with him. Uncle Boardman was bewildered. This great being, like a big oceancraft, bore down on him with such an imposing spread of financial sail, that he and his,—all but Aunt Lydia—were easy captures. Boardman built the mill, although he was forced to borrow five hundred dollars of Baggs that he might accomplish this. It was a note for this amount which Walter had stumbled upon and which his uncle had [89]
subsequently missed, but to cover the debt, he had written and tendered another. It is true that logs had not come to the mill so freely as Baggs had prophesied, for even logs need a little pushing to accomplish a journey; and Uncle Boardman’s receipts were not so large that the disposition of them had perplexed him. It was a fact also that some people had begun to label the mill “Boardman’s

Folly;" but Bezaleel Baggs could furnish any amount of palaver, even if he could not make trees cut themselves down, and roll in large numbers to the mill; and his softly padded tongue kept Uncle Boardman quiet. Chauncy Aldrich represented his uncle's interests at the mill, as that relative was often absent on mysterious journeys, from which he returned with an air of vast importance; as if he had bought up half the world to–day, and it would be delivered at 'Blake's Mills' to–morrow. In connection with Baggs' "office," a small, ragged, unpainted shanty, there was a "store" to supply the hands at the mill. Uncle Boardman had stocked this emporium, and Baggs sold the goods on commission. Uncle Boardman sometimes thought that his profits were exceedingly small; though he knew that his "branch store," as Baggs had pretentiously named it, could [90] have very few customers. Some people had rashly asserted that liquor was sold at this store, but as a town–law forbade it, and as Boardman Blake's principles forbade it also, the sale of liquor did not seem probable. For all that, something "mysterious" was sold there. It was at this "branch store" that Walter expected to serve, the afternoon of his return from his parents, as Chauncy wished to be away. The mail–wagon deposited Walter at the mill, and then clattered away. The mill was not running, as it was flood tide; and the water was rushing in from the sea, storing up the power that made all mill–running possible. No one seemed to be in the great barn–like mill, and few logs were accumulated there to feed the hungry saws when their sharp teeth might be set in motion.

"It looks quiet," thought Walter.

It certainly was quiet in the big, deserted mill; in the narrow little road without; in the adjoining fields, so level and green; in the sky above, through which the sunshine was silently poured down. Nothing seemed to be stirring save the tide, racing up "Muskrat Creek," and that went with an almost intelligent sound. As it rushed, and eddied, and gurgled, it seemed to say, "On hand, Boardman! We'll start that lazy mill, shortly." Ah, there was one other object [91] stirring, at the office, store, shanty door, and this was Chauncy. He looked out into the road, then up to the sky, and then over toward the mill, as if he expected an arrival from some quarter.

"Ha, Plympton!" he shouted.

"Here I am," replied Walter. "Am I late, Aldrich?"

"Oh no, but this is one of the days when the market seems to be paralyzed. Haven't had a customer, and not a log has been hauled to the mill. However, Uncle Baggs is off stirring 'em up somewhere, and trade will begin to move this way. He is a master hand to stir people up and there will be a movement soon."

Here he shoved back his cap, and showed that bristling wall of hair behind which he seemed to be entrenched, and from that impregnable position was defying all the world. His air was that of a challenge to Walter to "come on" if he dared, and show that Bezaleel Baggs would not "stir people up"; yes, "stir 'em up," and bring on an immense movement in "the market."

"Well," said Walter, dropping his traveling bag, "if there is little to be done, I can get a chance to read a book I have in my bag. How [92] long do you want to be away? Suit yourself, you know. I am here to accommodate you, and sha'n't be needed at my uncle's before six."

"Oh, I will be back by five. Besides, my uncle may come, and he will relieve you. He is a great hand to drop on folks sort of unexpected."

"Well, when he drops, I don't want to be exactly under him, for he looks like solid weight."

"Ha—ha! When Uncle Bezaleel *does* come down on a man, he can drop heavy. Well, good–bye and good luck to you."

Off swaggered Chauncy, his cap at one side of his head; his whole air that of some bragging money king, who had sallied forth to upset "the market" in behalf of himself; or to accomplish some other great feat of financial tumbling. Walter was left alone in the office. For awhile, he read a recent report of the life saving service; for the world that centered in the little building whose outlook and flags–taff he could see from Uncle Boardman's storedoor, interested him exceedingly. Nobody appeared to interrupt him save a fly, that buzzed up to him vigorously, in Chauncy's style, but buzzed back immediately at a wave of the hand, which was *not* Chauncy's style.

"Ah," said Walter, after an hour's fascinating reading, "I hear a [93] footstep. Somebody's coming. A customer, probably."

He let his book drop on the counter, and awaited this arrival. A young man entered, whom Walter thought he had seen before; but where, he could not readily say.

"He is not over twenty–one," thought Walter. "He has a nice form."

The young man had a frame of much symmetry, and the dress–coat that he wore, instead of the loose blouse common among the fishermen and farmers, brought out into distinct outline his well–shaped figure. Although his look was that of a rather strong excitement, which flushed his face, and gave it an unnatural eagerness, yet Walter was attracted toward him at once. A little girl, who bore some resemblance to the young man, closely followed him, clinging to the skirt of his coat. The young man appeared to be looking for something on one of the shelves, and with a twinkle of his blue eyes, and in musical, ringing tones, he called out, "In some stores, they say on a card, 'If you don't see a thing, ask for it.'"

"Well," replied Walter, "Ask away. I would like to sell something to somebody."

The young man did not lower his eyes to notice Walter, but continued to search with them the objects on the three shelves [94] behind the counter.

"He can't want soap, or matches, or that pile of mittens for fishermen," thought Walter.

The young man, himself, here expressed his wants.

"See here!" he said in a half–whisper, leaning forward. "Where's that big bottle Baggs keeps on the upper shelf, generally behind a bundle of yarn?"

As he leaned forward, Walter noticed by his breath that he had been drinking an intoxicant of some kind. He noticed also that the little girl in the rear was now tugging at his coat, as if to pull him back from an exposed position. Did the child say, "Don't!"

"Go way, Amy! Don't pull so!" exclaimed the young man rather testily. Still he did not look round at this interferer, and he did not even glance at Walter. His eager eyes were fastened on those generally uninteresting objects, soap, yarn, and matches. Surely, there could be no snake's eye up there to bewilder one.

"Ah, I see the top of it! Just above that big lot of yarn on the third shelf. That's how I made my mistake—I was looking at the second shelf, you see, and—and it's the third—don't Amy! Keep quiet, Amy! [95] There, if you'll just get that down! A—my, stop!"

Was it a big sob, Walter heard behind this customer? The young man's look was no more eager now than Walter's. The desire to know, was as strong in the latter, as appetite was in the former, and Walter had now mounted a rickety, flag–bottomed chair, and was pulling aside the packages on the shelves. Reaching a big bundle of yarn on the uppermost shelf, he saw the object of the young man's intense desire; an immense black bottle with an immense black stopper.

"There—there she is! Just hand her down; and if you have any water handy, I'll mix it myself, you know. Amy, you stop pulling, or I'll send you outdoors."

The young man's voice, though earnest, was not cross. Indeed, he had endured a constant twitching from his small companion.

"Just hand her down, please."

"Well, no, I think not, if it is liquor," was Walter's reply.

This, to the young man, was an unexpected turn of affairs. For the first time, he now looked directly at Walter. Still, he stayed good–natured, and that attracted Walter the more strongly.

"Why—why—of course it is liquor. You don't suppose Baggs [96] would hide kerosene, say, behind his mothy old yarn, would he?" and the young man laughed.

"Well, no, I should say not," and Walter laughed also.

"You are here to sell, are you not?" asked the young man.

"Yes, I suppose I am, for the afternoon; but I didn't agree to sell everything Baggs might put into this old hole. I don't know what your business is, though your face looks natural; but if the man that employed you, say to catch fish, should say some day, 'There goes somebody's sheep in the road. I am going to shear it, and keep the wool, and I want you to hold it, for I hired you to work for me,' I guess you would let your fingers burn first, before you would touch the thing that was another man's." There was silence now in the

little shanty. The young man began to drum on the counter with his fingers.

“Then, it is against the law to sell liquor in this town,” observed Walter.

“Oh, Baggs is cute to fix that,” replied the would–be customer in a whisper. “You need not take any money now. Baggs *gives* us a glass of liquor to–day, and in a week from to–day, when we meet [97] him, we say, ‘A present, Mr. Baggs,’ and we *give* him money enough to cover the worth of the liquor.”

The young man was no longer looking at Walter, but at the bottle on the shelf, as if addressing that.

“I should think,” said Walter, indignantly, “the devil himself would be ashamed of that mean, underhanded way. I believe in being aboveboard and honest. No, I am not going to have anything to do with this business,” and as he spoke, he very resolutely thrust back the yarn, hiding the bottle from the observation of all save those to whose sight their appetite gave unusual keenness. While he was doing this, he heard a noise at the door. It was only a slight stir at first, as of a lively brush from the wind pushing its way past the door. It was just such a “lively” effort of the wind, as at sea, may grow into a hurricane. Turning toward the door, Walter saw Baggs. It was Baggs indeed, and nobody else, but oh, what a change!

“Well, sir!” he roared.

How unlike that smooth–speaking, mild–tempered man, who usually went by the name of Baggs! His face was ruffled and darkened with rage. His skin seemed to be blown out; and as certain [98] unnoticed pimples had grown also, it had a mottled, puffy look, like that of a frog. In the midst of this turgidity and discoloration, his twisted eye flashed and wriggled in a frightful manner, while his voice was hoarse and blatant as that of a fog–horn.

“You—you are a pretty—feller—in—in this store! Git—git—out of this!” he shouted, catching his breath.

As his peculiarity of sight made it difficult to always tell whom he might be looking at, both the young men glanced doubtfully at Baggs, and then inquiringly at one another; as if about to say, “Whom does he mean?”

“Git—git—out!” he roared again.

“Who—o—o?” asked the young man outside the counter.

“You—you—*you*!” said Baggs, with tremendous emphasis, advancing toward the young man inside the counter. “I mean *you*, Walter Plympton. I—I—have heard your—talk—talk—for the last five minutes. I mean *you*, sir, whose—whose uncle I have been striving—ving—to exalt to the—the—pin—pin—*nack*—ul of untold wealth. I mean *you*, an ungrateful neph—neph—ew. I mean *you*, who wouldn’t give to a fellow—that’s—that’s faint—a little sip—sip that would do him no harm. Will the—law—law stop that work of—mer—mercy to [99] the sick? You were not—asked—as I understand—it—to sell, but simp—simply to put—as I understand it—the bottle *here*.”

With new and frightful energy, Baggs here pounded the counter, which he had struck several times before.

“You were not asked—asked—to do anything more. Will you—you not—befriend the—the—”

Although Baggs’ philanthropy did not fail him, and he could have talked an hour as the champion of the faint and weary, yet his breath *did* desert him; and he stood there, gasping, “the—the—the—the—”

Baggs had a great reputation as orator at town meetings, and he was declared by admirers “always to be equal to the occasion,” and it was mortifying now to be found so unequal to this emergency. There was no help for it, though. He could only gasp, “the—the—the—”

“Oh well,” remarked Walter, “I can go as well now, as any time. When you catch me selling liquor, you will be likely to find at the same time the Atlantic full of your mill–logs. Good–day, sir.”

This reference to Baggs’ logs, which were not numerous enough [100] that day to fill anything, so affected the orator, that he did succeed in making a new forensic effort.

“Go, boy!” he thundered.

The next moment, Walter was rushing out of the door, as indignant on the side of the clerk, as Baggs was on the side of the employer.

“Such impudence!” exclaimed Baggs, his wrath slowly subsiding. “If you don’t feel just right, I’ll ’tend to you,” he said to the customer. “I’ll trouble you to get down that bottle.”

The young man did not stir. He seemed to be in a stupor.

“What’s the matter?” asked Baggs. “Feel wuss?” and a sarcastic humor lighted up his twisted eye.

“I’m going,” said the young man.

“And not take a drink?”

“No, I’ve seen enough of it. That young fellow is right in not selling, and if he can’t sell, I won’t be fool enough to drink.”

“Come, come!” said a little voice behind him.

“Yes, Amy; I’m going,” and out of the store he went. Baggs was amazed. He could not understand it.

“Well, if that ain’t queer!” he muttered. He began to wonder if the recent scene were real, whether it might not have been a dream. [101] There was Walter, though, now almost out of sight; and the young man was moving in the same direction, his coat–skirts still clutched by Amy. These three were substantial witnesses to the reality of the affair; and Baggs, wiping his forehead with a very red, and a very dirty handkerchief, turned toward his desk in what was strictly the “office” part of the shanty.

Walter did not intend to take the road he was now traveling, but when he left Baggs, he was feeling so intensely, that the matter of a road was too trivial to be noticed. The road in which he was walking led him to The Harbor; and from this village, he could reach his uncle’s, though his walk would be a long one.

“I have started,” he reflected, “and I might as well keep on. Besides, if I turn back to take the right road, I shall have to pass Baggs’ office, and I don’t want to go near that rascal. I will walk a mile to avoid him.” He tramped forward with a kind of fierce energy, busily thinking.

“The idea! Wanting to exalt Uncle Boardman to a pinnacle of wealth! And he has been constantly befooling him. He has been pretending to buy up woodland far and near; and I don’t know but that he has bought it, in one way, but I don’t believe he has paid for [102] it. Aunt Lydia saw through him all the time, and she was the sharpest of the lot. Then that liquor business! Wasn’t he cunning, giving away his whiskey! Well, he found one person who would neither sell, nor give for him.”

So intensely was Walter thinking, he did not notice how rapidly he was passing through the little fishing–village. There were not more than forty houses at The Harbor, and these were located anywhere along the crooked line of the one narrow street. The neighborhood was very rocky, and in and out among the ledges, wound this single street. Some of the houses were very old, and their roofs were patched with moss. Planted near the ledges, these ancient relics of domestic architecture seemed more like masses of lichen, that had fastened on the ledges, becoming a part of them; and resolute to maintain their rocky anchorage as long as the rough sea winds, and the driving rains, would let them. The village had a small store, whose proprietor considered himself as a dangerous competitor of Boardman Blake, and a box schoolhouse, capped with a rude little belfry, which never had entertained a bell as its guest. It had also an unpainted “hall,” where one evening a dance might be [103] pounded out by the vigorous feet of the young men and women of the village; the next evening might witness an auction; and if the third evening belonged to Sunday, some kind of a religious service might be held there. These three public buildings, the store, the schoolhouse, the hall, Walter had passed. Chancing to look up, he said, “I am almost through the village. I have been so mad, I have made pretty quick time; and there is the road that goes up to Uncle Boardman’s; and—and—there’s the ‘Crescent’! I have a great mind to go home that way, by the Crescent.”

The Crescent was a peculiarity of rock and sand in the harbor. If it had been simply a shoal of sand, though shaped like a young moon this year, the shifting tides every day, the great storms of spring or autumn, would have worked it over into something very unlike a young moon another year. There were nubs of rocks at either end, and ledges were scattered along the sides of this marine scimeter, so that a measure of the restless sand was retained; and year after year, the Crescent kept substantially its form.

At low tide, the Crescent could be easily reached by any

pedestrian. One in passing from The Harbor to Boardman Blake's, could leave the road, and at low tide cross over to the Crescent, [104] pass along its ledges and sand, and leaving it, at its easterly extremity, regain the land without wetting the feet. This course would carry one not far from the lane that straggled from the life saving station up to Boardman Blake's; and although a much longer route than by the road, it had its attractions for those who liked to see the surf tumble on the rocks. Walter was of this number, and instead of following any farther the crooked street that wound among the ledges, and then curved toward Boardman Blake's store, he digressed at a point opposite the Crescent; and he took the longer, but more romantic way home.

"I will cross to those rocks half way down the Crescent, and sit down a while and watch the waves break over the rocks," he said. "Splendid place there."

It was a tempting outlook upon the somersets thrown by those acrobats of the ocean, the waves, when they reached the rocky line of the shore, and there made tumble after tumble. Walter sat a long time watching and thinking:

"Then I have run against Baggs," he said, "and I didn't anticipate that. Wasn't he mad! I never thought that smooth–talking man could [105] rave like one of these waves. I am sorry for Uncle Boardman's sake, for I imagine—poor man—he has enough to worry him, and my fuss with Baggs may make him some trouble. But I don't see what else I could have done. That fellow—I wonder where I have seen him—had been drinking already, and a glass or two more might have just finished him. I could not do that; no, not even set down the bottle for him. And the law was against it; and I could not in any way help break the law. Baggs could not ask it of me, for I didn't go there for any such purpose. No, sir! I think I did the right thing, and I'll stick to it, and stand by it."

In his earnestness, Walter rose, stamped on the ledges with his feet, as if to give emphasis to his opinion, and looked off on the wide ocean of blue, whose play was as restless as that of his thoughts. And as he looked, somehow it seemed to him as if he had the sympathy of that wide reach of nature he was watching. The sky seemed to bend down to him in an approval which the gently blowing wind whispered, and that great ocean had a voice, sounding in the thousands of waves pressing toward him, and saying in the roar of the surf, "You are right." This secret sympathy between law in nature and its keeper in the sphere of principle, is one of the [106] rewards of right–doing. And above all, in his heart, Walter had the sense of satisfaction whose source he knew to be God. He did not know what might be the personal consequences of his difficulty with Baggs, but he felt that he was right; and he could plant his feet on that assurance solid as the ledges under him. He remained a long time watching the waves, till he was startled to see what a protracted shadow his form threw on the black ledges.

"Sun is getting low," he said. "I must be going."

He turned, and moved away a short distance, when he turned again, and looked back upon the rocks he had left.

"That is strange," he said.

He noticed that this particular ledge, called the "Center Rock" by the fishermen, had a divided summit. The outline of the eastern half of this summit was curiously like that of a chair; as if placed there in anticipation of an arrival by sea. No one, though, came out of the great, empty waste of water, now rapidly blackening in the twilight.

"Sort of funny," he exclaimed, and hurried away.

"Ho, what is this?" he asked. Looking toward the land, he noticed [107] that while he had been watching the waves, the tide had turned, and covered the low, sandy flats with a floor of crystal.

"Well, it is not so very deep, and I can wade ashore," said Walter. He was untying his shoes, when he heard the noise of oars. As he chanced to look up to see who might be coming, the boatman turned, and resting on his oars, faced Walter. A smile as from an old acquaintance overspread his features, and he called out, "Hold on there!"

A few more strokes, and the boat was on the sand at Walter's feet.

"One good turn deserves another," cried the boatman. "Jump in!"

"Oh, that you?" cried Walter. "Well, I will." And into the boat he jumped.

This opportune arrival was the young man he had met in Baggs' store that afternoon. He was dressed now for work, and wore a blue blouse. It could not hide, though, his broad shoulders, and when he rowed, one could but admire the easy, strong sweep of the arms.

"I was busy watching the waves," explained Walter, "and I did not notice that the tide had turned." [108]

"You would have crossed without much difficulty to the shore, though in three hours from this time you might have done some swimming."

"I am good for that."

"Dare say. You would have got along, though they do tell some boogerish stories about those rocks. Did you notice the 'Chair'? It is on the easterly side of what we call the 'Center Rock.'"

"Oh yes, I saw that."

"Well, they say a young girl was caught on the Crescent by the tide toward night, and a rain and fog set in. Oh, it was years ago, and we had no station here; and it was when the men folks used to go off fishing down to Banks—the Newfoundland—and of course there were few folks at home. I mean men folks. Some of the women thought they heard screams in the night; but then in a storm, the waves keep up such a pounding, you can hardly hear your own ears. The storm got worse all that night, and in the morning, it was bad enough outside the Crescent. Soon as the storm would let them cross over, some of the people went, they say; but they didn't find the girl."

"Well, how did they know she stayed there? Perhaps she went somewhere else." [109]

"They never heard of her anywhere else; and that reminds me of something I didn't put in. There was a fishing–sloop running along the shore, and made harbor here. It passed by the Crescent in the afternoon, and the skipper saw a girl sitting in what we call the Chair, on the ocean side of Center Rock. That was the last seen of her, and the weather had not set in rainy then. Oh, I have heard my mother tell the story many times; and what was queer, there was a boy mixed up with the affair,—the girl's brother. My mother used to say that the boy and girl had had some quarrel, and he asked her to go over to Center Rock and see a curious chair there, knowing of course that the tide would turn and bother her. I think he led her there, and left her there. I don't know as he intended anything so serious as her drowning, but he was mad, and meant to punish her enough to frighten her. But it set in raining, and the fog you know is bewildering; and then the storm was pretty bad that night, and the waves wash clear over Center Rock in a storm. Then my mother used to say—my mother is not living now—the girl was a stranger here, and didn't know what the Chair might do for one. She and her brother were visiting here, I believe; and isn't it singular that their [110] name should have been Baggs? Not singular that I know of, only we had something to do with somebody of the same name this afternoon, and one thing suggests another."

The young man here rested on his oars, and looking into Walter's face, said: "You did a good thing for me, this afternoon."

"I am glad if I did."

"What I call 'the craze' was on me then. I had one glass, and that is always enough to start me, and I thought I must have more. It was strong, you know, and I can't touch the stuff safely. It's too powerful for me. Our talk though, gave me a chance to think; and when Baggs came, I surprised him by refusing it,—he offered it to me, you see. Then I went home, and my sister—she is as good as she can be—gave me a hot supper and some coffee, and I am all right now."

"That's good. I expect Baggs will want to pitch into me."

"No, he won't. He knows that I know something about his style of handling that bottle, and I think that will hold him back. I believe that he will be very glad to keep on the right side of you. If he don't, he will get on the wrong side of me. Baggs is a coward. He can blow [111] and bluster worse than a nor'easter, but he is a coward at the end of it."

"He must stop, though, his liquor business. If nothing more, it will get my uncle into trouble. You see he owns the goods in—"

"Does he? I didn't know that."

"Yes, he owns what is in that pen."

"Though not the pig, or the two pigs, I should say; counting in that precious nephew of Baggs'. Ha–ha!"

“That selling, or giving, will give my uncle a bad name.”

“I see, I see, for it will come out and every body know it, sooner or later, of course.”

“As for the liquor business itself, I won’t have anything to do with it.”

“You are right, I know; and I want to do the right thing myself. I mean to do right, and I have just promised my sister I would try again.”

“Ask God to help you,” said Walter in a hearty, boy–fashion.

“Well, yes, I suppose I ought. But here we are ashore, and sooner than I thought for.”

The boat was in a little sand–cove where, affected by the Crescent, the roll of the surf was very gentle.

“You go up to your uncle’s, I s’pose, and I go to the life saving station. I am one of the crew there, and it was my turn to be off to–day.” [112]

“There! I thought I had seen you somewhere before.”

“I have seen you there, and you would have known me quicker, perhaps, if I hadn’t shaved off my beard. That alters me somewhat.”

“But it seems to me as if I had seen you before I came this way.”

“Shouldn’t wonder. People meet, you know, under queer circumstances.”

“Hullo, Woodbury,” called out a man dressed like a fisherman, and waiting on the rocks above the strip of sand. “I’ve been here a–waitin’, some time.”

“Then his name is Woodbury,” thought Walter. “I know that much.”

The fisherman sprang into the boat vacated by Woodbury and Walter, and thrusting his oar into the sand, pushed off at once. Woodbury went to the left toward the station, while Walter took the lane to his uncle’s.

“I am very much surprised to know that Mr. Baggs would do anything of the kind,” said Uncle Boardman in his slow, meditative way, when Walter after supper related the affair of the day. Uncle Boardman, as he spoke, worked his fingers nervously, as if they were pencils, with which he was working out a problem on a slate. [113]

“Sur–*prised*, Boardman?” inquired Aunt Lydia, thrusting forward her sharp features. “You sur–*prised*? I am not. I don’t think there is anything that mean critter won’t be up to, or down to, rather. I ventur’ to say there’s been queer carryin’s on, if we only knew.” And Aunt Lydia’s sharp face suggested the beak of a bird that was after its prey; and woe be to that worm, the unhappy Baggs, if once before the beak!

“I thought I ought to speak of the matter,” said Walter apologetically. “I hate anything that looks like telling, but I knew you owned the goods up there in Baggs’ place, and you might be involved in trouble.”

“Walter, don’t you ’polergize one bit. I shan’t take it, if Boardman does. That mean critter don’t deserve nary a ’polergy.”

“Jingle, jingle!” went the warning bell in the store.

“I will go, uncle.”

“Oh, no! Somebody may want me.” When Uncle Boardman returned, he remarked, “I thought as much. It was—”

“Baggs?” said Aunt Lydia eagerly guessing.

“Yes, and I thought there must be some extenuating circumstances. He brought it in while we were talking together, saying he had had occasion to give a little liquor to some of the fishermen when sick and faint, and he allowed that he might have been mistaken, in other cases.” [114]

“Why should he receive presents of money afterwards, and why not take it at the time, if everything was all right, uncle?”

“Now, Boardman, you mean to be charitable,” ejaculated Aunt Lydia, “and it says charity shall hide a multitude of sins, but sich a big sinner, you can’t kiver him up. His sins *will* stick out.”

“Oh, well, Lydia, I only mean to say what can be said for him, and he allows he hasn’t always done just right, but he promises to stop.”

“But what will the poor, sick, faint fishermen do?” inquired Aunt Lydia solicitously, and in a sarcastic tone.

Uncle Boardman, though, had taken a candlestick from the mantel–piece, had lighted a long specimen of tallow manufacture, by

Aunt Lydia, and was passing out of the door that led upstairs to his chamber.

[115] “Well, I guess,” said Uncle Boardman good–naturedly laughing, “we will send ’em round to you. I don’t know of a better hand to take care of tramps and paupers.”

Aunt Lydia had a peculiarity, and that was the indiscriminate relief of everybody who might ask for her charity. In that way, she had nourished some very deserving souls, behind the pitiful looks and shabby garments pleading at her door, and she had also nourished some who were not so deserving, but were frauds of the worst kind.

The tallow candle carried by Uncle Boardman had now withdrawn its diminutive rays, and his footsteps had ceased sounding on the uncarpeted stairway leading to the second story.

“There,” declared Aunt Lydia, “if that man wasn’t a saint, I wouldn’t take folks’ heads off like that ere Baggs’. There, they do set right down on him; and it jest riles me.”

“Aunt,” inquired Walter, “did you ever hear about an accident at the Chair, on the Crescent, when it was said a girl went there, and the tide cut her off from the land?”

“A storm comin’ up that night?”

“That’s the time.”

[116] “Oh, yes, only it happened thirty years ago. But, Walter—” and Aunt Lydia looked at him with her sharp, black eyes—“though it was so long since, I can see that ere gal now.”

“Did you see her?”

“Of course. She went by our winders right down that ’ere road. Poor thing! She never came back.”

“What was it her brother did?”

“Why, they was a–visitin’ here, and they had some quarrel, and he urged her to go there, they said, and he met her beyond the house and went with her. Then, they said, he left her there on purpose—told her suthin’ to keep her there, I s’pose—and she didn’t know ’bout the tides, and was caught. I b’lieve he ’lowed to somebody arterwards that he hadn’t done jest right.”

“Was his name Baggs?”

“Bagster.”

“Oh!”

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[117]

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE STATION.

Walter was at the life saving station looking up a stairway leading from the crew's room to an open scuttle in the roof. If Walter had put his head out of the scuttle, he would have seen a railing, hemming in a small platform; and from its center, rose a modest flag–staff. There was no chance though for explorations, as the way was entirely blocked. On the stairway, Walter saw an immense pair of boots, and above them a stout pair of legs; and then a man's bulky body, roofed by a huge "sou'wester."

"No room for me to pass there," thought Walter.

The man held in his hand the object that at a life saving station comes under the head, "marine glasses."

"Do you see anything?" asked Walter recognizing the man to be Tom Walker.

"Only a fishin' smack, and a mean one at that. It's my watch, you know." [118]

The boots, the legs, the big body, and the sou'wester all came down.

"Step up if you want to, Walter."

Climbing the stairway, Walter swept the sea with his bright eyes, and then looked landward across the black rocks and the fading fields. Then he turned toward the sea again. Off in the east was the fishing smack, slowly sailing in the sun. Then he looked up at the flag–staff, which carried some specimen of marine architecture on its top.

"I see two craft," said Walter.

"Two?" inquired Tom, solicitously.

"The fishing smack and this on top of the staff."

"Ho—ho!" roared Tom.

"Only I can't make out this second one in the air."

"It *was* a brig, but the last gale we had tore away its rigging, and made some improvements; and I don't know what on airth or water to call that thing. I guess she is 'phibious, and will go on either."

Walter's eager eyes caught a glimpse of a box, on a landing half way up the stairway to the lookout, and from this box projected bundles of cloth, here and there showing bits of color. [119]

"That is the signal box?" remarked Walter.

"Yes. Sometime I will explain them to you."

"Will you?" inquired Walter, his hazel eyes snapping at the prospect of this new continent of knowledge,—the signal department of the life saving service.

"Sartin. Give you a hint now. For instance, we have a pennant, a triangular flag, blue, with a white ball in it; and if I h'ist it, it would mean 'no' to some question asked by a vessel off shore signaling to me. Or, s'posin' I h'isted a white pennant with a red ball. That would mean 'yes.'"

Walter desired to overhaul that unpretending box at once, but he knew he must return to the store; and he only remarked, "I would like to see all those signals out sometime."

"I guess you can without any doubt. You take a good deal of interest in our station, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. It is something entirely new to me."

"You would make a pretty good surfman," said Tom, glancing approvingly at Walter's compact frame. "Woodbury Elliott says you row a pretty good stroke." [120]

"Oh! That his name? I came in his boat from the Crescent the other night."

"Yes," said Tom deliberately, looking at Walter's frame as if he were a recruiting officer examining the physical points of a candidate for the ranks of Uncle Sam's army. "I think, I think—you would do."

Walter laughed. "I guess I must be a storekeeper. However, I am pleased if you think I have strength enough for a surfman."

Tom now turned away, and with his glass swept the misty horizon again.

"There is the fishin' smack," he said. "And hullo! What's that? I

missed her afore, sartin."

"What is it?"

"She's a fore–and–aft, sure as you are born; and—and—it is a coaster, and she's headin' this way. Queer I missed her."

"I didn't see her. Uncle Boardman is expecting a coaster to come after a load of potatoes. I wonder if that's the one!"

"I shouldn't wonder one bit. It's hazy where she is, and that's the reason we didn't see her."

"I think I had better report that to uncle." [121]

"Of course," remarked the surfman, pointing his glass again at the schooner. "She may go somewhere else, but she acts to me as if she wanted to run in at The Harbor."

"I think I will tell Uncle Boardman."

"What does she bring here, if it's bound here for your uncle's potatoes?"

"I believe she brings a variety of things; some groceries for the store, some salt for the fishermen, and so on. Her cargo is what they call miscellaneous."

It was not long before a coasting schooner was beating off the mouth of the harbor, saying plainly by her actions that she wished to make port as soon as possible.

"It must be the *Olive Ann*," declared Boardman Blake; "and, Walter, I think you had better go down to Spring's wharf, and see if everything is ready for the coaster there."

Walter went to the wharf. Jabez Wherren, a fisherman, stood leaning against an oaken pier, watching the fluttering efforts of the coaster to reach a sheltered resting–place.

"I expect that is a schooner uncle is expecting, and she will come here, Mr. Wherren. Will you look after her, please? I must go back to the store."

Receiving from the gray–headed old man a promise that he would [122] give the *Olive Ann* a reception befitting a dame of her commercial position, Walter hurried away. He returned to the store, and then left again in an hour for the wharf, above which now shot up two tapering masts, signaling the arrival of the coaster. He was passing the schoolhouse at The Harbor, when a little girl playing on the rough step of stone before the door, looked up and said, "I know you."

It was Woodbury Elliott's young companion, the day he had visited Baggs' shanty, and found Walter there.

"Oh, that you?" said Walter stopping. "Do you go to school here?"

"Yes."

"Who is your teacher?"

"Sister."

"Don't you have any school to–day?"

"School is just out, but my sister hasn't gone."

"I wonder if she is the one that Woodbury said gave him his supper and hot coffee," thought Walter. "She knew how to cure a man in trouble."

"Good afternoon," said a pleasant voice in the entry. Walter looked up, and there before him, advancing also toward him with a hand outstretched in welcome, was May Elliott. The old schoolhouse [123] in the fishing village seemed to disappear at once, as by the touch of a magician's wand. In its place, was the academy. Again, it was "composition day," and in May Elliott's hand was a schoolgirl's composition, from which she was reading these words: "The life that does not take into account the need of those about us, that does not take into account another life, that does not take God into account, is making a serious mistake."

All this came to Walter, and he stood in a daze.

"Don't you know me, Plympton? May Elliott?"

"Oh, yes," he said, quickly recovering from his surprise. "But I was not looking for you, and—"

"It gave you a surprise? Won't you come in?"

"I am glad to see you, Miss Elliott. Why, I didn't know you were here!"

He followed her into the low–storied schoolroom, and sat down in a chair that she placed for him near the door.

"Yes, I am here. My home is here at The Harbor, and you can see the house through this window; that white house beyond the

fishflakes in the field. There are some apple–trees back of it, which you can see.” [124]

“I didn’t know you were here,” said Walter again, looking off from the house, and rapidly taking the picture of the young teacher. She was hardly of medium height, and was simply clad, in a black alpaca dress, wearing at her throat a crimson ribbon pinned with a small cross of gold. Her brown hair was very soft and fine, and of a luxuriant growth. Her features were a little irregular, but her complexion was fair, and then a certain brightness and directness of look gave her blue eyes a magnetic power.

“Yes,” she laughingly said, “I suppose you would call me the village ‘schoolmarm,’ at least, this fall. When I was a little girl, I remember—sitting on one of those benches in front,—I had an ambition to be some day the teacher of the school. But, Plympton, I have been wanting to see you, and thank you for your kindness to my brother, Woodbury. He has—has—a weakness, as you know; and what you did that afternoon, checked him when he was sorely tempted.”

“I am very glad if I did any good. And—and—I have thought I would like to thank *you*, sometime.” [125]

“For what?”

“Do you remember your composition?”

“Oh, I believe I wrote a number of them. Which one was it?”

“That one called, ‘What are we living for?’ That influenced me a good deal,” said Walter, rising as if to go.

“Did it? I never knew that it helped anybody, except, perhaps, it set me to thinking more fully afterwards on the subject. Are you going?”

“I think I must. But I want to thank you for what you said; and if I can help Woodbury, I will.”

In response, there was a bright look of sincere pleasure shining out of May Elliott’s face. Through the day, a pair of blue eyes followed Walter in his thoughts, as if intent to overtake him and ask him some question.

“Miss Elliott keeps your school,” he said to Jabez Wherren on the wharf at a little later hour.

“May, you mean? Wall, yes, and she’s a smart leetle critter, not more’n sixteen or seventeen; but she makes them young ones toe the mark, I tell ye. We all think a good deal of May; brought up here amongst us, you know. There’s Woodbury, her brother; a smart [126] feller as ever lived, if he would never tech liquor. He might be a captain of his own craft, jest as easy, jest as easy—as—as—mud.” After this expressive and telling simile, Jabez recovered the breath he had lost in that effort, and continued: “It’s a bright family, the Elliotts is. That little Amy, she’ll beat the whole school a–spellin’—that is, all of her age. Woodbury’s father and mother are well–to–do, forehanded folks. He’s a skipper, and is on this very schooner. What’s that?”

Jabez was now directing his attention to the gangway of the *Olive Ann*, which had been securely moored to the little wharf. A colored boy in a shabby brown suit was disembarking, carrying a very small bundle in his hand. Springing out upon the wharf, he looked in various directions, as if a stranger, and he was calculating which way he had better go. A choice between two routes offered itself, and he chanced to take that which would lead him to Boardman Blake’s store.

“Who’s that passenger?” asked Jabez of Captain Elliott, a muscular, heavy man of fifty.

“I can’t say. He shipped at New York, and worked for his passage. He wanted to be off soon as I could spare him, and I said he might go now, or stay longer. He’d rather be off now. I’m afeared [127] he won’t pick up any work very soon, but he will probably push on till he finds some sort of a chance.”

Walter went home thinking of this unknown youth, a stranger, homeless, tramping off anywhere. Aunt Lydia met him in the kitchen. A very broad grin was on her face, as if the old lady had found a prize that made her very happy.

“Come into the addition,” said she, beckoning mysteriously. “Step softly, you know. I’ve got suthin’ to show you.”

The “addition” was built on to the rear of the house, and contained two rooms, the lower being a kind of store–room.

“There!” said Aunt Lydia, pointing at the corner.

Curled up under an old quilt, a smile brightening a face happy in a trip to some beautiful dream–land, was the “passenger,” as Jabez had entitled him, who had just arrived per coaster *Olive Ann*.

“Ho, Aunt Lyddy! You got Young Africa there?” whispered Walter.

“Yes, and I didn’t have the heart to turn him away. You see he came to the door, and sort of mournful, looked up and asked for a leetle suthin’ to eat, and said he would work first, and I didn’t have [128] the heart to refuse him. Then I sez, ‘Where you goin’?’ ‘Dunno,’ he sez; and I thought it wasn’t jest Christian to let him go a–wanderin’ off into the world when the night was a–comin’, and I sez, pointin’ to your Uncle Boardman in the barnyard, ‘you might ax that man, and if he’s a–willin’, and can give you suthin’ to do, you can stay here till mornin’.’ And it would have done your soul good to have seen how grateful that child was when Boardman sez—and I knew he would —‘I’ll leave it to Lyddy.’”

“What’s his name?” asked Walter, when they were in the kitchen once more, leaving that “child” to his happy rest under Aunt Lyddy’s homemade bedquilt; which, like its owner, was a little rough on the outside, but exceedingly warm within.

“Pedro White, he told me. And jest think, I told it to your Uncle Boardman, and he laffed and said ‘Pedro’ was Spanish, and he ought to be called ‘Don Pedro.’ You know your uncle has read a ’mazin’ sight.”

Aunt Lydia had a very large respect for her husband’s “book–larnin’,” as she called it. It must be acknowledged though, that before the pressure of each day’s necessities, Uncle Boardman, with his “book–larnin’,” would often retreat; while Aunt Lydia, gifted only [129] with her sharp, practical sense, would advance triumphantly. This fact does not prove that book knowledge is of little worth. It is extremely valuable. It should go hand in hand with excellent judgment to make it of the greatest value to its possessor. “That child” slept profoundly under Aunt Lydia’s bedquilt, which rivaled the rain–bow in its many colors and the sunshine in its warmth.

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[130]

CHAPTER IX.

THE HALL SERVICE.

Did I not say there was only one store at The Harbor? I beg Miss P. Green's pardon. She did not claim in so many words to "keep store," and yet if anybody had actually denied her right to the use of that grand word, "store," there would have been a tempest at The Harbor. She merely said that she "kept a few little articles"; and yet the black king of the Bigboos in the depths of Africa, would not think more of a red handkerchief and a hand looking–glass, than Miss P. Green did of her three shelves of "goods," and one small show–case of pins, needles, gooseberries, lemon drops, and stationary, in her front room. Gooseberries and lemon drops, I say, for Miss P. Green kept only these, believing that you could sell more if you kept one article, and "got your name up" on the merits of that one article. In this case there were two articles; but never were [131] there such gooseberries before, nor have there been such lemon drops since. The gooseberries would have been excellent to pitch with—just big, and hard, and round enough—at a game of baseball; and as for the lemon drops, into what rapture those sugared acids, or that acidulated sugar rather, would throw any schoolboy or girl, at "recess–time." Then Miss P. Green kept the post–office! There is no adjective I can now recall, of sufficient magnitude and magnificence to represent the importance which Miss P. Green attached to this position. Her ideas were not unduly exalted until she had seen the Boston post–office, and enjoyed an interview with the Boston post–master. She then felt that her position was unusual. She never looked upon her humble wooden walls as she came down the street, but that they changed to a granite façade, with lofty doors and pillars; and when she entered her abode she walked at once upon a marble pavement. What importance she felt when she handled the stamp, whose magic impress she must first make, before any letter could start on its travels from The Harbor. The Great Charlemagne pounding with his golden seal, did not feel half as grand. And those clumsy leathern pouches that were called mai– [132] lbags, and which only Miss P. Green could open—how she venerated them! True Billings, the driver of the mail–wagon, handled them roughly, and pitched them upon the doorstep without ceremony, bawling out, "Here you have 'em!" By the post–mistress, they were approached with a certain respect and awe, whose weight would crush the official opening the great treasury–vaults of the nation, did he regard these with corresponding feelings of importance. It was stoutly secured to the door frame outside with good shingle nails, that sign indicating Miss P. Green's official place in The Harbor world: "Post–office." On the door leading from the entry into the front room was the name "P. Green." This indicated her place in the great world of trade. If it had been attached to the outer door, it would have saved me an ugly omission, for I should at once have given her honorable mention in the business list of The Harbor. The sign occupied an outer position once, but boys do not always have that respect for authority which is becoming, and had changed the name one night to "Pea Green." It was indignantly withdrawn the next day. It was just as well removed, I dare say, for if she had continued to daily see those two signs, "Post–office," and "P. Green," as she approached the building, the sense of her official and [133] commercial importance would finally have been too much for her. As it was, she passed from the contemplation of one sign to the other, and there was a gradual letting down from that sense of exaltation which she had on seeing the front door.

But all of Miss P. Green's merits have not been mentioned. She was a very little body, and that may seem a detraction from her excellencies, and yet it was only another praiseworthy feature; for never in such small compass was packed so much knowledge. No "Saratoga" trunk ever went to "Springs," so loaded, crowded, jammed. She was the village register; could tell the births and deaths and marriages for the year, giving each date. Not so surprising a fact, considering that the village was small; but when you add to this a complete knowledge of every household, how many were in each family, their names, occupations, what they had for breakfast, dinner and supper, what time they went to bed, and what time they left their beds, the register kept by P. Green, grew into a village directory and a village history. But this tree of knowledge did

not stop its growth here. It had other branches. She knew all of the mysteries of dressmaking and millinery; had a large acquaintance [134] with housekeeping and nursing; kept posted in politics, and considered it her duty to defend the “administration,” though unfairly denied the right of suffrage.

One of the latest achievements of this encyclopedia, was to obtain complete and reliable information about the life saving station. This she had done by carefully cultivating the acquaintance of Keeper Barney. She was now at work on these two subjects, the Baggs family and all its branches; also the Plympton family; and this had the second place, as Walter’s arrival was the more recent. Such a wonder! So very much in so very little! It was a terrible satire on her size, that misnomer Pea Green, for in one sense it was exceedingly unjust. Not even the mammoth peas that grow in the land of the giants, could furnish so much comfort and delight to a dining circle of twelve, as this feminine wonder by the sea. And to all hungry gossipers, she did what no restaurant will do; she fed without cost all who came.

It was the most natural thing in the world, then, that Aunt Lydia should say one day to Walter, “I know how I can find out. I can ask Miss Green.”

She accordingly went to the post–office and asked Miss Green as [135] follows: “My nephew, Walter Plympton, wants to know about the Hall. Who has the say about it; that is, who lets people use it?”

Miss Green was delighted. She would not only find out what this use of the Hall might mean, but oh, what an opportunity to learn about the Plympton family! Sitting on a tall stool, which was an innocent contrivance to eke out her scanty height, she persuasively bent her gray curls over the show–case. Her once bright eyes had softened down to a faded blue; and time had laid on her forehead and cheeks its stamp whose mark was as certain as that of the begrimed die with which she fiercely struck the daily mail. She had a pleasant voice, an affable manner, a temperament sunny and hopeful; and people liked to talk with the post–mistress. The initiated also knew that in a certain back sitting–room there was a brown teapot always kept on the stove, adding to the charms of that snug retreat to which any tea–toper might be favored with an invitation.

“The Hall! Indeed! Going to be a singing–school?—a—a?” inquired the post–mistress.

“Oh, no! Now it’s strange Walter should have such a notion, you may think, but he’s one of that kind whose head is allers full of [136] suthin’. He came to me yesterday, and sez to me, ‘Aunt Lyddy!’ Sez I, ‘What?’ He didn’t say any more, for suthin’ called him to the door, and I was a–ironin’ and went on where I was. It was warm, you know. Don’t you think it was? I did feel it over the ironin’.”

Aunt Lydia had a tantalizing way sometimes of telling a story. She would enter very fully into details, amplifying little items and leaving the main subject untouched.

“But the point—the point—Lyddy,” gently observed the post–mistress.

“Oh, yes. By and by he came back agin; and what do you s’pose he said he was a thinkin’ about?”

“I don’t know.”

“I was then in the kitchen. No, I was standin’ afore the clock—yes —”

“But that’s no matter. What did he say, Lyddy? The point, dear?”

“Well, he axed who had the say about the Hall. I told him I didn’t know; and how could I be ’spected to know, Phebe?”

“Of course not. Then you want to know who can let him or anybody else have the Hall? It’s Cap’n Elliott, you know. He’s the trustee, as I call it. Why, the Hall was given by old Nathan Grant for [137] the good of The Harbor, he said, and he made Cap’n Elliott trustee. So Walter must ask him.”

“I see, I see.”

“Now, Lyddy! Is Walter’s father’s name Adoniram?”

Aunt Lydia perceived at once that the post–mistress now wished to take her turn in obtaining information, and she knew it would be a long turn. She moved towards the door, remarking, “Oh, no, it’s Ezra. Thank you, Miss Green; I guess I must be a–goin’.”

“But do take a cup of tea before you go,” pleaded Miss Green, fastening on Aunt Lydia a beseeching look. At the same time, the

post–mistress sidled down from her tall, four–legged throne, and began to move towards the little brown teapot. Aunt Lydia said something to the effect that yesterday it was warm, but it was a "chilly east wind to–day"; and she followed the post–mistress in the direction of the warmer atmosphere of the teapot. Having obtained all the knowledge she wished in the Plympton line, Miss P. Green poured out another cup of tea, and remarked suddenly, "And isn't Baggs queer?"

"Queer! That don't begin to describe him, Phebe." [138]

"He was here the other day. Came, you know, on special business about his mail, and said he had been a–trying to get down here I don't know how long. He wanted an arrangement so that letters could come to him, in a box. Now that's very nice, you know, when you have a class of customers wanting it. They have boxes in the Boston post–office you know, and I thought I might take it into consideration. He said he was going to send out circulars about something, and answers would come for 'Rambler, Box one,' if I would put one in for him. Well, if you believe it, before I had a chance to give him an answer, he went to that window in the office that looks toward the harbor—the offing, I mean." Miss Green was, or aimed to be, very correct, having once taught school. "What a start he gave! and he turned round, pale as—as—that paint on the office–door." It was not very white. "I didn't seem to notice it, but only said in an off–hand way, 'Do you see anything, Mr. Baggs?' I thought it might be a vessel sailing in. But he didn't take any notice. Then I said again—mild, sort of—'The sea quiet, Mr. Baggs? Anything out of the way? Can you see the Chair? You know if we can't see the Chair on account of fog, it is a bad sign any way; and [139] every day, people look off there.' You ought to have seen that man start again and almost give a real jump. 'Chair?' he said. 'What have I got to do with that Chair? Chair?' And if he didn't rush out of the store! I couldn't see anything that was the matter with the Chair. And there that man who had been so anxious to see me, went off and left everything unsettled. Now wasn't it queer, Lyddy?"

"Yes, but that Baggs is a very, very unprofitable subject of talk for me, and I have made up my mind to shet my mouth on him—for the present."

Aunt Lydia's mouth here shut with all the decision of a portcullis.

Miss Green, though, was not prepared to close her portals of speech, and question after question did she ask about the Plymptons, back to the first that came from England.

If she had only known there was a Don Pedro in the world! She had a way of pursing up her mouth after a question, and then of fastening on one a very direct look, and all this was as irresistible as a corkscrew in the presence of a stopper. Aunt Lydia left the post–mistress and returned home.

But what was Walter's object that led to this interview? What did [140] he want the Hall for? St. John's, the parish church, was a mile and a half away. On days when the wind was right, its bell could be heard faintly, musically calling all souls to prayer. Not often though did these sweet notes travel as far as The Harbor, and the consequence was, that very few souls traveled up to church. In fair weather, Miss Green and Mrs. Jabez Wherren might walk there, or they would report at Uncle Boardman's in season to take passage in his big covered wagon that, rain or shine, was sure to be heard rattling along to St. John's every Sunday. The remainder of the population virtually ignored St. John's, and St. John's ignored them. Its clergyman came down to say a few words of Christian farewell over the bodies that might rest behind the stunted firs in the little cemetery swept by the sea–winds, or to join for a life–long clasp, the two hands willing thus to fall into one another. Otherwise St. John's had very little to do with The Harbor, and The Harbor responded in the same fashion.

"Why," thought Walter, walking down through The Harbor one Sunday, "it doesn't look much like Sunday down here. Uncle Boardman doesn't live in one of these houses." [141]

The Harbor village had anything but that Sunday look which marked Uncle Boardman's premises. Some of the fishermen were out in their yards overhauling and mending their trawls. One or two were doing a little autumn work in their rough gardens. In an open lot behind the gray, lichen–patched ledges, several young fishermen, in red shirts, were playing ball. There was a row of fishing–smacks at an ancient wharf, and their owners were improving Sunday's

convenient leisure for the accomplishment of odd little jobs. Sunday at The Harbor was respected by the inhabitants after their peculiar fashion. Every fishing–boat came back to its quiet moorings before Sunday, as promptly as if a police force had ordered it there. Then came a day at home, not of entire abstinence from work, but of less work. To do less, not to quit work altogether, was the Sunday fashion of The Harbor. A man would have lost caste, and been ranked as a heathen, if he had taken his boat out to sea, every Sunday. He might stay at home, and be busy all day with little "jobs," and not hurt his reputation for religion. One fisherman abstained entirely from work, Jabez Wherren. He did not go to church, declaring that "somebody must stay at home and look arter [142] it; at which place all religion began." He did not work though. He would lounge about all day, dressed in his very best suit, and decked out with some very bright necktie, and flourishing a flaming red or yellow silk handkerchief, so that he looked like a man–of–war decorated with flags. Because he did not go to church, Jabez knew that his wife ranked him as a very deficient being; but on the other hand, because he did not work, he was well aware that in the eyes of his fellow–fishermen, he was regarded as a person of superior virtues. In his walk that Sunday, Walter at last was opposite the Hall, an antiquated, one–storied building that needed the services of both painter and carpenter. It was prefaced, though, by a porch, with two very imposing Doric pillars. This porch compensated for all deficiencies; and the villagers walking between those pillars felt grand as a Roman army, marching under the triumphal arch of Titus, in the "Eternal City." Walter halted before the Hall and there held this soliloquy. "I have got an idea. Mother wanted me to do some special religious work; and, I'm afraid—I know I haven't. She wanted me to get people to go to church if they didn't go, and now here is a chance. There's the new rector at St. John's. He is young, [143] and full of life, and I wonder if he couldn't come down here and hold services, once every now and then at any rate. It would be just the thing, I declare." Walter's hazel eyes snapped with interest, and a smile swept over his round, full face.

"What's Boardman Blake's nephew up to, a lookin' at the Hall?" wondered Jabez Wherren. Walter did not relieve him of his wonder, but soon turned about and went home.

"The first thing," he said, "is to find out who has the letting of the Hall."

Aunt Lydia ascertained this fact for him, and informed him that the trustee was May Elliott's grandfather.

"Then I must go and see the schoolmarm," remarked Walter, "and get her to help me."

"Then you're going to really try?" said Aunt Lydia.

"Yes," answered Walter positively.

"Seems to me they might go up to St. John's."

"But they won't, and St. John's must come to them."

"Now, Walter, I don't want to throw a speck of cold water on it, but do you expect to succeed?"

"Well, Aunt, it won't do any harm to try, and I am going to expect [144] to succeed, too. I was reading about Admiral Farragut, what he said, that any man who is prepared for defeat would be half defeated before he commenced. He said he hoped for success and would try to have it, and trust God for the rest."

"It looks to me jest like castin' pearls afore swine."

Walter laughed, and said he would go to the schoolhouse and find its mistress. May said she would see her grandfather, and ask for the Hall.

"But whom shall we get to play? Somebody said there was a melodeon in the Hall, and somebody else said—you—you played on it."

"And you want me to play? Well, I will do what I can. I am interested, and where I can help, I will. I will see if I can't get two or three singers."

That day, May went to her grandfather's. He sat by the window of his little house that looked out upon the river racing, at the base of the rough, rocky banks, toward the wide, restless sea. He was not a happy old man. True he had been a successful seaman. He had a sufficient amount of property to make him comfortable. He had no vices to regret. He had, though, known sorrow, losing wife and [145] children. He and his housekeeper were the only ones in his home.

He had been disappointed in his grandson, Woodbury, whom he desired to share his home with; and people said that old Capt. Elliott wished to give Woodbury the largest fraction of the money and other valuables he was supposed to keep in a certain bulky safe in his sitting–room. Woodbury, though, in the short interval he had tried to live at his grandfather's, had been twice intoxicated, and the last time angry words had flamed between them like hot coals that they were throwing. He left the house in wrath, and in wrath Capt. Elliott shut the door after him. The captain was not a religious man. He was very honest, and having once been cheated by a professor of religion who was a very scanty possessor of it, wholly lacking it indeed, Capt. Elliott ever afterwards declared himself superior to the character that the church required. He shut out God from his soul, because a hypocrite shut him out from his dues. He made his honesty his all, and was a prayerless, peevish, fault–finding, selfish old man. When May called, he was still looking out of the window. The sea–wind lifted and let fall his thin, white hair, but could not lift [146] from his stern, sharp–cut features, the shadow of a cheerless, selfish life. He heard his granddaughter's voice, and turned to meet her. When she had made her request, he said, "For how long do you want the Hall?"

"Oh, I don't know. We are going to begin at any rate. We want to see what interest there will be."

"Well, yes, I s'pose you can have it. That's what the Hall is for, to hold all kind of reason'ble meetin's."

Here May made a bold movement, and her blue eyes were full of courage as she asked, "And, grandfather, won't you come too?"

"Oh, nonsense, child! I have more religion now than you could pack into St. John's. Why, I'd be ashamed to do what some of them folks do."

May was a strategist. She knew it was useless to argue with him. She also knew that he liked to hear her play her melodeon in the sacred parlor at home, kept in state there all the week with the dried grasses on the mantel, and the family register on the wall, and the big family Bible on the mahogany table.

"Won't you come to hear me play?"

"May, I'll make this agreement. I'll come down and stay as long as you play and sing, but I'm not a–goin' to stay and have any [147] min'ster advise me in a long sermon, for I know as much as he about it, and more too."

"Well, grandfather, stay while the singing lasts."

There was another invitation extended. This was given by Walter to Chauncy Aldrich.

"Ah, ah," said Chauncy in his self–important way, lifting his hat, and with great dignity running his hand through his wall of hair, "you want me to honor the place with the presence of C. Aldrich? Yes, I'll come. But look here, none of your long, prosy sermons, but something warm, and something short. Ha, ha!"

One by one, all preparations were made for the service. Miss Green promised to lend her cracked voice to the "choir," and two or three young fishermen offered to roar in the bass. Don Pedro, whom Uncle Boardman had kept at his house to assist in some of the autumn work on the farm, made himself very helpful in sweeping out the Hall and arranging its seats.

"What time do you expect the clergyman will hold the service?" inquired Miss Green, as Walter was about leaving the post–office one day.

"Oh, I think he will come in the evening, if we want him," replied [148] Walter.

"There!" reflected this young master of ceremonies as he left the house. "If that isn't just like me! I declare if I didn't forget to ask the clergyman! But of course he will come, and I will take Uncle Boardman's team and go up at once, to ask him."

Alas, the rector couldn't come!

Walter drove back in despair.

"I'll stop at the schoolhouse and see the schoolmarm," he said, "and ask what is to be done, though I know she will laugh at me."

The school had just been dismissed; and May only lingered to set away her few books in her desk.

"Ah, Miss Elliott," said Walter confusedly. "I—I—I'm afraid it doesn't look hopeful—about—about our Hall service?"

“Why not?”

He laughed, and blushed, and said frankly, “I went ahead and got everything ready but the minister!”

“You hadn’t spoken to him!”

“No, and it was just like me, mother would say. I got my cart and had it nicely packed, or you did rather,” a compliment which made the young teacher look quite rosy,—“I got my cart, but I hadn’t [149] thought about my horse! When I spoke just now to Dr. Ellton, he said his hands were full, and he couldn’t possibly come. Just like me! I needed it perhaps, for I was saying, ‘What a grand thing I am helping along!’ And here is my cart all packed and ready to start, and where is my horse?”

The young teacher was amused and pleased with Walter’s frankness.

“Oh, well, Plympton, we won’t give up. I have done things that way myself. Somebody can take the service, I know. Isn’t there any one else at St. John’s?”

“There is a young fellow who, I believe, comes on Sundays to help the doctor; Raynham, I think, is his name.”

“You ask him.”

Mr. Raynham was asked. Would he come? His black eyes lighted up as he gave his answer: “I should be delighted. I only help at the morning service, and I can come down as well as not in the evening. The doctor would like to have me, I know.”

“It does me good,” thought Walter, “just the way he accepts my invitation. Wonder if ministers—and other folks—know how much good it does when they promise a thing that fashion!” [150]

Mr. Raynham engaged to take tea at Aunt Lydia’s, Sunday afternoon, and for this young prophet, she heaped her table with biscuit, and cake, and doughnuts, till it looked liked a fort with its outworks.

“Now,” she said to Mr. Raynham, when he was leaving for the Hall, “you mustn’t go a–flyin’ over our heads to–night when you speak.”

He gave his shoulders a nervous twitch, smiled, and said, “It’s only a talk, I have, when we have finished evening prayer.”

“If you let it come from the heart,” said Aunt Lydia encouragingly, “your arrer will be sent out from a strong bow. You see ’twon’t do allers to have jest what will do for big–folks. You jest talk out of your heart, and think of us as leetle folks, and your arrers will hit the mark, sure.”

“I hope so,” thought the young assistant, “and may God give me my message.”

He felt his need all the more, for May Elliott came to him and said, “If you see an old man going out when we have finished the singing, don’t you think anything of it. I could only get him here on the condition that he might be excused after the music.”

“Indeed!” reflected Mr. Raynham. “I will see that the music lasts some time.” [151]

What a service that was! The choir sang with remarkable heartiness, even if it did not execute with remarkable skill. True, Miss Green’s voice was a little unsteady on the high notes, and fluttered about like a man on a high ladder, who growing dizzy, and threatening to fall, catches distractedly at the rounds.

The young fishermen, too, thundered away on the “Ah–men” as if to atone for previous deficiencies, and roared for half a minute in a bass monotone that suggested the ocean. Then there was Don Pedro. When he was clearing up the hall, May Elliott was rehearsing on the melodeon, and she heard his voice several times accompanying the tunes. She impressed him into the musical service at once, and never did any royal tenor or bass from Italy, feel his importance more sensibly. As Don Pedro was very lacking in the department of “best clothes,” Aunt Lydia promised to “rig” him out in some of Uncle Boardman’s superfluous garments. Don Pedro was somewhat tall and slender, and Uncle Boardman was short and thick, and the “rigging” was not a close fit. The clothes hung about Don Pedro like the sails of a ship about the slender poles of a fishing–smack. Genius, though, is superior to all inconveniences, and above Uncle Boardman’s immense coat, Don Pedro’s head [152] struggled manfully. He did not have a sharp sense of the ludicrous, and only remarked, “I guess as how dese clo’es was made for anudder man, shuah.”

And the audience—it filled all the rough seats in the hall. Did Mr. Raynham see that face of an old man, sad and hopeless, near the door? No, he only knew some indefinite, nameless “old man” was there, itching to go out when the musical part of the service had been completed.

“We will vary the usual order of such services as these, to–night, and after I have spoken five minutes, we will have more music; a hymn,” said Mr. Raynham.

“Ah,” thought Capt. Elliott, squirming in his seat and ready to retreat, “I guess I shall have to hold on, for I promised my grand–darter.”

How Mr. Raynham did talk “out of his heart,” to some imaginary old sinner trying to avoid his duty, and get away from God’s house!

What would that soul do when God met him in judgment, and he could not escape, possibly? Capt. Elliott wriggled very uneasily; but there was his promise to May!

“We will now have some music,” said Mr. Raynham. Again rose [153]
the choir, Don Pedro struggling above his mammoth outfit; Miss Green springing up with voice ready to mount to the ladder’s top, and there tumble; the young fishermen on hand for an oceanic roar —at the close.

“I’ll go now,” thought the captain, but the young prophet called out, “I will say a few words, and then we will have more music, another hymn.”

Capt. Elliott felt that he was a pinioned bird. Stay he must, and all the while the young man on the platform shot his arrows.

“He’s a talkin’ out of his heart to some poor prodigal,” thought Aunt Lydia. “God help him!”

Then that beautiful appeal in the hymnal was sung, that Advent appeal;

> “O Jesus, thou art standing
> Outside the fast–closed door,
> In lowly patience waiting
> To pass the threshold o’er:
> We bear the name of Christians,
> His name and sign we bear:
> O shame, thrice shame upon us,
> To keep him standing there.”

“O dear!” groaned the captain. “That’s me! I can’t stand this. [154]
Guess I’ll go now.”

The young fishermen were now roaring “Ah–men!” and if they had been allowed to imitate the ocean long as they pleased, Capt. Elliott might have escaped. Mr. Raynham saw an old man rising, and guessing the object of the movement, waved his hand imperatively to the male singers. The ocean did not finish its roar very gracefully, but above the confused tumbling of the surf, Mr. Raynham’s voice rose triumphantly. “We will have music again, in a moment. A few words more.” Capt. Elliott remembered his promise to May, and reluctantly sat down.

“Oh, dear! Catch me makin’ sich a promise next time!” inwardly moaned the captain.

In those “few words more,” Mr. Raynham made a pathetic appeal to his audience, and especially to those who were old, and yet trying to live without the love of their Father in heaven.

“That would go to the heart of a stone krockerdile,” declared Aunt Lydia.

No, it went to the heart of a human being; and stony though it may have seemed to an outsider, it was tender yet, for homeward went that night an old man, creeping slowly and alone, sore and wounded in his soul, conscience–sick.

And Chauncy Aldrich, how did he feel?

“That was a good sermon, Aldrich,” said Walter after the service. [155]

Chauncy gave a laugh, ringing, and hard, and brassy: “Ah—ah! That young feller did get warmed up, warmed up, Plympton; but you can’t expect a business man like me, always watching the market and pushing trade, to be thinking about these things. By and by, Plympton!” Ah, that by–and–by flag! Many noble ships have sailed fatally under.

The people were interested in the service.

“Come again,” said Aunt Lydia to Mr. Raynham; “come again. We all want you. Come, if you haven’t anything big for wise folks, and

only suthin’ simple for fools; for you will have lots of ’em here.”

Mr. Raynham said he would come another Sunday; perhaps the very next.

The Sunday that the Hall had been occupied, chanced to be Michaelmas beautiful festival, ripe like the landscape with color and fruitage. All nature—its maples, its oaks, its fields, its orchards—was shining with the glow of St. Michael’s triumph over the dragon. And in the rough little fishing village by the sea, it seemed as if the brave, mighty archangel had given the old dragon another thrust, and Right had sorely wounded the Wrong.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOAT–RACE.

No less a wonder than a boat–race was announced on an October day, and no less a person than Chauncy Aldrich planned the wonder.

"We need to wake 'em up, wake 'em up," he said to Walter, and he ran his hand through his bristling rampart of hair. "Trade is dull, and needs stimulating. People that want to do business must make business. I have passed a subscription paper round, and the business men of the community have handed out quite liberally. Your uncle, I am sorry to say, did not seem to have a commendable local pride, I should say, and refused to help us. However, we propose to have the race, and give a purse of twenty–five dollars to the successful boat in a six–oared race. Entries can be made by any parties living inside of ten miles from here. Yes, we are going to wake up some trade, and so we have thought it best to have a boat–race." A purse of twenty–five dollars! That sounded large as—the Atlantic Ocean. It consisted, however, of Baggs' very liberal "promise" of twenty dollars, or double even (and it is very easy to multiply a "promise" any number of times), an actual subscription of four dollars from Timothy Pullins—Uncle Boardman's business–rival at The Harbor—and then Miss Green was so tickled to be accounted one of the business community, and to receive an invitation to subscribe, that she had actually handed over the magnificent sum of one silver dollar. [157]

The neighborhood was very much excited over the event. Walter had been selected as one of the crew in Chauncy's boat, and with his usual enthusiasm, he practiced rowing at all leisure moments. Aunt Lydia found him "going through the motions," as he declared it, behind the counter of the store, even.

"What ye doin', Walter?"

"Ha, ha, Aunt! Only going through the motions, practicing the stroke Chauncy gave us. He says it is the best in the country. There, you shove forward so—"

"Nonsense! I want somebody to shove the saw for me in the shed. My fire is dreadful low. I'll tend the store while you are gone." [158]

Walter transferred this trial stroke to the saw–horse at once.

He planned the next morning, to rise half an hour earlier than usual, and row awhile on the river. "Am I late?" he said, opening his eyes early, and from his bed looking out of a window toward the sea. The sun was just coming up, and had suffused with a rich crimson the placid waters.

"I'm all right," Walter said, and hurriedly dressed himself. He was about leaving the room, when he said, "There's my Bible! I almost forgot that. The fact is you have to be particular about reading, or you will miss a morning pretty readily."

It is very easy to make gaps in our devotions, and a gap made to–day may mean a gap to–morrow, and when two or three days go by and no Bible has been read, it is very easy to widen the break into an interval of a week. There is nothing so weakening as an intermission now and then. On the other hand, there is nothing that so pays us a handsome profit, as a little care to keep up a good habit. The human will is a curious piece of machinery, and the simple fact that we are in the habit of doing certain things, of going to church, of reading our Bible, saying our prayers, this year, is one of the strongest reasons why we shall be likely to do this next year, and will have vast influence in giving a set and direction to our character. Walter had begun to realize this, and he said to himself, "If I am going to read my Bible, I must be particular to read it every morning." He sat down in a yellow chair by the window fronting the sea, and opened his Bible. This was one of the verses he read that morning; "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word. With my whole heart, have I sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments." [159]

Somehow, those words were pressed into his memory; printed vividly there like those shining colors off in the sea. When he had finished his reading, he stepped softly downstairs, passed out into the yard, and then made his way to his boat on the shore of the river. The morning though bright and clear, was chilly, and the rowing of the new stroke imparted by Chauncy was "good as the

stove in Aunt Lyddy's kitchen to make one feel warm," Walter thought. He finished his practice, and was about stepping from the [160] boat upon the smooth little pebbles strewn along the "landin'," as the fishermen called it, when a sharp voice startled him. "Hul–*lo*!"

Turning, Walter saw Chauncy Aldrich.

"That you, Aldrich?"

"Nobody else, Plympton. Out trying my new stroke?"

"Yes, it's first rate to warm a fellow up."

"And you'll find it good to make a boat go. It's as good a stroke as you will find in the market."

Here Chauncy lifted his hat, and thrusting his hand through his hair and piling it up anew, gave a defiant look, as if saying to all the world, "I'll dare you to bring on another stroke as good as this." Then he resumed his conversation.

"See here, Plympton. I just wanted to see you, and I came out here on purpose, thinking I might find you, after what you said one day that you thought you should take an early hour for practice. A business man, you know, must be on hand early to catch custom, and I wanted to see you about something special. Just you and me, and no more!"

Chauncy said this with an air of secrecy, of patronage also; as if he had reserved for Walter and Walter only, some unknown, [161] distinguished honor. He drew close to Walter, and dropping his voice said, "I expect that our opponents next Tuesday, the day for the race, will be the Scarlet Grays from Campton."

"Scarlet Grays?"

"Yes, they wear scarlet caps and gray pants, and then scarlet slippers again, and look quite nobby. But that's according to fancy. You and I mean business, and that's what we are after, and can get along in our every day wear. That's what I think."

Here he gave a wise little chuckle, and shook his head very decidedly and knowingly, so that he reminded Walter of those days when the academy students called him, "Solomon."

"But here's to the point. A–hem!"

Chauncy dropped his voice still lower, and tapping the palm of his left hand with the forefinger of his right, sharply eyed a rock in the river as if he would be willing to take this rock into the secret, but for no consideration could he admit a second rock.

"You see, Plympton—ahem!"

Then he shrugged his shoulders. It was evident he wished to say something, and yet had a misgiving with regard to the fitness of the message, or Walter's fitness to hear it.

"Well, out with it, Aldrich!" said Walter, his open, honest face [162] contrasting strongly with the sly look of reserve on his companion's features. "Out with it! That's business, as you say."

"Ha, ha, Plympton! You've got me there, sure. Well, as I was going to say, Lang Tripp, the captain of the Scarlet Grays, came to me the other day and said he, 'Look here, Aldrich! This is between you and me.' 'Of course,' said I. 'Are you anxious to win in that boat–race?' 'Well,' said I, 'we mean business, of course; but if we are whipped, we must submit. When a man goes into the market to buy, he must do the best he can, and let it go at that. That's the way of it, of course,' said I. 'When a man goes into the market,' he said—you said—no—he said"—

The business man tumbled over half a dozen "saids" and began again. "I mean that he referred to what I said about going into the market, and then went on, 'That helps me to come to the point, which is—is—a little understanding—trade, some folks might call it, though I don't.' Then he went on, and this is what it amounted to. They have gone—I mean the Scarlet Grays—to a good deal of expense in getting up their uniform—they're rich, you know! Rich [163] isn't the word. O they could buy out a gold mine and not feel it. Well, after all, they haven't won a race. They are going to play with us, you know—row, I mean, and then they row with a set of mill–hands at Campton. Well, their folks feel badly because they don't whip anybody, and Tripp says his mother is all worked up about it. Then Tripp asked, 'Who is that rather heavy, strong, well–built fellow in your crew, who wears a stiff, round–top felt, and pulls a neat, strong stroke too, for I saw him at it the other day?' Well, I knew my goods of course, and I knew it was—you."

Here Walter straightened up. The compliment was very

acceptable, and Chauncy's quick eyes saw it. This apt disciple of Baggs appreciated the customer he was dealing with, and repeated the opinion of the renowned leader of the "Scarlet Grays." Then he continued: "After that, Tripp said, 'I really feel that we are at your mercy, especially with that fellow against us—'" here Chauncy looked slyly at Walter, who now stood erect as a king at a coronation—"'and I know it's going to make our fellers feel bad, and our folks feel bad, and we shall surely lose that next race with those mill fellers—and of course,' he said, 'I don't mean that you shall lose [164] by it—' 'Lose what?' said I, for a business man must have his teeth cut. 'Oh,' said Tripp, 'I am coming to it. We don't, or I don't, care a snap for the money. How much is it?' Well, I told him; and then yesterday, I got ten fishermen to give each fifty cents, making between thirty and forty dollars in all as—as subscribed. Of course, Uncle Baggs is the heaviest name on the list, and he didn't hand it to me; but then he's good for twenty times twenty."

Chauncy did not say whether he was good for the money, or simply for a "subscription"; a difference which all handlers of "subscription papers" appreciate. All this time, Walter was wondering what Chauncy was driving at.

"Of course I said I didn't care about the money, and Tripp said he didn't; and Tripp said that it should be all right. It should all be paid over to us; or rather, the equivalent of it. His folks would feel so badly if they lost another race, and he knew his crew wouldn't have the heart to row that next race. 'There,' said he, 'it shall be between us. If you and that Plympton—that's what you call him—will just let up now and then on your rowing, and pull easy, I think we can handle the rest of you, and—and—'" [165]

"What do you mean?" said Walter abruptly. "Sell out?"

He was now more erect than ever, straightening up because stiffened by a sense of indignation.

"Hold on, Plympton, you don't understand," said Chauncy soothingly. He saw that he had made a mistake. He "had put too many goods on the market at once," to use his own phrase. Continuing his soothing tone of voice, he said: "I can't but pity the Scarlet Grays, if they are feeling so badly and their folks are stirred up, and 'the town is down on 'em.' Lang says, why, his mother is just awful, he says, and is real nervous. To oblige them, I'd give it all away—I mean the prize."

Such self–sacrifice! He was willing to throw himself away—as far as this boat–race was concerned—all for the sake of the Scarlet Grays' feelings! In reality, he had already received a present of "five dollars" from Tripp, and expected another "five," if successful with Walter. Walter's instincts were always in the right place. A wrong thing coming to him, he would condemn as wrong, and a right thing, he would commend as right. But he was sympathetic, while conscientious. He felt for the individual sinner, while he disapproved of his sin; and his sympathy might cloud the decision of [166] his judgment. When he thought of the Scarlet Grays, the occasion of so much parental disappointment, and the object of so much town talk and town sport, he did pity "the poor chaps," as Chauncy whiningly labeled them in his continued talk. Chauncy saw that he was making an impression; that he was "putting the right goods on the market, and the right quantity;" and he continued to deliver them in a sympathetic, pitying, self–sacrificing tone. Suddenly Walter said to himself, "What am I doing, allowing this fellow to talk so? Where's mother's advice, 'Honest, boy'? And then that psalm I was reading from, this morning. What did that say? Why, I can almost seem to see it written in the sky!"

And looking away to the east all afire with a shining crimson above the placid sea, he seemed to see those words traced in the clouds:

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word. With my whole heart, have I sought Thee; O let me not wander from Thy commandments."

He turned quickly to Chauncy, and said in a very positive way, "Aldrich, this thing is not right; and I won't have anything to do with it." [167]

"A–em!" said a voice.

Somebody was passing. The two young men turned, and there was Capt. Barney, the keeper of the life saving station. He passed so near that they heard his step distinctly, and yet he did not seem to be noticing them, and rapidly moved away. Another moment, he had

turned the corner of an old mossy ledge, tufted with a few bushes, and planted near the water's edge, now sparkling in the sunshine. Chauncy was much confused for "a cool, clear–headed business man," as he judged himself to be. Walter's decided opinion, again abruptly presented, had taken this soft talking, pitying young trader by surprise. His face flushed, he stammered, and he looked angry, as Walter now spoke on his side:—

"Aldrich, this thing is wrong. I don't care about the money; but as I understand it, quite a number of people, including those ten fishermen, have given toward the race. They will all take an interest in the race, and want The Harbor crew to do its best, its honest best. The people that take the trouble to come and look at us will all expect us to do our best. Why, I couldn't do that thing,—let up on the rowing, and then walk up the street and hold up my head. As for those ninnies from Campton, if they didn't want to get licked, what [168] did they enter for? They were not obliged to do it!"

Chauncy's feelings were of a very mixed character. He knew the proposition from the other crew was not fair, and was really ashamed of himself; and then he was mad because Walter had shown himself to be more honest than he. Walter now startled and confused him with another proposition:—

"See here, Aldrich! If we get the prize–money, I don't want it any more than you. Let's give it away, say to start a library down here at The Harbor, or somewhere in town; a Town Library, I mean; of course, if the other fellers in the crew are willing, and if—if—we get it."

This was another unexpected blow. Chauncy already had begun to reckon what his share of money from the race would probably be, and had paid it over in his own mind toward a pair of new trousers which he very much needed. The failure of his wealthy uncle to pay Chauncy for some reason all the money he owed his clerk, interfered with the young man's desire to dress well on Sunday, at least. With a face reddened by shame and anger, he had begun to stammer out a reply to Walter, when his name was suddenly called. [169] Turning, he saw the keeper of the life saving station. At Capt. Barney's side was a stranger, who was introduced as the superintendent of the life saving station district, Mr. Eames.

"I want to get a little lumber at your mill," said the keeper, "if you could go with us."

"Yes, *sir*!" replied Chauncy with an air of patronage, to his patron. "I'm ready for a trade."

Off he strode, glad of any excuse for ending a conversation in which he felt that he was making little progress. In a jaunty way, he sported his hat on one side of his head, and moved as proudly as if going off to a bargain of millions.

The boat–race had been announced to come off the afternoon of the second day after this interview between Walter and Chauncy, at the hour of two, and it came off as promptly as that hour itself. There was great interest felt on the occasion. It seemed as if the sun had given his golden disk an extra polish, so bright was it; while the maples that dotted the banks of the river flew their gay banners from morning till night. All the able bodied inhabitants that The Harbor could muster, turned out with curious eyes and sympathetic [170] hearts. People from the outside world came in vehicles of various kinds. Certain anxious looking women tucked away in a coach, Walter fancied to be the mothers of some of the Scarlet Grays. But where were the latter?

"There they are!" shouted some one at last, and round a rocky point in the river, came the brilliant Scarlet Grays. Wearing their scarlet caps, they looked like poppy stalks all a–blossom, and conspicuous on their caps were the dark letters S. G. Chauncy's crew, consisting of Chauncy, Walter, Don Pedro and others, seemed very humble and tame beside these brilliant floral oarsmen.

"Fact is we made a blunder," observed Chauncy, "in not having a uniform. But never mind; merit wins. The trade does not always go to the man in the best clothes."

Remembering their late morning talk, Walter could but think that a trade, and a bad one, had almost gone in favor of these gaily decorated seamen.

"Fellers, who are those coming?" asked Chauncy, now slowly rising in his boat and pointing out another that was now shooting out of a little creek that emptied into the river. "There are six rowing in it? Does that mean a new entry? I suppose they have a [171]

right to come, as we gave out that boats could enter any time before the race."

As the strange craft approached nearer, the comments of Chauncy's crew were more curious and eager.

"Seaweed Townies!" exclaimed somebody. All wonder was at an end, and disgust now began. "Seaweed Town" was a nook of the sea where half a dozen poor houses were clustered on a rocky shore, and their inhabitants were shabby people nicknamed "Seaweed Townies." The occupants of this boat were boys of about sixteen, lean and scraggy, with long, tangled black hair. Although not equal in size to the members of Chauncy's crew, they had a certain wiry, tough look, and their dark eyes flashed with an eager ambition to win. The Scarlet Grays—and how brilliantly they outshone these rivals who did not indeed shine at all—hailed the advent of this new "entry" with derision.

"Arabs!" they said with a sneer; but the Seaweed Townies did not reply to them, only looking more eager, and occasionally giving their oars a nervous twitch.

Off darted the three boats at the appointed signal; while the spectators applauded, and the very maples seemed to be waving red handkerchiefs.

"Don't they look handsome!" screamed little Miss P. Green. [172]
"Those Scarlet Grays are be—be—witching."

"Nonsense!" said Aunt Lydia with commendable local pride. "Those little turkey gobblers hain't got no last to 'em! Jest see our boys!"

"Our boys" certainly pulled with vigor. Chauncy was now sincerely anxious to win the laurels of the day, the arrival of the Seaweed Townies having "toned up the market." Walter handled his oar with vigor, and Don Pedro pulled with a grim resoluteness. Who would praise the Seaweed Townies? Now and then some sympathizing fellow, or "Arab!" yelled from a boat in the river, a note of cheer; but among The Harbor populace, Jabez Wherren alone ventured a word of commendation.

"Wall, now," said Jabez, "them little chaps from Seaweed Town do pull well. They don't seem to have any friends, but I shouldn't wonder—shouldn't—wonder—"

"Wall, what?" asked his spouse, impatiently and meaningly.

"Don't—don't dare say," replied Jabez, in a tone of mock humility, squinting afresh at the struggling crews.

"Wall, *I* dare to say," affirmed that warm partisan, Aunt Lydia. [173]
"You ought ter be ashamed of yourself!"

On sped the boats; stoutly pulled the oarsmen; the spectators huzzahed; while the maples, in silence, showed their warm admiration. The Scarlet Grays took the lead at the opening of the race, a fact that created much excitement among the Campton carriages, and, all a–flutter with fragrant white handkerchiefs was the coach filled with ladies. The "S. G's" though, could not maintain their position. They frantically struggled, and one boy in his violent contortions even lost his scarlet cap overboard, and pulled bare–headed the rest of the way. When the stake–boat was reached, and the contending craft rounded this limit of their course, it was seen that Chauncy's crew was in the front place. This excited The Harbor people to furious applause, as soon as this fact was appreciated by them.

"It looks now," said Aunt Lydia, "as if our boys would win, and we'll have a Libr'y down here. Walter said, the boys all agreed, if they got the money to give it toward a Public Libr'y."

"Hoo–ray for our boys!" screamed Miss P. Greene, who had transferred her admiration from the Scarlet Grays to the proper [174]
crew, and wished to show her appreciation of all "educational movements" as she termed them. "Hoo—"

She was about to give another cheer, but a tall butter firkin on which she had been standing because it put her sharp nose and sharp eyes just above the shoulders of other people, here refused to serve as a lookout any longer. It was something altogether apart from the usual vocation of butter tubs; and naturally asserting the right of revolution, or in this case, of devolution, the tub canted over, and began to roll; and down somewhere went Miss Green! But while she went down, her voice went up, the tongue asserting its accustomed supremacy in this trying moment, even, and the cheer for Chauncy's crew ended in a scream. It made a little stir among

the spectators, but Jabez Wherren was promptly on hand, and gallantly fished the post–mistress up. He set the rebellious butter firkin in its proper subordinate place, and then set Miss Green on top of it, where like a queen on her throne she received the commiseration and congratulations of her friends, who shuddered at her fall, and rejoiced over her rise once more. I am afraid this fall was ominous though, and my readers will soon see for themselves. [175] As the crews pulled away in the river, Jabez Wherren, with a lack of patriotism, declared that those "little Seaweed fellers are givin' it to our boat. Jest about up with 'em and crowdin' 'em hard!"

"There, Jabez!" said his spouse, who like the butter firkin could only stand a certain amount of strain, "ef you can't talk any more sensible, you'd better go hum."

"No—no," quietly remarked the grinning Jabez, "I'm goin'—to see the upshot of this."

Unlucky prophet! What did he want to use that word "upshot" for? He had no sooner spoken it, than there was an unhappy commotion noticed in Chauncy's boat. The crew had been complaining of the new stroke which Chauncy had introduced, but he had insisted upon its use, saying it was very "scientific"; that "just now it was the top thing in the market, and would fetch a premium any day." When it was noticed in the race that the Seaweed Townies were gaining on them, Chauncy, who acted as captain of The Harbor crew, energetically stimulated them by such remarks as: "Muscle pays—now, boys!" "Don't let them have a cheap bargain. Hum—now!" "Crowd the market! Give it to 'em!"

Finally he called out: "The stroke, boys! Give them our stroke [176] good! Science, boys!" Every boy now watched his oar intently, and pulled with all the "science" he could muster. Chauncy aimed to set the example, and as he strove to handle his oar with precision, he gave it an unlucky violent jostle in the thole–pins. One of these like the butter firkin on shore, could not patiently submit to everything, and—broke! There is such a thing in an oarsman's experience as "catching a crab." The oarsman concludes for some reason, generally an irresistible one, to go over backwards, and there catch his crab. As he tumbles into the bottom of the boat, his feet naturally go up and his arms also, while his head and shoulders go down; and his whole figure may possibly suggest a crab, with its crooked, wriggling members. Chauncy now ignominiously "caught a crab." The great Solomon went down in disgrace and disaster! The effect on The Harbor spectators was as if the sun had gone into mourning, while the maples all shivered in sympathy. Chauncy quickly was up again, a new thole–pin was inserted, and the crew gallantly pulled away. But there were the Seaweed Townies, ahead now by two boat lengths! This advanced position, with grins and giggles, those "dark–eyed monkeys," as Aunt Lydia promptly labeled [177] them, stubbornly maintained. Chauncy with frenzied efforts tried to "work up the market," but the "Arabs" were victors. Lean and wiry as ever, they triumphantly pulled their boat ashore.

"Well, boys, we whipped the Scarlet Grays," said Chauncy, wiping his face. "Fact was I had from the very outset a strong desire to whip them, and we succeeded."

Chauncy's assertion about his "strong desire" would not bear investigation.

It was a fact, however, that Chauncy's crew had whipped the Scarlet Grays. Like poppies that have been picked and then left out in a frost, the "S. G.'s" pulled listlessly to the landing–place.

The crowd slowly dribbled away, the people making their comments as they retired.

"There's a chance for a Public Library gone," moaned Miss P. Green.

"Yes, yes," sympathetically wailed Aunt Lydia and Mrs. Wherren.

"There, Jabez," said his wife, "I hope another time you won't cheer fur the en'my so."

"I didn't cheer 'em, Huldy," replied Jabez in surprise.

"You made sympathizin' remarks, though." [178]

"Yes, yes," said Aunt Lydia, and Miss P. Green.

And poor Jabez went home, feeling that the weight of responsibility for some great national disaster rested on his shoulders. His wife, "Huldy," had remarkable success in making Jabez feel that he was guilty, even when innocent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SURF–BOY.

The bright colors of October had faded out of the landscape, and the soft shades of November followed. With November, came the festival of “All Saints’,” reminding us of another life, and of those who are with Christ. Not only are those eminent in the Church suggested to us,—“apostles,” “martyrs,” “confessors,” the constellations in the sky, recognized by all,—but how many separate stars better known to us personally, look down through the shadows of death’s night, and cheer us in our pilgrim journey! These are our own beloved dead, whose bright faces smile upon us, and assure us that we are not forgotten. May we not forget them, and may we prove our memory in our better lives. “All Saints’” passed, and the sharper days of November arrived at The Harbor.

[180] Walter’s duties at his Uncle Boardman’s had been steadily continued, varied by occasional gaps of leisure; and these he had filled up with home visits. Sunday also was a big, blessed gap of leisure, and each Sunday night had brought its service at the Hall. The attendance had been good. Mr. Raynham was earnest, while reverent in his conduct of the service; and the “choir”—how that had distinguished itself! The “Cantate Domino,” “Benedic, anima mea,” and other chants, they took up enthusiastically, and lifted them very high on their soaring wings of song.

“They make nothin’ of singin’ ’em,” affirmed Aunt Lydia; which translated meant that they made *something* of them; for promptness and heartiness are never without a result, though the melody may not be the sweetest.

Sunday over, Walter went again to his usual duties in the store.

One Monday morning, there was an unusual call at Uncle Boardman’s.

“Jotham Barney, I do declare!” said Aunt Lydia, looking out of a kitchen window into the yard. “Here he comes up to the back door. I wonder what he wants here.”

[181] A lifting of the outside door latch was now heard, and a heavy step was planted on the floor of the little entry. Then the inside door swung open, and the keeper of the life saving station entered Aunt Lydia’s sanctum.

“Good mornin’, Mis’ Blake.”

“That you, Jotham? Set down, do.”

“Much obleeged, but I’m in a bit of a hurry. Where’s your husband?”

“He’s down in the mash field clearin’ up.”

“I s’pose I could see him, and I’ll go down.”

“He will be glad to see you, Jotham; but I guess you’ll have to go down, for Boardman’s that kind, he wouldn’t leave his work, for the king.”

“That is all right, and that’s why he is so forehanded.”

“Forehanded!” remarked Aunt Lydia, shaking her head ominously when the keeper had left the house. “I don’t know, I don’t know! I expect that Belzebub’s a–swallerin’ up Boardman’s property fast as he can gulp it down.” This reference to Baggs did not have a soothing effect on her feelings, and she wisely changed her thoughts by going to the window that faced the orchard. She watched the keeper, as he took a path that followed an old stone wall. Soon leaping this, he hurried across a narrow field that was dotted with the yellow stubs of cornstalks. Beyond this, was the lot which Aunt [182] Lydia had designated as the “mash field.” It bordered the broad, flat marsh, beyond which flashed the blue, bright river. It was a variety field in its crops, yielding a little corn, more potatoes, and beans mostly. “Clearin’ up” was no small task, as it meant the removal of bean–poles, and an indefinite quantity of vines. The latter went no farther than a bonfire in one corner of the field: and up to it Boardman Blake was now venturing at intervals, thrusting into its smoke and flames immense armfuls of dead vines. At the time that the keeper of the station made his appearance, Boardman was stoutly tugging at a row of very obstinate bean–poles, and every moment he grew redder in the face, while his scanty breath issued in warm little puffs.

“Glad—to see ye,—Jothum. How—dy’e—do?” ejaculated

Boardman, still tugging away.

"Well as usual, thank ye. Got some tough customers there?"

"We—e—ll,—yes!" said Boardman.

"Think—"

The world lost that last precious thought. Here a provoking bean–pole that he had grasped, suddenly broke, and in a great, fat heap, over went Boardman, cutting Chauncy Aldrich's figure when in the boat–race he "caught a crab." [183]

"Hurt—ye?" cried the keeper, rushing forward and offering his assistance.

"Oh—no!" said Boardman laughing, and rolling over as easily as Miss P. Green's butter firkin, on the day of the fatal boat–race. "The pesky pole got the better of me."

"Let me help you," said the keeper, his vigorous muscle quickly hoisting into an upright attitude this "fallen merchant," as Chauncy would have called him.

"There!" puffed Boardman, resolutely resuming work, and tugging at the stub of the broken pole. "Now I'm ready for business, if I can help you."

"I wanted to see you about Walter."

"Walter, my nephew?"

"Yes."

"Hope he has done nothing out of the way. His folks would feel dreadful bad."

"Oh, no—no! jest the opposite. Fact is, I want him at the station."

Boardman looked up, and wiped his broad, benevolent face.

"You don't say! I thought Walter couldn't have been up to anything out of the way, for he is as well meanin' a boy as you often see. And you want him at the station? Indeed!"

"You see, Squire"—a title the people gave Boardman when they [184] wished to be specially attentive, and it was always acceptable to Boardman—"you see, Silas Fay, one of my men, is not very well; but I want to hold on to him as he is a powerful feller, and a good boatman. I thought if Silas took a rest, a month say, he would be able to come back and pull through the winter. I thought for that month, I might get your Walter."

"Is he strong enough?"

"He has a good deal of strength for one of his years, and every day he will be a–gainin'. Jest look at him! I have watched him a good deal. He is a good oarsman too. They say he pulled fustrate at the race. Then I thought he might like the money, and also that you might spare him, as work at the saw–mill is slack, and I knew you didn't have to be there so much, and could be more at the store. Then that colored boy is with you, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes, and I think I could get along. We are not doing—well, you might say, we—we—are doing—not a thing at mill. Baggs has gone out West to look after some business."

Boardman looked very despondent.

"Squire, look here."

The keeper here dropped his voice, though there was no occasion for it, as the only being that heard him was a musk–rat stealing [185] along in the shadow of the wall of a ditch near by. In low, confidential tones, the keeper remarked,—

"I think that—I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but I must say it —I think Baggs will bear a good deal of watchin'. Did you know the men at the station had been lettin' him have their money?"

"Why, no."

"But they have. He said he could give 'em more per cent than the bank would, and so a number of 'em, when paid off, took their cash to Baggs. He's a sly old crittur. One time, he purtended he wasn't particular 'bout havin' any more, and one of 'em as good as begged him to take his money, and Baggs made a good deal of the fact that he calc'lated he was the 'poor man's friend,' and on the whole, though he didn't want it, yet he would ''commodate' him; and that's the last the feller has seen of it."

"Doesn't Baggs pay interest?"

"Oh, it was in the agreement that the int'rest should stay and ''cumulate,' he called it. He's a knowin' one, that Baggs! Squire, I wouldn't resk too much."

Boardman did not enjoy such advice, but he was accustomed to

it, as Aunt Lydia administered frequent doses. There was always a dose the first thing in the morning, like the sulphur and molasses some unfortunate children are obliged to take; and other administrations during the day, might be expected. [186]

"Wall, let that go for what it is worth. To go back, Squire, as I was a–sayin' about Walter, I thought you might spare him, this month, say."

"Oh—yes—yes. I think I can."

"Then, I'll speak to him. You see one reason why I'd rather have him in Silas' place a month—of course, I don't s'pose he could be spared mebbe, any longer time than that—one reason, as I said, is that I think I can depend on him. I heard him, one mornin' before the boat–race, say to Baggs' nephew a thing—something or other—wasn't right, and he wouldn't have anything to do with it. I liked that in him. I told the sup'rintendent of our station deestrick who was on, all 'bout Walter, and that I thought he would do as a substitute, and I mentioned that leetle circumstance. The sup'rintendent said it had the right ring. So, Squire, if you are 'greeable, I'll speak to Walter."

"I'm willing, Jotham, and I'm obliged to you for your good opinion of my nephew." [187]

Not only was Boardman "'greeable," but so was every one who was involved in the matter. Aunt Lydia assented, though she declared she should "miss him." Don Pedro gave a solemn smile, and said he would do all he could. Walter's parents were willing; and as for Walter—he just sprang for the chance. He met the proposition with all the enthusiasm of his nature. That yellow building near the beach fascinated him. The sea beyond was a mystery that awed, and yet ever attracted him. He had been reading about the life saving service, and he wished with his own eyes to look inside—not inside of a book, simply, but the service itself. He went home to pass "Thanksgiving," that delightful family festival; and after his return, one brilliant but chilly November morning, he climbed up into his Uncle Boardman's high red wagon, and took his seat by Don Pedro, who had been commissioned to take Walter, and an old blue chest, down to the station. Walter had found this chest up in the garret, packed away under the dusky eaves.

"It looks more sailor like than my trunk," reasoned Walter, "and I will ask the folks if I can't take it. Good! It has rope handles, sailor–fashion. Just the thing!" [188]

The "folks" were willing, and without obtaining the leave of the chest itself, this was dragged out into the light, upset, dusted, pounded on every side, and dusted again; and after this rough, unceremonious treatment, lugged down into Walters chamber. There, it was neatly packed, and then removed to the red wagon. Before it reaches the station, there will be time enough to say something about the late work of that department of Government employ, into which Walter Plympton for awhile has gone.

By the report of the life saving service for 1885, there were 203 stations planted on the edge of that great kingdom of water whose violence must so often be fought. Of these stations, 38 were on the Lakes, 7 on the Pacific, 157 on the Atlantic, and 1 at the Falls of the Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky.

These stations are grouped into districts: those in Maine and New Hampshire, constituting the first district; in Massachusetts, the second; on the coast of Rhode Island and Long Island, the third; and the New Jersey coast makes the fourth. There is a large number of stations in the last two districts, for they offer a dangerous coast on which to trip up the great commerce hurrying into and out of New York. As we go farther south, the coast from Cape Henlopen to Cape Charles lies in the fifth district; and that from Cape Henry to Cape Fear River in the sixth. The eastern coast of Florida, with the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, is in the seventh, the Gulf coast in the eighth. Lakes Erie and Ontario make the ninth district; Lakes Huron and Superior the tenth; Lake Michigan the eleventh; and the Pacific coast constitutes the twelfth. Each district is in the care of a superintendent, and over all is the General Superintendent, Hon. Sumner I. Kimball, whose headquarters are at Washington. The service also has its Inspector, Capt. J. H. Merryman, and there are twelve Assistant Inspectors, for the twelve districts. Let us now get up high enough in imagination to look down on our rough coast, and watch the vessels struggling with storm and surf while the surfmen gallantly push out to their relief. 371 disasters were recorded at [189]

these stations, and in the periled vessels, were 2,439 persons; and only eleven were lost. Now let us look at the property involved in these disasters. The vessels and their cargoes were estimated to be worth $4,634,380, and of this amount, there was a saving of $3,379,583. There were 56 vessels totally lost. This is the last published report. The work at a life saving station is of varied [190] nature. There are not only wrecks to be visited, but vessels coming too near shore in the night time must be warned off by the faithful patrolman's signal light. A vessel may be stranded, and need to be "worked off." If a fisherman's dory, or a millionaire's yacht, should meet with any kind of a disaster, if some unlucky traveler by the sea may tumble into the water from his little craft, if any party of mariners, disabled for any reason, may need shelter and refreshment, it is the life saving station that is expected to furnish help for all the above cases.

Let us now pack into a nutshell the results of the work of these men, since this system was inaugurated in 1871. There have been 2,918 disasters that involved property worth $51,763,694, and there was a saving of $36,277,929. Out of a total of 25,693 persons involved in these disasters, 25,236 were saved; and the department claims that it was not responsible for the loss of 197. In the latter cases, the stations were not open, or service was hindered by distance. 4,829 persons were aided at stations, and the days of relief afforded these were 13,313. I would add that, the seventh district is peculiar. It takes in the eastern coast of Florida. Stations here are "provisioned houses of refuge" in the care of keepers, but without any crew. The coast is singular, and if a vessel be stranded, the escape of the crew is as a rule, comparatively easy. In the case of such a disaster as the above, to a crew, their special peril is from hunger and thirst, when they have reached a shore very scantily inhabited. Guide posts are set up for the benefit of such castaways, directing them to the station or lighthouse that may be nearest.

"Whose noble mission it is to fight the sea" (p. 191)**.**

The vast field of work occupied by the life saving service, let us [191] try to grasp with our thoughts. Recall once more the stations established; the figures, too, that represent the life and property already saved; and think also of the vast interests still at stake in the ships that are sailing, and the crews that are climbing their rigging. The boy who sits in the red wagon by the side of Don Pedro, is

coming to help with his young, strong muscles, and nimble wits, that force of about fifteen hundred, to–day, whose noble mission it is to fight the sea, and rescue the life and property it would destroy. The red wagon bumps and jolts over the rough little lane winding down to the station, and finally halts, as Don Pedro shouts to the horses, [192] “Whoa, dah!” The blue chest with its clumsy rope handles is lowered to the ground, and then obediently accompanies Walter and Don Pedro into the station.

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[193]

CHAPTER XII.

ON HIS BEAT.

Keeper Barney and his family of surfmen were at breakfast as Walter entered. They were seated about a table on which were two huge steaming dishes,—one of biscuit, and the other of fried potatoes. By each surfman's plate, was a cup of hot coffee. A ready chorus of welcome went up from these modern knights of the sea. "How are ye, Walter?" sang out the keeper. "Hullo!" "Good mornin'!" "Come in! come in!" were the various styles of greeting; while Charlie Lawson, the cook, shouted, "You look thin as a shadder! Set down, and have something to fill you out!"

"I'm much obliged," replied Walter. "I have been to breakfast, though."

"That means," explained the keeper, "that he was out last night practicin' on a beat, and so took an *early* cup of coffee; but we will [194] show him to–night what a *real* beat is."

"That's so!" said Tom Walker. "Them fancy beats don't amount to nothin', beside the real article."

Walter felt at home at once, and declared that he guessed he would try "Cook Charlie's biscuit."

"Biscuit! Try them fried taters too. One of 'em would keep you a–goin' a hull day," declared the cook.

"You look as if they had done a good work for you," said Woodbury Elliott to the cook. Something had fatted up "Cook Charlie" as he was generally called. But what business has a cook to be lean? The presiding genius of the kitchen, certainly ought to give in his own body proof of his skill. A lean cook is an inconsistency; while in a fat cook there is a fitness. And then what right has a cook to be cross? A good dinner begets a good temper; and the cook ought to be sweet–natured always. A lean, cross cook, is an inconsistency. Cook Charlie, was of the kind that harmonizes with the cheerful, comforting nature of the kitchen stove. All the surfmen were at the breakfast table excepting Silas Fay, whose place Walter intended to temporarily fill. There was the sandy haired keeper, and [195] there was Tom Walker, with his big bushy beard,—a shaggy kind of an animal. Next to Tom, sat Woodbury Elliott, his blue eyes flashing out occasional glances of welcome toward Walter. If Cook Charlie was fat, "Slim" Tarleton was lean; and his first name was bestowed upon him on account of this peculiarity. He was Capt. Barney's bony neighbor on the left. Next to Slim, came two brothers, Seavey, and Nathan Lowd. They were quiet, inoffensive young men, whose peculiarity was a grin on every possible occasion, excepting a funeral. They were twins, resembling one another closely; but showed this difference, that Nathan grinned more than Seavey. There was one more at the table,—Joe Cardridge, a black–haired, black–eyed man, on whose face was a cynical expression, as if he was continually out of humor with the world, and wished to show it by a sneer. Nobody liked his discontented, jealous disposition, and it was the keeper's purpose to get rid of him at the first opportunity. He was an excellent boatman, and this merit had secured him the position of surfman. It was true indeed of all the crew; their knowledge of boating, gained in many trips after cod and pollock, [196] halibut and haddock, constituted their special fitness for the life saving service. They were strong, hardy, muscular fellows, and Slim Tarleton—bony, but tough—was no exception.

After breakfast, the keeper led Walter upstairs.

"I want to tell you where you will bunk, Walter, and I guess you had better take Silas' bed. Here it is."

"Who sleeps next?"

"Woodbury Elliott there, and Tom Walker on this side. Each man of the crew is numbered, and you will take Silas' number, six. You are Surfman Six."

"That's good. Now, I've been round over the station, and know it pretty well. Could you just give me an insight into the boat–room, more of an idea of it?"

"Sartin. Let's come down now."

From the kitchen or living–room, on the first floor, one passed directly into the large boat–room; and that immediately proclaimed the nature of the building, and also the work of its occupants. In the

center, was the surf–boat, twenty–six feet long. At the stern and bows, were air–chambers.

“That long steering–oar is twenty–two feet long, isn’t it? Somebody said so.”

“This was worn about the body under the arms” (p. 197)**.**

“Yes. Walter. It gives me a tremendous purchase when I set in the starn to steer.” [197]

“Of course you have six oars, and then there are two spare ones.”

“Jest so.”

Each oar was stamped, “U. S. L. S. S.,” whose translation is United States Life Saving Service. On each seat was a cork jacket, consisting of two rows of cork blocks secured to a belt of canvas. This was worn about the body under the arms.

“That means,” said Walter, “all ready for use, any moment.”

“Yes, we may be wanted any hour, and we can’t go out, service–time, unless we put those jackets on.”

“So Tom Walker told me. Let me see—Oh, there’s the axe Tom said you kept in the boat; and there’s a hatchet, and you have got ‘Uncle Sam’s’ mark on them.”

“Yes. There’s a rudder too, which we can use in smooth water. This is a surf–boat, but there are in the service some life–boat stations. On the Lakes, and Pacific coast, you find ’em. Life–boats are better for a shore that is bold, where the water runs deep.”

Along the right hand wall of the boat–room, extended a miscellaneous collection of apparatus. There was a mortar for shooting a line to a wreck, the ball used being a twenty–four pound round shot. There were shovels and a Merriman rubber suit. Wound ingeniously and carefully on pins, were long coils of shot–line, that could be slipped off any moment, and sent whizzing and flying behind an iron ball. There were also long coils of rope, to be used in completing the connection between a wreck and the shore. Of the three sizes, the largest, a four–inch cable, was employed with the life–car, and a three–inch cable with the breeches buoy. [198]

“There it is!” exclaimed Walter enthusiastically, as he crossed to the left of the surf–boat and looked up at the life–car. This was suspended from the ceiling. It resembled a boat, but it was covered. In the center of the cover or roof, was an opening. At each end of the car, were air–chambers.

“Woodbury Elliott says four small persons, or three large ones, can get in there.”

“Yes, we calc’late to stow that number away.”

“And that opening is the manhole.”

“Yes, and when you are in, you can fasten the cover from the inside, and be tight as a fly inside a drum.” [199]

“I used to wonder how they could breathe, till I found out there were little air–holes in the top.”

“Sartin.”

“And this is the cart,” said Walter, nodding toward a stout hand–cart.

“Yes, and you see she is all packed for sarvice any moment.”

Here the keeper laid his broad, hard hand on the apparatus in the cart. There was the breeches buoy, consisting of a large cork ring, from which drooped very stout, but very short legs, or “breeches.” A Lyle gun, lighter than a mortar, and used for shooting a line to a wreck, projected its nozzle from the heap in the cart.

“There is the cartridge–box,” said Walter. “And I suppose of course the cartridges are there.”

“Yes, all ready, and two dozen primers are in there.”

“Pickaxe and shovel, and tackle and fall,” murmured Walter.

Yes, these were carried by the cart, and Walter saw little tally–boards, inscribed with directions to a shipwrecked crew, for the proper fastening of ropes to the vessel.

“Could I look into the closet where the Coston signals and rockets are?” inquired Walter. [200]

“Round this way,” replied the keeper, who was pleased to notice that Walter knew so much about the apparatus at the station. He threw open a door, and a drawer also. In this closet, were various pyrotechnic treasures, serviceable with their brilliantly flashing fires for the work of the surfmen.

The store of curiosities in the boat–room had not been exhausted yet. Near the door of the living–room, was a row of shots that were adapted to the Lyle gun, one end to rest on the powder, and in the other end was a shank with an eye to which the line was fastened. On the left side of the room, was a four–wheeled carriage for the hauling of the boat. Hanging from the walls were ropes and oil suits. There was also another closet of supplies. There were patrol lanterns, colored signal lanterns, speaking trumpets, twenty–four pound shot for the mortars; and what serviceable piece of apparatus was *not* there?

“Glad to see you know so much about this ’ere room, Walter,” said the keeper.

“Oh, yes, I’ve found out what I could,” replied “Surfman Six.”

During any visit at the station, Walter had gone about with two observant eyes, and a tongue that was not ashamed to ask questions. What he learned, he packed away for use in his retentive memory. [201]

“You remember your beat when your father let you go one night with Tom Walker?” said the keeper.

“Oh, yes.”

“All right. At the same time this evening, I’ll get you ready, and you can patrol that same side of the station.”

At eight o’clock, Walter stood before the keeper like a knight that some king was equipping and sending out for special service.

“I am all ready,” said the young surfman, his bright, hazel eyes flashing like two of “Uncle Sam’s” patrol lanterns on a dark night. He wore a cap that Aunt Lydia had lined with soft, warm flannel for this particular duty. His feet were encased in rough, but strong boots; and his clothes, though rough like the boots, were thick, with extra linings, furnished by the same feminine skill as that which lined his cap. He had buttoned up his stout fishing–jacket and now awaited the keeper’s orders.

“There,” said the keeper. “Here is your time–detector, and here’s your Coston signal. You know where the key to the detector is kept, I guess I’ve given you directions enough ’bout lettin’ off your Coston signal ef you see a vessel too near shore, or ef you want to signal to a craft in any trouble. Wall, good luck!” [202]

Out into the quiet, cool November night, Walter promptly stepped. He halted one moment at the outside door. There was a

moon somewhere in the sky, and somewhere behind the station; and it threw its light on that part of the shore and the sea which Walter fronted.

"How low the tide runs!" thought Walter. Beyond that rocky rim against which the surf daily fretted, turning over and over like a wheel trying to grind out of the way an obstacle, now stretched the uncovered sands. He could easily mark off with his eye the dry sand, and then the wet sand glistening in the moonlight. Then came the surf, a tumble of silver. Beyond were dark, swelling, threatening folds, forever coming up out of the sea as if to drown the earth; and yet forever breaking down into white surf that rolled away in an impotent wrath. Beyond all, was an untroubled surface of light and peace; this in turn ending in a dark, hazy belt that encircled the horizon. There were two lighthouses whose red fires flashed through this belt of haze, and jeweled it. Above, were the stars, soft and peaceful.

"I will walk down on the sands," thought the young patrol, and [203]
his light was soon flashing above the floor of wet, glistening sand. With keen eyes, he searched the surface of the sea for some sign of danger; but the sea was innocent of all disturbance save the tumbling, roaring surf at his feet. He saw a light up the beach that shifted its place—a kind of firebug crawling away; but he knew it was only the lantern of the other patrolman as he slowly walked his beat. What a sense of responsibility came down on Walter's shoulders! It seemed as if he would be held accountable for any disaster to the world's shipping on his side of the station; while Slim Tarleton must look out for all harm that threatened navigation on his, the westerly side of the globe. After a while, this sense of responsibility lightened. He was not accountable for *all* the disasters on this, the easterly side of the globe, but only on the ocean between Walter Plympton, surfman, and Old England. This stretch of jurisdiction gradually narrowed. It became only the ocean that he could see. This, though, was so quiet, lamb–like, lustrous, that it dulled all sense of alarm; and Walter began to think of something else, as he plodded along. There were the stars. How quiet it was up in their sphere!

"There's Orion!" he exclaimed, tracing the outlines of that [204]
celestial hunter, whose acquaintance he had made in the academy.

"Where's the Great Bear?" he said. And there it was; its fires mild as dove's eyes, that night. Then he hunted up the North Star, the Pleiades, and other worthies. Having finished his astronomy, and as no vessel out at sea sent up any rockets, and no vessel near the shore needed his warning lantern, since the moon hung out a better one, he began to watch the shadows of rocky bluffs, thrown down on the sands. These were huge masses of blackness projected across the shining sands, into which ran little rivulets of gold, where the water, left in pools, tried to make its way down to the sea again. These golden streams, though, could not wash away the great, ebony shadows.

"There's the Crescent!" exclaimed Walter. He could make out its dark ledges, and he located also the probable neighborhood of the Chair. He plodded along in his uneventful walk. He reached the houses at the end of his beat, and turned aside to hunt up the particular building where he might expect to find the key of his detector.

"When I patrolled this beat that night with Tom Walker, I had no
idea I would ever be coming after that key to–night. Ah, there she is [205]
now!" he exclaimed.

The key was in its accustomed place. Walter seized it, thrust it into the hole in the detector, turned it, and proudly made his first record as a surfman. Then he retraced his way to the sands, still glistening in the moonlight, and slowly trudged back to the station. When at the close of his long watch, he wearily passed upstairs, and dropped into his warm bed, he went readily to sleep, but not into oblivion. He was busily dreaming, dreaming that he was a knight, and King Barney was dressing him in armor. Then he thought that armed with shield and spear and sword, he went out upon the beach to fight the perils of the sea. These took the form of a monster wriggling out of the surf; and as in the old Grecian fable, Perseus was moved to rescue the maiden Andromeda from a sea–horror, so he was striving to save May Elliott, bound like Andromeda to the rocks on the shore. The battle was a long one and it did not come off till toward morning. He was suddenly aroused by—was it an angry

stroke from a claw of the sea–dragon? It seemed so to Walter; and looking up in a shivering horror, expecting to see the most diabolical face ever invented, wasn't he delighted to see—Tom Walker's shaggy head: [206]

"Oh—h—Tom! That you! Well, if I ain't glad to see you!"

Tom roared.

"Well, if I don't call that a cordial greetin'! Ha—ha! Folks are apt to feel t'other way, when waked up. Glad to see me! Ha—ha! Well, I'm glad to see you. Come, breakfast's ready. Cook Charlie's taters will soon be cold as the heart of a mermaid, if you ever dream of sich things."

Walter did not say whether he had been dreaming of such a character.

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CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER FIRE.

Boardman Blake sat in his store, patiently holding his hands in his lap, and waiting for a customer. Indeed, there seemed to be nothing else that he could very well do. He was not needed in the barn, for Don Pedro was there, looking faithfully after oxen and cows; after "Old Jennie," the mare, also. Boardman had just brought from the well all that Aunt Lydia needed in her department—"two heapin' pails of water." He was tired of looking at the few books on the shelves in the store, and he had gone through the *County Bugle* from its first note to its last one. As no customer arrived, his only occupation was to nurse his hands in his lap, and wait in hope. If Boardman had waited until an actual customer had arrived, there would have been a good deal of nursing. He supposed at first it was a customer, when he heard a footstep at the door, and then caught [208] the tinkle of the watchful bell.

"Ho, Walter, that you? I am glad to see you," and as Uncle Boardman welcomed the young man, he expressed his pleasure in a very beaming smile and a very firm hand–grip. Walter explained the errand about certain goods which Keeper Barney wanted Uncle Boardman to send to the station, and the conversation then became a personal one.

"Well, Walter, how do you like the surf business?"

"Oh, I have enjoyed it so far. It's not all play, though."

"No, no! It's a rough–and–tumble life when the winter sets in. However, I would make the best of it.

"Oh, I mean to do that, uncle."

Here Uncle Boardman looked out of the window, and twirling his hands in his lap, talked away on this subject of making the best of things.

"Now, at the station you won't find everything to your mind. You won't like all the men; but then you can make a good deal of what you do like; and what you don't like, you can just look over it, and try not to mind it, Walter." [209]

"I know it. There's Joe Cardridge. I don't take to him a bit; but I try not to mind him. And as for Tom Walker and Woodbury Elliott, I could do anything for them. There's Cook Charlie—he's a jolly team, and the Lowds, they're great grinners, and the men make a deal of fun of them; but they're good–hearted as the days are long. I like Slim Tarleton."

"Pretty hard trampin' backwards and forwards, some nights, ain't it?"

"Yes, that's so; but then I say, 'Well, there will be a warm bed when I get through,' and then in the morning, I can't say I enjoy getting up, turning out into a cold room; but I say, 'There's a lovely hot breakfast downstairs,' and I pop up quicker."

"That's it, Walter. I guess you're getting the hang of the house. How—how do you come on since—" Uncle Boardman hesitated. He felt the pressure of a certain amount of responsibility, as he stood in the place of Walter's father and mother, and he wished to ask about his religious life.

"Since—since you were confirmed, Walter?"

"I—I try to do right, uncle, and—"

"You stick to your prayers and your Bible?"

"Oh, yes. I miss my church, Sundays." [210]

"Well, Walter, do the best you can, your duty toward God and toward man; but do it naturally."

"What, sir?"

"Why, I mean by that—let me see how I shall put it? It seems to me that I might—of course I don't intend it—be too—too conscious of my religion. Seems to me a man may be painfully so, going round with a kind of holier–than–thou way. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"Just be natural. Let your religion just take possession of you, and then come out just—just as song comes out of a bird. I don't see why it shouldn't, for religion is the happiest thing in the world. Sometimes, I find a man, and he makes me feel that he is so dreadful good, why it would be taking a liberty, to laugh in his

presence. Now that man is sort of painfully conscious of his religion, all the time a–worrying about it and a–fussing over it; and makes the people uneasy all round him. Just be natural, Walter, and without your fussing over it, it will come out easy and smooth as a bird's singing. I tell you, Walter, a good kind of religion is one that says when you weigh a thing, 'Sixteen ounces make a pound;' and when you talk, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor;' [211] and when it comes to our no licensing, that says, 'Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that puttest thy bottle to him and makest him drunken also.' Do you understand, Walter? Be thorough in your religion. Pray, but act as you pray."

"I want to do that way."

This was the answer Walter made audibly. What he added silently, and what he repeated as he was going to the station, was this: "Uncle Boardman can afford to talk, for Uncle Boardman practices. I don't care how much I have of that man's religion. 'Make the best of things,' he said. I wonder if he isn't having a hard time in his mill business with Baggs, and if it don't come hard to be cheerful!"

It did "come hard be cheerful," for Uncle Boardman had only been a fly in the web of that spider, "Belzebub" Baggs. To erect the mill and inaugurate the business there, Uncle Boardman had been obliged to put on his home a mortgage, additional to one already existing. The first burden, the house might have sustained; but under the additional pressure of the second, the house threatened, as a piece of of Blake property, to collapse. Did not the fly know he was walking into a spider's web, when "Belzebub" came, and spoke soft words, and made extravagant promises? The fly was suspicious, [212] but the spider showed him a recommendation from two men of excellent judgment whom he personally knew. Enticed by the assurance that B. Baggs was a man of business, a man of money, and a man of morals, the fly walked into the spider's web. Discovering his mistake, Uncle Boardman was now trying to rectify it; refusing to place any more money in the mill enterprise. And didn't the spider threaten vengeance! Didn't he turn on the poor fly, and torment him with the fact that he held a certain note against him almost due, and whose payment he would press!

"Oh!" thought Uncle Boardman. "It's that note for $500, which I lost somehow, and then I gave him another. Well!"

That was all the fly could say. He knew he had made mistakes, but they were mistakes based on the opinion of those whom he supposed he could trust. Now that the toils of the spider were closing about him, he was doing his best to struggle out of them.

"I won't, though, make others just miserable with my troubles," he declared. "I won't give up. I'll—I'll—"

When he reached this place, Boardman Blake always looked up; and amid the storm clouds, steadily gathering, not slowly but [213] rapidly increasing, he could see one little place that held a star.

"I'll trust my Heavenly Father," he said, trying to be cheerful, patiently bearing Aunt Lydia's reflections, (those were rather gingery at first), good–naturedly standing up, and taking the raillery of his neighbors also. Aunt Lydia! She *was* gingery at first, peppery even, and that of the cayenne sort, but when she understood the nature of the influence brought to bear upon her husband, that he had been guided by the judgment of others, who were supposed to be wiser, she sheathed her tongue in all possible charity. She played the part of the true wife, and silently looking at him through the eyes of a woman's pity, stood by him, and defended him, with all of a woman's devotion and courage.

As Walter neared the station, there was a sneer leaning against the door, and this sneer was two–legged: it was Joe Cardridge. It was a mild December day, and he was lazily enjoying its sunshine. As Walter approached, he superciliously looked him over, and said "Hullo, surf–boy!"

"How are ye!" replied Walter pleasantly.

"Surf–boy" was a title, which, spoken in Joe's sneering way, [214] Walter did not fancy. If Tom Walker had roared it out, Tom would have put into it a tone of hearty good–will; and Walter would have worn the name gladly. Joe added a sneer to it, and the title galled Walter. However, he kept his temper under, and always addressed Joe courteously. The other surfmen noticed Joe's manner, and silently criticised it by treating Walter's youth with all the greater considerateness.

On one occasion when Joe contemptuously and with the spirit of a bully had flung this title at him, Slim Tarleton remarked, “Hullo, Walter! You’ve got a lot of strength, I know. You have got master arms. We’ve got an old stump in our cow pasture, and I mean to tell father to let you try on it when we are takin’ up stumps.”

There was no Slim standing at the station door to offset Joe’s present sneer with the tender of another stump.

“Ben movin’ the world, boy?” continued Joe.

“I have been up to Uncle Boardman’s,” replied Walter.

“How is his mill gettin’ on? ‘A fool and his money is soon parted,’ they say.”

“He is not a fool,” said Walter resolutely. “I believe if he had an [215]
honest man to deal with, he would get along.”

“Indeed!” remarked Joe sneeringly.

Several of the surfmen now came to the door, tempted by the mild air, whose softness seemed to be on sea and land, softening all glaring color and over all roughness throwing a veil of purplish haze. It was one of the fine effects of that scenic painter, Nature.

Who of those present understood that Joe Cardridge was not only an ally of the great Baggs, but also his hired—I can hardly say paid —agent? It was he that had induced a number of the men to intrust their money with Baggs; and on every man’s money he had been promised a commission.

“I most–er–wish I had taken out my kermission fust, afore sendin’ Baggs the money,” Joe had said; but it was too late to make changes. He still lived, though, in the hope that out of those exhaustless money fountains Baggs was reputed to own, a golden stream might run some day into Joe Cardridge’s pocket. Feeling that he was the representative of the great house of Baggs, he did not fancy the nature of Walter’s remark, knowing its meaning. However, the thunder storm raging under his vest he prudently concealed in the presence of Tom Walker, Cook Charlie, and Woodbury Elliott. [216]
Although he had received no pay from the great mercantile house employing him, he meant in its behalf to give “pay,” in an underhand fashion to the young fellow now insulting Baggs, as he thought.

“Fellers,” he said, “it’s pleasant, and the grass is thick and dry; and it won’t hurt if we git tumbled; and let’s have a rastle.”

The proposition of a friendly wrestle did not seem unpleasant to these young fishermen, proud of their muscle, and ambitious to show it.

“I’m willin’,” said Tom Walker, gaping, and at the same time ostentatiously throwing up a pair of brawny arms.

“So am I,” said Woodbury Elliott, straightening up, and bringing into firm outline his splendid frame.

“So—so—am I,” said Cook Charlie, waddling about; “pervided—you let me beat.”

This proposition was welcomed with a laugh, but it was instantly followed by another from Joe.

“Come, surf–boy, let’s you and me try.”

“Surf–boy!” growled Tom Walker. “He has got a lot of strength, Joe.”

“Oh, I’m willing,” said Walter pleasantly “Any time.” [217]

Joe was the older and the taller of the two, but Walter was as heavy, and his frame was more compact. Joe’s bones had been put together loosely. If Walter could have looked down to the bottom of Joe’s dark, evil eyes, he would have read this determination there: “I’ll punish this boy smartly ’fore I git through with him to–day.” Walter however saw no such sinister spirit, and he only said, “Ready!” The two gripped, and quickly Joe came to the ground in a heap. Joe looked angry when he rose. “Let’s try that agin!” he said.

Woodbury noticed the anger in Joe’s face, and called out, “Fair play, fair!”

Joe made no answer, but renewed his effort, only to make a worse heap on the ground than before. When he rose the second time, he was furious with wrath and immediately struck at Walter. The “surf–boy” though, quietly pinioned his arms and laid him on the ground a third time. Rising again, his fury was his master, and he would have thrown himself on Walter, but Tom Walker and Woodbury Elliott planted themselves before Joe, and called out to him to stop.

“I challenge—him!” said the almost breathless Joe. “I want—to—try—it—in fightin’ fashion.” [218]

“I shan’t fight,” said Walter. “But I can take care of myself if I am attacked.”

“You are afeared!”

“Quiet, Joe!” said Tom. “He has come off fust best, and he is not afraid; and he could use you all up, and I ’vise you to keep quiet. You ought to be ashamed of yourself that you can’t play fair. Here comes the keeper, too.”

Hearing this, Joe stumbled off into the station, looking like a disgraced animal, which he really was. He muttered vengeance however, as he stole away.

“Didn’t that boy carry himself well?” said Tom to Woodbury, as they strolled back of the station. “I’ve been a–watchin’ him and he has stood Joe’s mean fire like a hero. I think he means to do the right thing.”

“No doubt about that; but I guess he felt pretty well stirred up.”

“That’s so. I imagine he jest felt like bilin’ over; but he didn’t show it more than the outside of an iron pot, where the bilin’ is. I think he did well. He jest conquered that Joe, and he conquered himself; and I think I could more easily give ten lickin’s of the fust sort, to one of the second.”

As for Walter, he had entered the station, gone upstairs, and was looking out of a window that faced the west, where the sun was [219] frescoing the misty walls of the sky with daintiest shades. He was in no quiet mood. He was sorry that he had consented to any trial of strength ending so unpleasantly. He was sorry to find out that under the roof with him, was an avowed enemy. The world looks friendly to the young, and it is a bitter discovery to hear lions roaring about our path. Walter resolved, though, he would try the harder to do only the thing that was right; and as he stood with his face to the flaming sky, he asked God to help him.

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CHAPTER XIV.

TWO BAD CASES.

Old Capt. Elliott, so the people called him, could not climb a certain stairway. That was not so strange, for it was the stairway of a new life, and amendment is sometimes the hardest thing one can attempt. And yet it does not seem as if a little piece of paper, would have so hindered Capt. Elliott—a little piece of paper in his pocket—for it bore him down as if it had been a mill–stone round his neck, and climb, he could not. Say rather, climb he *would* not. The facts were these. He had been very much agitated by the services at the Hall. They were a glass to his soul, in which he had looked, and had seen what a needy, miserable being he was. He resolved he would begin a new life, and he climbed one step in that stairway—the step of prayer. He thought he had climbed another step, which is just as [221] important, repentance; that he had begun to leave behind him old sins and was on the way to speedy improvement. But a call one evening from Miss P. Green led him to think otherwise. She suddenly appeared at his door, interrupting him while he was praying, her bright eyes flashing and her little curls dancing, and handing him a letter, remarked, "I found this in the mail, Cap'n, and none of your folks were down, and as I was over this way, I thought I would bring it along."

"Thank ye," he replied gruffly, and taking the proffered note, he turned away, leaving Miss P. Green on the broad stone steps before his door.

She withdrew her bright eyes and her dancing little curls, saying, "There, I should have thought he might have said, 'It's from so–and–so.' That would have been some pay; but *I* know! It's from Boardman Blake. I can tell his handwriting a mile off. I wonder what he is writing for, when he might come himself."

Capt. Elliott also wondered; but some things we can say better with our pens than we can with our tongues, and this was Boardman's situation.

The old man forced open the envelope with his big fingers, and [222] read this:

> "CAPT. ELLIOTT;
>
> "*Dear Sir*,—I am aware that the time on my mortgage is up, and I know you have a right to come over and take my house. I thought perhaps you might give me a little time, as it is very hard just now to raise any money. If you could do this, it would be a great favor to me. I am a good deal worried about it, and am sorry you can't have your money. Hoping you can oblige me, I am,
>
> "Truly yours,
> "BOARDMAN BLAKE."

"Can't pay!" sneered the captain. "How does he get money to live on? How does he s'pose I can live? Wants a little time? Well, hasn't he had it? It is that old mill into which his money has gone, and now he wants more time. Nonsense!"

Capt. Elliott put the document in his pocket and tried to pray once more, but he couldn't. The step he wanted to climb up was so hard, or rather that paper in his pocket was so weighty! "A little time," he kept mumbling to himself. Gray–headed old man, chafing because a worried neighbor begged him not to take his house, but give him a little time in which to attempt payment, while he himself was only a beggar at God's throne, and had not that Heavenly Father given him a long time for repentance? Who was he, thus [223] gripping another unfortunate by the neck and refusing him the solicited favor? Get up from your knees, Capt. Elliott. Stop your praying and go to writing. Tell Boardman Blake he shall have his "little time." Then kneel again and ask God to have mercy on you, an undeserving old beggar. As it is, that note in your pocket clogs your progress, holds you down and holds you back. You thought you were getting along rapidly, and had mounted several stairs and were up quite high. Now you feel bruised and sore, and down in the depths, as if you had had a tumble and were lying at the foot of the stairway again. A bad case indeed.

Ah, God will not take us unless we come to him whole–hearted in our desire to serve Him, and not only ready to give up every sin, but actually giving it up, letting go old grudges, willing to do the just

and honest and generous thing by our neighbor. Then He takes us up in His arms and calls us, “Son, Daughter!”

Another bad case, and that very day too. The day was not stormy, and yet threatening. The sea looked cold, and the white crests of the waves were like patches of snow, pure but chilling, while between these wintry tufts were black hollows of water. A mist had advanced [224] so far toward the station that the shore could not be inspected from the lookout two miles either way. The patrols were on duty therefore, and Walter was at the Crescent end of the beach, as that part facing the rocks in the river was called. Wrapped in his thick, warm fisher jacket, he faced the keen, chilly though not violent wind blowing from the north–east. Now he made broad footprints in the gray sand with his big rubber boots, then he stumbled over rocks matted with the rich brown of the sea–weed, or some bold encroachment of the sea would compel him to withdraw to the top of a high wall of rock. He was near the end of his beat, and halted a moment to watch the play of the waves about the Chair.

He soon became aware of the presence of another spectator, somebody looking in the same direction. It was a man leaning upon a bulky rock projecting from the sands. As soon as Walter saw his bending form, the broad back, the strong shoulders supporting a round head, and noticed that he was a person of short stature, he exclaimed, “That’s the man! That’s the way the man looked whom I saw one morning in Uncle Boardman’s store, standing behind the counter as if handling the books on those shelves. I have been [225] hunting for him all this time. Yes, that’s—” The man here turned quickly about, and involuntarily Walter added, and said it aloud, “Baggs!”

“Hum, did you want me?” replied Baggs rather ungraciously.

“Oh!” said Walter confusedly. “Beg your pardon, Mr. Baggs. Good morning!”

“Well, no, I should think it was a bad morning. I want to know why you are interrupting me.”

“I didn’t mean to interrupt you. I am on my beat, and I only wish to attend to that. I saw you looking at the Chair, and I was looking at it myself.”

“Well, can’t a man look at the Chair and not be interrupted?” replied Baggs, with a good deal of warmth.

“Oh, yes, and I can too,” said Walter, who was not the person to be crowded when in the discharge of his duties. He felt that he represented the whole Life Saving Service of the Atlantic coast, and he was not willing that Baggs or any one else should do anything that looked like interference. “I suppose,” added Walter, “I looked at you rather hard, for you made me think of a man who mysteriously appeared and then disappeared in my uncle’s store one morning.” [226] The next moment, Walter was saying to himself, “There, I did not intend to say that. Just like me to let a thing out.”

Walter’s impulsive nature could not easily retain in concealment anything that interested him. It was like an arrow on the string of a drawn bow, and fly it might, any moment. Baggs was disposed to let fly something also.

“Then you haven’t forgotten that, have you?” he said testily. “What do you suppose a man would want in there, at that time? He couldn’t be stealin’, for I’d like to know what your uncle has got in there that’s worth stealin’, or got anywhere as to that matter. No, sir, I wasn’t the man. My mission is not that of a thief,” said the pure and lofty Baggs, striking an attitude designed to be majestic, but which only made more conspicuous the awkward proportions of his thick, squat figure.

“If you had let my uncle alone,” exclaimed Walter very decidedly, “he would have had something that might have been worth the envying.”

“Are you going to teach *me*, sir?”

“No, I am going about my business,” replied Walter coolly, “for I can’t stay here any longer.”

“Well, sir, another time don’t interrupt anybody looking off.” [227]

“I am willing any one should look at the Chair all day, Mr. Baggs. Good day, sir.”

Walter had said, “Well, I’ll treat him decently anyway,” but his last remark had an effect that does not generally follow “decent” remarks. Baggs trembled with excitement, blustered, almost foamed, and inquired stammeringly, “Why—why should I—look at—

the Chair? Why—why—what have I done—to it—why—what have I done to the Chair? You, you're mistaken, sir, you—"

Walter turned away in silence and walked on to the end of his beat. Baggs remained, muttering to himself as he looked toward the ill–omened rocks. When he did leave, he took the road leading to the village, passed through The Harbor and then followed the winding line of the water up to the mill.

"My nephew!" he exclaimed, and stopped as that brisk vigorous young trader approached.

"Not much trade stirring to–day," remarked Chauncy, rubbing his hands.

"Won't be in this hole," replied the uncle gloomily.

"Oh, yes," said Chauncy encouragingly, "it will come, it will come. Fact is, the weather is against us. You can't force a market against the weather." [228]

The two had halted near the water. Just beyond their feet, in a little curve of the shore, the water suddenly deepened. The boys of the neighborhood called it the "Pool," and sometimes used it as a bathing tub.

"There are too many people that are against us ever to expect much, Chauncy."

"What do you mean, uncle?"

"Well," said Baggs, dropping his voice and moving his head nearer to Chauncy's ear as if afraid that somebody might hear him, "there is that Walter Plympton. I think he knows more than is good for our business. He must somehow be forced out of the neighborhood. As I understand it, he will not be at the station long, but he must not stay here at all. I will get his old booby uncle to send him home; and I want you, nephew" (he always said this when he wished to be affectionate, and sincerely affectionate he never was), "I want you, nephew, to say round here and there, you know, that you—don't think he is much of a feller—indeed you know of his bein'—bein'—"

"Being what, uncle?" asked Chauncy eying sharply his relative.

"Well, if you don't just know, get up something. Well—"

"Get up what, uncle?" [229]

"Well, now, at the 'cademy, wasn't there some scrape, wasn't there drinkin', wasn't there—"

Chauncy was flippant and conceited and brassy, and he had veneered certain of his uncle's tricks of trade with the name "business methods," and had practiced them as the customary thing among shrewd, enterprising men, and therefore permissible. Chauncy was not base enough to spatter with lies the character of one whom he knew to be trustworthy. He had rather avoided Walter since the boat–race, but he could not deliberately go to work to ruin his character. Chauncy now mildly demurred; but at the same time, he lifted his cap and stroked those formidable locks of hair, and that meant a pugnacious attitude, a very decided, "I won't."

"Oh, I don't believe I would, uncle," said Chauncy. "I don't really know anything against Walter. He's a sort of a Puritan, and thinks considerable of Walter Plympton; but we all of us have a pretty good idea of ourselves. Guess I wouldn't," and he added a title sometimes used among the great man's relatives, "Uncle Bezzie."

This fond uncle was not in a mood to be contradicted, and then patted with a soft title. He turned fiercely on Chauncy, his face [230] swelling and darkening, his crooked eye flashing, and his voice roughening.

"What are you—you—makin' opposition for? Who raised you,—who—raised you, sir,—yes, raised from—from obscurity, and gave you a place in—in—a fust class mercantile house? What—why—do you oppose for? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir, yes—and —take that."

The uncle here lost control of the temper hidden behind the usually mild voice. He lost control of himself altogether, for advancing toward the astonished Chauncy, who was peacefully but decidedly rubbing his lofty knob of hair, he suddenly and violently pushed his beloved nephew over into the water. There was a fearful agitation, for a few moments, down in that hitherto peaceful pool; but Chauncy soon crawled out of the unexpected bath.

"That's—that's mean!" he ejaculated, spitting the water from his mouth and shaking it off from his dripping clothes. Baggs, though,

did not hear him. He was angrily moving away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BARNEY LITERARY CLUB.

Cook Charlie was a blessing. Nature had made him that handsome present of a happy temperament, and common sense had taught him to take good care of the gift.

“I know my man,” said Keeper Barney when he hired him. “He’s worth a fortin.”

I have already said that Cook Charlie was fat. He was also bald. Though not over thirty, his appearance of age gave a certain authority to his opinions, and a second title for him was that of “old man.” Old man or young man, he was always good–natured. Did it blow without? Did the wind bring a sting with every blast? Cook Charlie was calm. Did the sky scowl on the tired surfman? Cook Charlie was sure to smile. Did any discussion in the living–room [232] become a disputation, ill–natured, angry, and did the men turn uneasily in their chairs, stamping stormily on the floor with their hard, heavy boots? “So—so, boys,” Cook Charlie would exclaim. “Now, look here! Let me put that question.” And this amiable manipulator of contentious souls would “put the question” so skillfully that both sides might find themselves on the same side! Then Cook Charlie was monarch of the kitchen stove. He knew that, and what a center of comfort and happiness he made that stove! No sulking fire—one big, black pout—awaited the chilled surfman when he came from his windy beat; but a cheery heat radiated from that stove, in whose ascending current the patrolman rubbed and bathed his hands gratefully. Then the breakfasts, dinners, and suppers! There was not a great variety of food, but it was sure to be hot. It was sure to be abundant also. Then Cook Charlie would have a little “surprise” for the men, perhaps a pudding that he would covertly slip out of the oven and land on the table amid a series of, “Oh—Oh—Oh!” I think he realized that he had a mission in that bleak little station, and with his cook stove he could do marvels. He did not say it in words, but there was a cheerful little tune forever sounding in [233] his thoughts, and this was the burden of the song:

> “My stove is king,
> My stove is king.”

“Mr. Barney,” said the district superintendent Baker, one day, “who is your right hand man here—I mean the one you get the most help from?”

“My cook,” said the keeper promptly. “Of course he wants his wages, but I don’t think he works just for them. I think he takes a pleasure in seein’ how well he can do. He keeps his fire in good condition all the time, so that the boys can warm themselves handy any hour; and then, you know, surfmen must be well fed if you want good work of them. I call Cook Charlie my steerin’ oar.”

It was Cook Charlie that Walter had a special talk with one morning. The young surfman’s watch was now toward sunrise. He halted as he was about finishing his beat, and from the doorstep of the station, looked off upon the sea. Winter was whitening the earth, but the warm flush of summer was on the sea and in the sky. It was a holiday sky, a long fold of purple swathing the horizon. Then came a pink flush, and deep set in this was the morning star. The sea was [234] one vast sheet of silver, warm and placid. Along the shore, it was wrinkled and broken into surf. Far at the right, the sky was of a cold azure, and the sea beneath it was chilled and shadowy also. Here were two vessels sailing. They seemed to be eagerly pushing toward that summer light in the east and that sea of silver.

“I’ll watch the sun come up,” said Walter, and this sentinel of the Life Saving Service, his extinguished lantern in his hand, stood sharply watching as if for an enemy that would come by water. A noise on the land called his attention away for a few minutes. When he turned again, no enemy was there on that still, shining sea, but away off on the horizon’s edge was a tiny, pink boat, a boat without oar or sail, a boat that must have come for a carnival, but had mistaken the time of the year. The pink flamed into silver, and the little boat became a gay turban of some royal Turk about to show his eyes and peep over the horizon line at the earth. Was this the enemy that the young coastguard expected? No, the turban expanded into a very big innocent–looking frozen pudding laid by Neptune’s jolly

cook on this smooth, polished table of the sea. This confectioner's dish soon began to rise, growing into a lofty, bulging dome, a towering dome, rising, swelling, rounding out—till there swung clear of the sea a globe of fire, the sun himself! He began to assert his presence in the most unmistakable way, sending out the sharpest, the most dazzling rays, from which Walter was glad to turn away his eyes. [235]

"A new day," said Walter, "and what is to be done to–day? Breakfast, and then I may turn in awhile, and have a nap. The newspaper will come, and I suppose I shall read that. We shall have a drill of some kind, and the watch from the lookout must be kept up. Then I suppose we shall be loafing about Charlie's stove. I believe I have about gone through that library in the corner. I wish —yes—and I'll ask Charlie about it right off."

Cook Charlie was alone with his stove, his coffee–pot, and frying–pan. An appetizing fragrance welcomed the hungry young surfman as he opened the door of the station.

"Good chance now," thought Walter, "and I'll speak about it."

"Charlie," said Walter, laying down his time–detector and signal, and hanging up his lantern, "I wanted to ask your opinion."

"Ask away. No charge made."

"You know time hangs a little heavy here." [236]

"That's so, Walter, but what of it?"

"Well, I was thinking if we couldn't have a little variety here. Now there are some subjects that it would be rather interesting to know about, it seems to me, and it would be in our line of business. I mean such as the sea and storm, or commerce, or our Life Saving Service and that of England. You know somebody might write on them, and we have a little society–meeting and read our pieces. We could have a certain afternoon for it, and then we could discuss subjects. We might call it the 'Mutual Improvement Society,' or something like that, you know."

"That's quite an idea, Walter. The name though might frighten some of 'em out of doors."

"Call it—call it 'Round the Stove Society.'"

"Ha–ha, we have that all the time. That's a sticker, the name. What shall she be? Well, I guess we had better get our boat before we name it. You let me speak to the Cap'n, and then if he favors it, you say a word to Tom and Woodbury, and I'll try the rest."

Keeper Barney that morning was delayed by his work, and took his fried potatoes, biscuit and coffee after the usual breakfast hour. Cook Charlie thought, "Now is the time. We are alone, and I'll bring [237] up that little matter now. Let me see; how shall I take him? The Cap'n is a fustrate feller, but he likes to have the credit of siggestin', and doin' things hisself. I must jest fix it in some way so that he'll mention it hisself. Let's see."

Fingering his bald head as if he expected to find the right idea on the outside, if not inside, he approached the keeper, holding out an additional plate of "fried taters" just from the pan, steaming and savory, as an innocent magnet to bring the keeper's heart into a favorable attitude toward the new plan.

"Oh, Charlie, you're real good," exclaimed the keeper.

"You earn it, Cap'n. You have to work hard enough on somethin' all the time, fussin' or worryin'. I wish the men only had somethin' to occupy their time."

"'Twould be a good idea if they would jest till up their spare minutes," remarked the keeper, as he drank with avidity his coffee.

"A readin' somethin', you know; and it wouldn't hurt 'em to be a–studyin'."

"I know it. I wish our superintendent at Washington would send us two or three—four or five nice new books every winter for our lib'ry. Congress, of course, must give him the money." [238]

"Why, Cap'n, I've let your cup be empty! Jest let me fill it up smokin' hot."

"Charlie, you know jest where a man feels tender. You ought to run a beach hotel."

"I am a–doin' it now, Cap'n. Ha–ha! There, take another biscuit, a hot one. I do wish the men would be improvin' their minds. Everybody can do somethin'. One winter I was at Duxton, the young people there had a little society, to write on subjects, you know. Fact is, people can improve themselves if they want ter."

The keeper made no reply, not even saying, “A–hem!” He continued to eat in silence. Charlie eyed him sharply.

“Hullo! He’s got an idea! That’s the way he allers does when an idea strikes him. He says nothin’ and eats faster and faster, as if an idea on four legs, its mouth open, was after him. Hold on!” thought the cook.

Soon came a communication from the silent eater. He looked up, and then slammed his hands on the table.

“Charlie, I’ve got an idea! Now what do you think of it? There’s no sense in the men’s loafin’ round the stove forever. Let’s get up a society, a kind of readin’, perhaps speakin’ or debatin’ society. Call it—the—the—”

“Cap’n, you’ve hit the nail on the head. A cap’tul idee! Call it the [239]
Barney Lit’rary Club. Hoor–rah!”

And here Cook Charlie in his enthusiasm began to swing the dish that he held in his hand. It was half full of crisp brown potatoes, and they too were unable to resist the excitement of the hour, and danced off in every direction.

“Oh, Cap’n, there’s the rest of your breakfast!”

“No matter!” said the keeper, a light flashing from his eyes that made still warmer the color of his hair, his face and his beard. “No matter! I’ve had a good breakfast. We’ve got an idee, you know, to pay for it.”

“That’s so, Cap’n. You brought down the right bird that time.”

“You might sound the men on the subject and tell ’em what I’m a–thinkin’ of.”

“I will, Cap’n.”

“There’s Walter. He’s handy with his pen. You tech him up.”

“I will, sure.”

“I must be off now on the beach.”

As he left the room, Cook Charlie went to the door leading upstairs and called out, “Come here, Walter. The Cap’n’s proposed jest what we wanted, and I engaged to speak to you. Come down! I want to ‘tech’ you up.” [240]

Details were all arranged, and one afternoon the “Barney Literary Club” held its first meeting. It was a wintry day without. The wind blew sharp and strong from the north–west, and meeting the tide that was coming in, broke up the sea into short, fierce little waves whose dark, angry blue was spattered with flakes of white, chilling foam. Across the frozen land and the dark sea, the brightest of suns looked smilingly out of a clear sky, but his smiles did not warm the land or cheer the sea. Did not all this though, make the living–room of the station a snugger, jollier place?

“A grain small,” thought the keeper, “is this room when we and our big boots all try to get into it, but we have had some good times here, and we will have to–day another.”

The keeper, as president, sat in the chair of honor, and that was an ordinary chair placed against the wall between the boat–room door and the outer door. At his right sat Cook Charlie, the secretary, awkwardly fumbling a lead pencil and sheet of paper. Walter was on the left of the president. An eager yet embarrassed look was on his face, for he had been appointed to read a paper which he nervously clutched with both hands. The other members of the crew were scattered about the room, all of them permanently located except [241]
Slim Tarleton. It was his watch, and every few minutes he would run up the stairs and from the lookout sweep with his glass the sea, that subtle, treacherous power which must be watched, day and night. The president made a very short speech to the “Barney Literary Club,” and then read a paper on the United States Life Saving Service. The facts given are embodied already in this book.

“I will now call on Walter for a paper,” said the president.

There was a tickle that needed to be expelled from Walter’s throat, and at the same time a warm blush spread up to the roots of his hair.

“My paper is on the Life Saving Service of other countries. Great Britain, which has a coast almost five thousand miles long, has a Royal National Life–boat Institution. It is supported by voluntary offerings. Its object is to provide and maintain life–boats, and it also rewards efforts to save the shipwrecked at points where it may have no station. A life–boat with all necessary equipments, and that would include carriage, will cost somewhat over three thousand

dollars, and a boathouse can be built for about seventeen hundred. The cost of keeping up a station is about three hundred and fifty [242] dollars for the year, a sum that would support an American station with seven men for only one month. In England, the above sum pays the crew for going off to any wrecks, for exercising their boat once every three months, and covers also the coxswain's salary and any repairs. The life–boats are of different sizes—six, eight, ten and twelve–oared. Some of the crews go out but seldom. When it is rough thereabouts at the Goodwin Sands, the life–boat men must stand watch all the time. At Ramsgate, the service is so important that a steamer waits on the boat constantly, its fires banked up ready for any emergency. Different cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and others, have given life–boats to the Institution, and contribute every year to its funds.

"England's work though for the shipwrecked takes in something else besides the work of the life–boats. There is the Rocket Service. The thirtieth of June, 1881, there were two hundred and eighty–eight rocket stations. The rocket apparatus consists of the rocket, the rocket line, the whip, the hawser, and sling life–buoy. The rocket has a line, a light one, fastened to it, which is shot over a wreck. Then the rest of the apparatus is used. We use the gun or mortar instead of the rocket. England's rocket stations are under the [243] control of the Board of Trade. The men of the coastguard manage the rockets. For every life saved, the Board of Trade pays a sum of money. It gives medals also to those who may have shown unusual courage. The wants of sailors and others who may be saved from shipwreck are now met by the 'Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Royal Benevolent Society.' The work, then, that we do in our stations, in England seems to be spread out, and it is done by several bodies, and how much the whole may cost, I can't say. Of course, it is not fair to compare the money expended in England with the amount we spend, until we know all the expenses there. I think, though, our system is better than England's.

"There is a 'French Society for Saving Life from Shipwreck.' It was started in 1865, and not only along the coast of France, but in Algeria and other colonies, has this society carried on its work. In sixteen years, it saved two thousand and one hundred and twenty–nine lives. June 30th, 1881, it had sixty–two life–boat stations, and three hundred and ninety–one mortar or other projectile stations. It is modeled after the English system, but it prefers the gun to the rocket.

"There is the 'German Association for the Rescue of Life from [244] Shipwreck,' founded in 1865. It is supported by donations. The last report I saw, gave it seventy–four life–boat stations, twenty of these having the mortar or rocket apparatus. There must be a larger number now. In 1880–81, it saved two ships and a hundred and twenty–two lives; and from May, 1880, to May, 1881, its members subscribed over a quarter of a million of dollars. Germany has flat sandy beaches, and it cannot so well use England's heavy boats. It is said that in Russia, Italy and Spain, life saving societies patterned more or less after England's 'National Life–boat Institution,' have been organized. England must have a magnificent navy of life–boats and a fine rocket service; but I guess Uncle Sam with his hands in his deep pockets, paying out more and more every year, has organized a service that can't be matched elsewhere. That is my opinion, and I would like to ask the company's."

This patriotic appeal to the company was exceedingly popular. Boots went down heavily, hands came together sharply, and enthusiastic cries of "Good!" "Good!" were heard all over the room. Then the secretary read a humorous paper on "The Surfman—his first Stormy Patrol," giving experiences he had gleaned from the [245] crew, and so faithfully reported that they were readily recognized, winning him a round of hand–claps.

"Woodbury!" "Woodbury!" was now heard from several quarters. "That Sea–Sarpent! Let us have it!" "Don't be bashful!"

Woodbury Elliott was nervously twisting in his chair, the color deepening in his fair complexion, saying, "No! No! I couldn't!" But the Literary Club had all attended school with him, save Walter and Joe Cardridge (a bad specimen of imported humanity) and they knew what Woodbury could do at "speakin' pieces."

That famous character, the sea–serpent, he had made still more famous by his successful delivery, at school, of a comical criticism upon the animal, and in after days, it would often be called for, and

was always sure of an admiring audience.

"Well, here goes!" said the surfman, and Woodbury Elliott rose to give once more this marine gem. The laughter following it was hearty as ever, but it had not wholly died away when an unexpected orator, Joe Cardridge, volunteered to entertain the Literary Club.

"Boys, you did not know I was a speaker. Well, I was some, once," he asserted in his conceited way, "and if you'd like, I'll give you the 'Auctioneer.'" [246]

Without waiting for an answer from the club, he called out to Cook Charlie, "Where is that butter firkin I saw round here? I want it to stand on."

"A leetle ticklish, Joe. I wouldn't resk it."

"Oh, it's good enough. An auctioneer must be up 'bove his crowd, you know. Fun for ye now, boys, I tell ye. I was always great on it, and I guess I'm good for it now. Where's that firkin?"

The firkin was brought, turned upside down, and Joe mounted it. He had forgotten a part of his speech, but it made no difference in his enjoyment of his fancied brilliant success. He gesticulated, jumped up and down, endeavored to work up into buying mood his audience with frequent threats like this, "Goin', goin', genlummum!" The bottom of a butter firkin can stand what is reasonable, but what self–respecting firkin will submit to everything? Joe's would not. In the midst of several infuriated shrieks. "Goin', goin', genlummum," his audience looking on with a silent but manifest sneer, several heard a suspicious "cr—cr—ack!" Joe in his intense admiration of the performer did not hear it. He gave another jump, the word [247] "gone" issuing from his throat, when the firkin emphasized this threat by suddenly withdrawing its bottom, and "gone" it was for the auctioneer! Down he came, partly in the firkin and partly outside of it, falling in a very mixed condition. The club roared. Any merriment was now sincere. The president forgot all his dignity and joined in the laugh. The secretary was always ready for any fun. As for Joe, he was mad. He declared that he had been insulted. "Fool!" he shouted at Walter. "What you larfin' at?" Leering at the company in his rage and mortification, he rushed out of doors.

"Guess he'll cool off there," observed the president. "We will have the next exercise."

This was the "Opening of the Drawer." Any one was at liberty to drop into an imaginary drawer any question about the papers. He could ask it orally, or write it on a slip of paper. The club would then attempt to answer the question.

After a session of two hours, this company of literati broke up. It resolved itself into a station–crew again. Distinguished orators and able writers changed into hungry surfmen around a supper table where huge cups of coffee sent up little clouds of fragrant steam. [248] There was a further change into patrolmen in thick Scotch caps, and Guernsey jackets and heavy, stamping boots, into watchers for the night coming and going. At last the unemployed members of the Literary Club were all soundly snoring under thick army blankets, the little kitchen was deserted, save by the keeper, and the stove made but a faint little murmur by the side of that great black ocean thundering on the rocks and roaring all through the cold, black night.

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[249]

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UGLY NIGHT.

The Advent days had now come, when the winds blow keen across the frozen ground, and nature seems to be in a violent grief over sins it had hoped to bury in frosty graves forever, but which will not quietly lie there. “Beyond Advent though is Christmas,” thought Walter, “and I shall spend it at Uncle Boardman’s. Father and mother will be there.”

Walter’s time at the station had almost expired. He could not say that he was tired of the service, and yet he noticed something in the attitude of the men which made him a little discontented. What it was, he could not definitely say, but there was some coolness on their part. Tom Walker and Woodbury Elliott were exceptions to any change by way of coolness, and yet was there not a noticeable [250] warmth of treatment on their part? It had an element of pity, and as Joe Cardridge froze into a cold, contemptuous silence toward Walter, as others coolly noticed him, Tom and Woodbury were more cordial. When the wind, wintry and sharp, cuts into a party of men out doors, they may protect themselves against it by a fire. Does the wind blow more and more chilly? Then they pile the wood higher and higher. So Tom and Woodbury made friendship’s fire burn all the warmer, because an outside atmosphere was growing colder.

What did it all mean? Walter could not see to the bottom of this mystery. What had he done, why one man should shrink from him, and at the same time another man grow so much more friendly?

In addition to all this, came a very significant look from the keeper, one afternoon, as he and Walter chanced to be alone, and after the look, came a significant question. It was one of those sharp looks where one seems to have a gimlet in his eyes, and he bores deep into the person he confronts. Such a look as that of the detective meeting a criminal.

“Walter—I—I—hope I am on the wrong track altogether—but there are some stories round about you which I think you ought to [251] know, and as keeper I think I ought to look into ’em. We have to be particular here, but you know that, of course—and—”

“Well, what is it, Cap’n Barney? Don’t keep a fellow roasting in an oven longer than is necessary. I am ready to answer any charges.”

Walter’s eyes were flashing, and as he straightened up in his indignation, it seemed as if he had grown six inches taller during the short speech the keeper had made.

“I have been suspecting that something was out of the way, because some of the men have cooled off so, and I’d like to get hold of the trouble well as you, Cap’n Barney. I’ll pull that rat out of his hole, if I can catch hold of his tail.”

The keeper smiled. He admired the young man’s spirit of ready, honest indignation, and Walter s figure of speech amused him.

“Wall, Walter, I don’t say the stories are true, and I have said that no man is to be held guilty until proved to be, and if you deny them, that *ends* ’em for me.”

He emphasized his remarks and put a period to them by bringing a huge, brown fist down on the long kitchen table, making the Coston signals and time–detectors there rattle away.

“Well, sir, name the charges, for it is getting awful warm here,” [252] said Walter, in his impatience to know the charges, which he felt was to know several lies.

“Wall, they say at the ’cademy where you were, that you were up to scrapes, a–drinkin’ and carousin’, and that you have been drinkin’ here, even while at the station.”

“It is a lie, one big Atlantic lie, big as that ocean out there!”

“There, I told ye so!” said a voice triumphantly. “I knew it was just so! Good for you, Walter! S’cuse me, Cap’n, but I happened to come in just then and couldn’t help a–hearin’ ye.”

It was Tom Walker who had suddenly entered, his bushy beard whitened by the snow–flakes dropping without.

“If you hadn’t mentioned it, Cap’n, I was goin’ to, this very day. I thought it was dickerlus and didn’t b’lieve it was worth noticin’ at fust; but it’s got so at last, I should have spoken of it if you hadn’t,

and Woodbury would if I hadn't."

"That's so, Cap'n, every word of it!" and now behind Tom, appeared Woodbury at the door, brushing the snow off from his coat. "That's so," he continued, and he looked at Walter not at all in the gimlet fashion, but a friendly smile of recognition lightened up [253] his handsome face.

"Oh, you are of my mind, boys," said the keeper. "I knew Walter wouldn't do that thing. It is not his style at all."

"Now, Cap'n, I want to know who has been accusing me," said Walter. "This thing must be looked into."

"That is only fair. Several have mentioned it, but Joe Cardridge seems to be the special one."

"Joe Cardridge! Where is he?" asked Walter looking at the boat–room door, the outer door, the door leading upstairs to the crew's room. "Where is he? I'll get him and bring him here and face the charges here."

He was starting off, trying to go in several directions at once, when the keeper said, "Hold on, Walter. It is Joe's day off. He is not within a mile of this place now, but he will be back I s'pose in time to go on his beat. This thing shall be looked into."

"I insist upon it that it shall," said Walter.

The weather outside was not at all attractive to the patrolmen that day, and when the twilight drew its dusky curtains about the station, the outlook was still bad. A north–west wind was blowing very strong and cutting. Snow was still falling in light, dry flakes. [254] What was already on the ground served as a plaything to the wind that seemed to be intelligently and maliciously gathering it up and then hurling it into the faces of all travelers, flinging it over their heads in blinding, cutting sheets, withdrawing these until its victim walked in an easy, careless confidence, then sending the snow again in sheets more closely folding and stifling and cutting.

"You'd better wrap up specially warm," was Tom Walker's reminder to Walter, who went on to his beat at night.

"I will, thank you. I will put on that new blue flannel blouse for one thing."

"I would, Walter. I find that mine comes in awful handy. You see it is padded thick and warm. Six of us, I believe, bought them."

These six new flannel blouses were bought from a traveling clothing–peddler who came to the station and with a glib tongue so skillfully paraded the advantages of a purchase, that almost all the men accepted this rare opportunity.

"Well, Walter, you might have done wuss," said Aunt Lydia, one day when Walter chanced to call upon her, and laying it on her sewing basket asked her to examine the blouse.

"You paid all it's worth, but it does seem thick and warm, and I [255] guess it will do you service. I will take a few stitches in it for you where a needle is wanted."

"A pretty good looking set of surfmen when we get our new blouses on, neat and clean, you know, and then turn out for some drill at the station. The only trouble is that the coats look so much alike and are of about the same size."

"Look alike!" thought Aunt Lydia. "Guess I will tuck a blue 'W' on somewhere."

With her nimble needle, she "tucked" this blue initial inside one of the sleeves just above the wrist. The blouse lining was white. Without any reference to this, she handed Walter's blouse back to him.

He wore this blouse, that night of the wind and snow.

"Glad I have got it," he said, pushing out into the night. "It helps keep a fellow warm. Now for it!"

He crossed from the station lot to the beach, and was glad to find a strip of sand that the rising tide had not yet covered. "Boom—m—m—m!" went the waves in one unending roar. The wind was drowned in that chorus, and as it blew from the north–west and drove at his back, Walter cared little for its fury. When the tide [256] forced him to walk upon the rocks, though their surface was so uneven and so slippery with the snow, he made steady progress and completed his beat in about the usual time, He turned to begin his homeward walk, and then the wind pounced upon him with all its fury.

"Now I have you!" it seemed to say. "I can drive into your face,

blind your eyes with snow—there, take that!" A flurry of flakes came into his face, sharp, tingling, compelling him to turn and offer his back to the charge.

"I can go this way," thought Walter. "Hard work though! What if I should see any trouble on the water and have to signal and start for the station?"

No sign of trouble did the young patrolman discover, no flash from any rocket. There was only one huge, roaring blackness! He stubbornly fought his way over the rocks, across any chance bit of sand, now splashing through the pools left in the ledges by the tide, struggling over an ice bank to high ground where a field skirted the shore and along whose edge he could walk and still have before him that ocean which he must continually watch and ever be prepared to fight. He was not far from the station, and was saying, "Well, I have [257] whipped the wind this time," when he remembered that he still had an ugly place to cross. It was an abrupt break in a shore ledge, and could be avoided by keeping to the right and taking the ground in the rear of the ledge. By making this detour, though, he lost sight of the sea, and in that interval, what if some vessel sent up from the water its plea for help—a vain appeal because no vigilant patrol detected the rocket's flight?

"I must go down into that hole and keep my eyes on the ocean," thought Walter, and guided by his lantern, he was stepping down the rough declivity in the rock, when the wind as if fearful that it might for a single instant, in some sheltered nook, lose its opportunity to make trouble, blew with frantic fury. In the midst of this fiendish blast, Walter's light was blown out!

"She's gone!" he was saying one moment, and the next, he was conscious that he was making a misstep and was tumbling! Then came a blank, as if the wind extinguishing his lantern, had extinguished him also, and down into a black hole he had fallen. There was an interval of unconsciousness black as the sea beyond him. Finally he was aware that somebody was calling to him. A light [258] also was trying to reach him as he lay at the bottom of this deep, black pit. The light flashed into his eyes, sharpened and expanded, and the voice too sounded louder and louder. At last, the voice said, "Hullo, boy, what ye up to down here?"

"Joe Cardridge!" thought Walter.

"Come, git up! Lemme help ye!"

"What have you been saying about me?" was Walter's first thought. Then he reflected: "Well, this is hardly the time to bring the matter up when a man is saving you from a fall."

"Jest lean on me. You had an ugly tumble," said Joe.

"Oh, I guess I can get up, thank you."

"There's blood on your face. You must have hit yourself when you struck." Then Joe's tone changed. "That comes from havin' surf–boys round," he muttered with a sneer. "Ought to be home with their mothers."

"What did you say?" asked Walter, catching the words with difficulty in his confused state of mind. "I'm obliged to you for finding me, but I can walk myself. Surf–boys are good for something," he added with pride.

"Oh, don't be techy. Come along."

"You can go ahead," said Walter with dignity, "and I will follow." [259] Joe made another mutter, but it was unintelligible this time, and Walter made no reply.

"I have had a bad tumble and did not know anything for some time," said Walter, as he entered the station and found Cook Charlie in a chair by the stove.

"Poor feller!" exclaimed the cook sympathetically. "Sit down here, and I'll have you some coffee less than no time. What—blood on ye? Here, let me wipe it off."

"Not serious, I guess."

"No, only a hard rub. I'll fix it."

Charlie insisted on caring for Walter, but the latter said he must care for himself. Cook Charlie's sympathy though, was pleasant. Something else was agreeable; Walter's mortification and bruises were all finally drowned in the depth of that sea never cruel but always kind—sleep.

Keeper Barney was walking the next morning through the crew's sleeping quarters when he heard a stealthy step behind him. With

the sound of the steps came the sound of a voice, “Cap’n.”

“Oh, is that you, Joe?”

“Yes, Cap’n. May I have a word with you?” asked Joe Cardridge.

“Sartin. Say on.” [260]

“I don’t know as it is any of my business, but it is some of your’n. You know there have been stories round about that boy, Walter—”

“Yes, Joe, and I don’t believe them. I told him about them, and he wanted to know who said so, and I had to give your name. He is dreadful anxious to see you, and if you have any proof, I advise you to be ready to bring it on.”

“Proof!” said Joe sneeringly, flashing a spark of hate out of his usually dull, sleepy black eyes. “What was last night but proof?”

“Last night? Why, it was an awful tough night, and the feller stumbled. Did you never fall? Cook Charlie said it was done in the discharge of duty, so he gethered, that Walter might have avoided the place, but if he had, he would have lost sight of the ocean, and not bein’ so well used to the place as some of the rest of us, he did not succeed in keepin’ his footin’.”

“Keepin’ his footin’!” was Joe’s contemptuous reply. “Look here! What would you say if I told you the boy was under the influence of liquor when I found him. I s’pose he took suthin’—it bein’ a cold night—and he took too much; but you don’t want the men to do that.” [261]

“Neither too much nor too little. I don’t want them to touch it at all. There is plenty of hot coffee. That will brace ’em up and warm ’em up. Do you mean to say that you have positive proof that Walter had been a–foolin’ with drink?”

“He acted jest like it.”

“But he was hurt, and very nat’rally was confused.”

“S’posin’ I should say I saw a bottle stickin’ out of his pockets, when he was undressin’?”

“You did?”

“May be there now, for all I know,” said Joe carelessly.

“Nonsense. I don’t believe it. You are altogether too suspicious, and I can prove it now.”

Here the keeper walked to the opposite side of the room, and turning to the clothes that swung from a row of pegs above Walter’s chest, began to pull them over. Suddenly he drew back his hand as if it had touched a red–hot coal! In one of the pockets in Walter’s blue blouse, was a brandy–flask!

“Indeed!” exclaimed the keeper.

“Didn’t I tell ye so? That’s what I saw in Walter’s pocket last night, and I smelt his breath. You goin’ to keep such a boy as that round?” [262]

Here Joe looked up into the keeper’s face somewhat as a snake might be supposed to eye the object he had struck and vanquished.

“Wall—I must look into this. Let everything stay jest as it is. I must go into my room a few minutes. Soon as Walter comes into the station, I’ll have him up here, and I want you to be round too.”

“I’m ready any time, Cap’n. I’m down on pickerprites. Only next time, Cap’n, be willin’ to take my word quick as you do Walter’s.”

Keeper Barney did not hear the last sentence. He hurried away to his room, glad to close the door and hide his manifest disappointment. His position was one that bringing responsibility, carried anxiety with it also. There were many details in his work sometimes perplexing and always burdening. He expected this. He was prepared to find among the men in his crew the average amount of laziness and eye–service, of ill–temper and jealousy. He was not surprised if some men proved to be treacherous, and after seeing Joe Cardridge’s face once, he expected to find many bad places in the fabric of his character. Walter Plympton, he did thoroughly trust, and he was heartsick at the evidence that he was untrustworthy.

“I did not expect to git that blow,” said the keeper. “However, I’ll [263] see what Walter has to say ’fore finally condemnin’ him. The evidence though looks bad. The sooner I go through this thing, the better. Walter will be in pretty quick, I guess.”

He appeared sooner than he was expected. Joe Cardridge’s boots had hardly ceased to pound their way downstairs before another pair began to pound their way up, and somebody rapped on the keeper’s door.

“Come in!” was Keeper Barney’s response. The door opened and Walter entered.

“Joe Cardridge said you wanted to see me and I told him I wanted to see him and you together. He has not come though. And then, sir, I had a letter for you. I brought it with me from the office last evening, but you were not here when I came, and Cook Charlie thought it would do to give it to you this morning rather than disturb you, as you were not feeling just right. It is in my blouse hanging up, and I will get it now.”

Walter fumbled in his pockets for the letter, but his blouse refused to yield any such document. Indeed, it had none to yield.

“Why, why, I can’t find it!” stammered Walter.

“What letter?” asked the keeper sternly. He had followed Walter [264]
into the crew’s room, and was eying him sharply.

“It was a letter from the district superintendent,—judging from the envelope—and I supposed I had it sure, but I can’t find it where I put it. Let me hunt all through my blouse, look in every pocket. What’s—this? Why!”

The keeper eyed Walter still more sharply and curiously, watching him with a smile of wonder to see what Walter would do when he reached the pocket where the brandy flask was. A guilty person would have attempted to hide it, but in a natural way Walter pulled it out, held it up, and manifested his surprise.

“Is that the letter the superintendent sent?” inquired the keeper sarcastically. “If it is, he has changed his principles a good deal.”

“That isn’t mine. I don’t know anything about it, Cap’n Barney.”

“Look here! Hasn’t this thing gone far enough, Walter? Here you arrive at the station in a s’picious condition when your patrol is up, one of the surfmen picking you up, and a brandy flask is found in your pocket. A letter too is missing, a letter from the deestrick superintendent, who will make us a visit in five days, and I s’pose it
is a special matter he wants me to look into. It puts me in a pretty [265]
fix. You—you—you.” The keeper was stumbling about in his effort to find the word he wished to use. He was angry at the loss of the letter, knowing that it might contain directions whose neglect would seriously damage him in the opinion of his superior. While he was irritated by a sense of his loss, Walter was indignant at the thought that he could be supposed to carry a brandy flask with him for tippling purposes. His bright hazel eyes were full of fire–flashes, and he threw back his handsome head in the pride of innocence.

“Cap’n Barney,” he asserted, “I am very sorry that letter can’t be found. I think it will be found, but if it should not turn up to–day I will write to the superintendent and tell him frankly of all that happened, of my misfortune last night, and ask him to write to you, saying that I am sorry for troubling him, and as for the other matter —”

“Yes,” said a voice breaking in suddenly, “that’s fair enough.” It was Cook Charlie’s voice. He had come upstairs, unobserved by the keeper and Walter. “You see, Cap’n,” he continued, and in that tone of voice which was peculiar to Charlie and was like “oil on troubled waters,” “I am part to blame ’bout this letter business. Walter had it
last night, and wanted to hand it over then, but I told him jest to [266]
hold on to it, that the mornin’ would do. Of course, you work hard, and you were sick—and everybody knows you have enough on your mind to make a hoss sick, and there isn’t a more faithfuler keeper on the coast—and of course, I did not want to disturb ye. Blame me as well as Walter. Oh, it will turn up! Besides, he has offered to do the fair thing in writing to the superintendent, and that relieves a faithful keeper like you, and nobody could do more.”

Under the skillful stroking of Cook Charlie’s words of praise, Keeper Barney’s agitation rapidly subsided, and the hard, angry lines in his face began to fade away.

Walter now spoke; “As for that brandy flask, I have no idea how it came in my pocket. It is my coat, I allow, but I don’t own what’s in that pocket. There is some mistake here, and it was put in accidentally or somebody is trying to harm me. You can dismiss me if you want to, but I want the superintendent to investigate this whole matter, and if you will wait until he comes—no, turn me off now if you think it fair when I have had no chance to turn round,
you might say, and speak for myself.” [267]

“It is Joe Cardridge who says you were not jest right when he found you last night.”

“Does *he* say that I had been a–drinking? Then it’s a lie. Let me see him! Where is he?”

“Quiet, Walter! You have got friends.” This was a new voice, Woodbury Elliott’s.

By this time, all the crew were upstairs. The loud talking had attracted one curious head above the railing that guarded the stairs running up from the kitchen, then another head, then a third, till finally they all had stolen up stealthily, for no matter what etiquette might have demanded, the curiosity of human nature inherited from Eve (and Adam also) was a stronger motive, and there they were in a rough circle about the keeper and Walter.

“Quiet!” said Woodbury softly to Walter again. “Cap’n Barney, let me say a word why I think you should let this thing hang over until the superintendent’s visit, that is supposin’ you had made up your mind to discharge Walter.” He then proceeded to review the whole case, beginning with the slanderous stories whispered about Walter, and closing with a reference to the mysterious discovery of the flask in Walter’s pocket. Against everything that looked suspicious, he put Walter’s previous good character and excellent record.

“Cap’n Barney, has a man of us given you so little trouble in his [268]
conduct in the station? Has a man been more prompt to mind you, been more pleasant among the crew?”

As Woodbury went on, pleading with animation, it was plain that in the opinion of the crew, he was fully sustaining his reputation as the best school orator in the “deestrict.” There were little chuckles of admiration heard now and then, and the keeper himself nodded his assent to Woodbury’s points.

He had hardly finished his plea, when an eager voice on the outer rim of the circle squeaked, “Lem *me* speak! Guess I can speak some,” said Joe Cardridge, hastily moving forward. “I have a few p’ints to make. I was the one who found Walter, and know more’n any one else. I’ve told ye how I found him, and you know what you yourself found in his blouse! And what do the reggerlations say?”

He now began to quote from a regulation that says, “Keepers are forbidden to keep or sell, or allow to be kept or sold on the station premises, any intoxicating liquors; nor will they permit any person under the influence of intoxicating drinks to enter the station house or remain upon the premises.”

With all the impressiveness of a jury orator, gesticulating [269]
furiously, amid the undisguised impatience of his auditors, he continued to quote: “Keepers will—will—not permit any—pusson—under the—influen—en—za—of intoxicatin’—drinks—drinks—er—er.”

“Er—Er!” said some one in the ring of listeners, and all began to laugh. Joe was raving. He declared that he would not stay to be insulted, that Walter was clearly proved guilty. He was careful to say nothing disrespectful to the keeper, but he did not hesitate to pay his compliments to the crew in very stalwart Saxon. He then went downstairs, stamping and raving about “Surf–boys.” He would have returned, but the keeper stopped him. “I shall do my duty,” coolly declared the keeper, “and I shall expect you, Joe Cardridge, to do yours. As for Walter’s case, it shall lie over until the arrival of the superintendent. If you can explain things, Walter, I shall be glad to have you. I don’t think any of you will blame me for not dismissing the case at once when you remember how strictly I shall be held to account, and how dangerous in our work all tamperin’ with liquor may be. Cool heads and steady nerves, we must have.”

“I believe that, Cap’n Barney,” said Walter, “and I will help you [270]
maintain discipline. I only want a chance to turn around and defend myself; for somebody is striking at me in the dark, and I don’t know where to strike back. It is a cowardly game they are playing. False, every bit of it.”

“That’s so,” grunted that faithful supporter, Tom Walker.

“Only give me a chance, sir,” insisted Walter.

“You are goin’ to have it.”

When the crew separated, Slim Tarleton patted Woodbury on the shoulder and said, “You did well, Wood; you did well. ’Twas good as the ‘Sea Sarpint.’”

The favorite orator of The Harbor was gratified to win this praise, and he went away happy. With what feelings though did Walter separate from his mates? Buttoning his coat closely about him, into the wintry air out he stepped, anxious to seclude himself a while. He

went to a nook in the rocks overshadowing the dismal, unfortunate hole into which he fell only the night before. The storm was over. The clouds were breaking up, and the hard, pitiless blue sky was disclosing itself in irregular patches. The tone of the coloring of the sea was also that of a hard, pitiless blue, dashed here and there with chilling foam–streaks. Against a land white and frozen, the surf continually swept like one snow–drift rolling up against another. [271] Walter sat down in his rocky corner and looked off upon the sea. It was not pleasant to be suspected, and suspected wrongfully. It was true that he had the sympathy of most of the crew, and the keeper wished to find him innocent, but Keeper Barney showed that he was distrustful. Walter's time at the station was almost up. In a week, Silas Fay, for whom Walter had been serving as substitute, expected to be in his old place, and Walter wished to leave with credit, not under this horrible cloud of suspicion. He was going back to Uncle Boardman's. He would meet The Harbor people and May Elliott. He would soon visit those at home. It was not an agreeable thought that he would go as one accused even if not proved guilty. He felt that these accusations set him apart, isolated him, and others were looking at him as one suspected. There was a great, crushing loneliness that bore upon him,—only for a moment though. While he was watching the sea and the eastern sky, the sun suddenly broke through the clouds, and a flood of light swept everywhere, far out to sea, far along the shore, warming the wave–crests, the surf, the snow–banks. And with this burst of light, flashed into Walter's soul the thought of God, filling and glorifying all space without, all the [272] soul within. It was God who knew him, understood him, believed him, would befriend him; and Walter was no longer alone. That revelation of God made in this trying hour was a new, unanticipated, rich experience. It came when he was hard pressed and driven in upon himself, so weak, helpless and alone, only to find that God had not failed him and was with him all the time. God will not fail any trusting child. He will stand by you. Walter felt strong. He rose from his seat in the rocks and stood erect as if shaking off a hard, heavy burden. The tears were in his eyes.

"I did not think God was so near," he murmured. In his religious life, he had been trying to follow God, not with all the success he craved, and yet still trying to follow Him. And now in this hour of trial, of attack by enemies, that great Leader had come to him and strengthened him. Is He not always near? There is dimness of sight in us, and not a lack of nearness on God's part.

"I will try to keep close to God," thought Walter.

There came to him also that consciousness of nature's approbation, which he had experienced once before. The sky, the sun, the sea, all seemed to assure him that he was right and that [273] they were in league with him. That sea, though—could it be trusted? Might it not prove treacherous, those chilling hidden depths under all the sunlight now flashing across the waves?

"Five days in which to show I am innocent," said Walter. "Who knows what may happen in five days?"

Yes, who could tell?

He turned from the sea and walked back to the station.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A SOUL IN NEED.

Two days after Walter's fall in the night, he had leave of absence extending from sunrise to sunset. He did not care to take it, his time at the station was so brief, and especially as he was anxious to prove his purpose to be loyal to all obligations resting upon him.

"It is your turn to be off, Walter," said the keeper. "You are fairly entitled to it, and I want you to have what is yours. Be on hand at sunset. You may learn something in your favor, and you had better improve your chance."

With the keeper's apparent kindness went an insinuation that Walter's course had not entirely been swept clean of every shadow of suspicion, and if he could find a broom to do this sweeping, it was plainly suggested that he had better secure it. That remark decided Walter in his course. He left the station in no pleasant mood of [275] mind, and the keeper's words had occasioned it. "If I can, I will get that help," thought Walter, walking off rapidly, "but—where?"

He was puzzled. One memory came to him, however. It was what his father said once: "Walter, if things go wrong, if people say we are wrong and yet we know we are right, but can't somehow show it and prove it, then wait and let God do the proving. He is as much interested in good character as we, more so even, and He will bring things round right. Tie up to that post."

"I will tie up to that post," declared Walter.

He did not go directly to his uncle's, but took the road to The Harbor.

"Walter!" said a voice as he was passing the post–office. He turned quickly. A young woman had just left Miss P. Green's headquarters, and was calling to him. It was May Elliott. She looked at him in her earnest way, her blue eyes brightening as she said, "I only want to say that I hope you won't care for those stories about you at the station. Your friends have confidence in you, and don't believe what has been said against you."

"Thank you. That does me good. It's pretty hard to be accused [276] when you are innocent."

"Well, you wait. The truth will come out; and when it comes, you will be justified. Oh, there is something else on my mind. Did you know that Chauncy Aldrich was sick?"

"I only heard that he was indoors with some trouble."

"They say he is pretty sick, and Miss P. Green, where he is boarding, says he is low–spirited. I did not know but that you might like to call and see him."

Waiter declared that he would go at once. He found Chauncy in a little room with a single window. From this there was a view across the white snowfields to the blackish ocean, scowling angrily like an immense eye under a dark, heavy lid of cloud. Chauncy was lying on his bed, his head raised a little that he might look out upon the winter scenery. His eyes were bright but somber, and his hands were thin and white. That cold bath to which his uncle had unceremoniously treated him, and which he afterwards attempted to explain as a "little joke," had provoked the sickness so bleaching and weakening and thinning the once vigorous young trader. Every feature showed the effect of the hard fever that had attacked him. [277] Even the knob of hair that was so accustomed to bristle on Chauncy's head and silently to defy all the world, had now been humbled. His hair in a thick, tangled mass, suggested a fort in ruins.

"Plympton, how are you? I'm real glad to see you. Sit down, old boy. Where have you been all this time?"

"At the station, you know. They tie us pretty tight, but it is my day off. I'm real sorry you are sick, Aldrich."

"O thank you! Guess I shall pull through it, but it's awful hard to be cooped up here," and as he said this, he kicked at the bed–clothes with a sudden energy. "A business man, you know, that is used to stirring, can't come down to this easily. I'm real glad you came in. Say, are you going up to your uncle's?"

"I thought I should."

"Well—"

Chauncy hesitated. He wished to say something about his Uncle

Bezaleel. He did not know very much about Baggs' business relations to Boardman Blake. In spite of Baggs' blustering display of confidence in his nephew, any ostentatious intimations that Chauncy knew everything about his business in general, Chauncy knew very little. One reason was that the uncle's business, after all the brag, [278] was very limited, and then Bezaleel knew that Chauncy had too much principle to back him in certain dishonest schemes. The young man now hesitated, impelled to say something about his uncle, and yet held back by an unwillingness to damage one with whom he had been associated.

"I guess you had better go to your uncle's, Plympton. There is going to be a conference there, I believe, my uncle and his lawyer, and your uncle and his lawyer, and oh, I don't know what else. Miss Green told me; and bless me, what that mail–bag don't know, isn't worth the knowing. She will hold more news than an ocean steamer. Now mind, Plympton, I don't know what is up. Take my word for it. But there is something to pay, and I would go there."

"I shall, most certainly," and Walter's eye flashed like that of a watch dog who starts in the night as he catches the stealthy step of a burglar. "I hope it is nothing serious with my uncle."

"I don't know how it is; but two lawyers—that means a rush in the market, Plympton; yes, a rush."

Chauncy ceased talking. His efforts at conversation had already wearied him. He lay upon his bed silently arguing a point. This [279] "rush in the market" meant a very significant movement by his enterprising uncle, though its exact nature was a mystery to Chauncy. His uncle's slippery ways had suggested to him one occasion when he himself had been false to Walter, and almost involuntarily he exclaimed, as one may do in sickness that weakens the control of the mind over itself,—"I don't think I ever tried to deceive you, save once. I hope though you won't hold it against me."

Walter caught this confession imperfectly; and what made him guess the occasion to which Chauncy referred? Was it a chance look out of the window toward the rocks of the Crescent, about which the surf had wound its scarf of snow? Walter thought of the day when he saw Bezaleel Baggs on the shore looking off toward the Chair. He was reminded of Bezaleel's resemblance to the mysterious form he saw one morning in Boardman Blake's store, that morning when Chauncy Aldrich so persistently tried to call off Walter's attention from the store. Walter now turned suddenly to the invalid.

"Aldrich, see here. What do you mean by saying you deceived me once? I can only think of one time when I guess you did try to pull [280] the wool over my eyes, and I want you to own up if it was so. Do you remember one morning when I first came this way to stop? I was opening my uncle's store and you drove down in a wagon, and I came out to the door and saw you there, and I fancied I saw somebody else in the store?"

Chauncy nodded his head in assent. Then he added slowly, "That's—the time—I mean, too."

"Look here! Wasn't that your uncle inside the store?"

Chauncy hesitated. He spoke at last, and with sudden force. "Plympton, I don't want to deceive you now; but I did then, and am sorry. It was my uncle in the store. Now, I don't want to go back on anybody, sick as I am. He is my mother's brother, if he isn't what he ought to be." His lip quivered. He was thinking of a mother, long ago at rest in death.

"Perhaps you mean that you don't want me to say anything about it, and that it will look as if you had turned against your uncle. I don't think I need to speak of you. I saw him with my own eyes, though I don't know what he was up to there in the store."

"I don't," whispered Chauncy.

"It is a satisfaction to have you confirm my opinion, and as for [281] yourself anything between us is all settled."

"Thank you."

"There, I have bothered you too long. I didn't mean to stay here all this while."

"I kept you, I kept you. Don't go. It's fearful lonesome here, save when Green comes up; and then she may look at me and say I make her think of her brother who died, and cries—well, that don't help a feller; and I stay here and think, you know. Say, Plympton!" Chauncy's eyes shone out bright and sharp. "Say, I don't want to die!"

“Oh, I don’t believe you will. I am thinking of this: soon as I get off from the station,—and my time is up in a few days,—how would you like to have me be your nurse? I could sit with you, you know, and I am strong and could lift you easily when you wanted to change about.”

Strong? The very sight of the young surfman so muscular and healthy was an elixir to Chauncy. He seemed to take strength from Walter at once, and certainly his own stock needed reinforcement, for he was very feeble.

Walter pitied him; “Poor fellow!” he said, and Walter laid his hand on Chauncy’s forehead and gently stroked it. “I’m sorry for you, and I’ll help you.” [282]

The tears came in Chauncy’s eyes.

“Weak, you see, Plympton, weak as a baby. I should like to have you come first rate. You make—me—think—of my mother when she was alive—she did that—put her hand there, you know.” The tears came faster now.

“Now I would be quiet,” said Walter soothingly.

“Oh, this don’t hurt me, only when Green comes and looks at me, as much as to say: ‘A bad bargain, a bad bargain!’ See here, Plympton! Do you remember May Elliott’s composition at the Academy?”

“Yes, I’m sure I do.”

“Well, I have thought of that a lot. You might not think so, but I have, driving round you know, a business man, watching the market, you know. She said the life—what was it?”

“The life that does not take others into account, God and another life—that’s the idea—was making a great mistake.”

“Yes, that’s it; and lying here, I have said to myself, ‘Aldrich, you’ve made a mistake. You are buying stock that will fetch precious little. Yes, a mistake.’” [283]

“Well, Aldrich, I won’t keep you talking; but before I go, why not take God into account, let me ask? Why not tell Him how much you need Him, that you are sorry, and want Him to help you to a better life, and that you give yourself to Him?”

“He’d get a tremendous poor bargain if He took me. All run down now.”

“God knows all that. Let’s see. What is that verse about God commending His love toward us, saying while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us?”

“Christ died for us! That does me good. That’s like cold water when the fever is on and you are fearful thirsty,” and Chauncy moved his lips as if drinking.

“Then there is another verse—I don’t know as I say it exactly, but I can give the idea—that when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.”

“Yes, yes,” and again a thirsty soul drank of this cool goblet of good news.

“Plympton, I say!”

He spoke with much emphasis, as if he had a matter of great importance to relate or a favor to ask.

“I don’t know as you have a prayer handy you could say, have you?” [284]

Walter hesitated. What prayer could he say that would help another? There was the Lord’s Prayer, though. He could say that. Kneeling and holding Chauncy by the hand—how tightly Chauncy clung to that strong, friendly hand—Walter began, “Our Father!”

“Our Father,” repeated Chauncy, and then followed Walter through the prayer.

Walter added a few more words in which he tried to approach an ever present, ever willing Saviour, beseeching that Chauncy might be helped right there to give himself entirely up to God; braiding into his words, the touching, solemn collect: “Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers.”

Walter then rose from his knees.

“That was another good drink,” Chauncy said.

“I did not mean to stay so long, Aldrich. Why, the tide is almost in,” said Walter, glancing out of the window. “The Crescent is pretty well covered.”

“Oh, don’t go!”

“Pretty well covered! What’s that verse? It is about God’s forgiveness. I read it in the Psalter last Sunday; ‘And covered all their sins.’ That is the way it is with God’s mercy.”

And Walter thought of the tide coming in everywhere, and [285] everywhere covering and hiding the black rocks, the long, sandy bars, the unsightly flats of mud, burying all under its bright, shining, softly singing current.

Chauncy appreciated Walter’s meaning; and when the latter left, Chauncy with a smile in his face was looking afar and watching the tide coming in.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

DARK DEPTHS UNCOVERED.

When Walter left Miss Green's, he turned away from the sea and walked rapidly in the direction of his uncle's. A sleigh with jingling bells went by him. The driver of the team was well protected against the cold, and the style as well as the extent of the protection—the rich buffalo robe snugly tucked about his person, the handsome cap of fur that could not wholly conceal his gray hair, the warm, heavy, riding gloves of fur—showed that the driver of the team did not have a mean and scanty share of this world's goods. The bright, sharp, intelligent eyes under the rich cap of fur gave evidence that the owner of the team was smart enough and shrewd enough to hold whatever he had gained and also add to it.

"Do you know that man?" Walter said to Jabez Wherren, who, twisted up by the cold, was moving slowly, shiveringly, over the road.

"That man! He's Squire Tuck, your uncle's lawyer. He lives in Groveton." [287]

"He looks as if he knew something."

"Knows suthin! For what he knows, I wouldn't swap all the clams 'tween here and Novy Scoshy," replied Jabez, who was a famous clam digger, and all his estimates of value were determined by one famous standard, a clam.

"Then," thought Walter, "Squire Tuck is on his way to that meeting at uncle's that Chauncy spoke about. That is my guess."

He soon came in sight of the well–known buildings so associated with his life the past autumn. There was the old–fashioned house from whose big, red chimney lazily drifted the purplish smoke. There was the store. There was the sign above the door. And there at the post before the door, was Squire Tuck's horse.

"And there's another team at the other post," said Walter. "Guess that is Baggs' team."

When he entered the store, he noticed that a row of nails near the door opening into the sitting–room had been already covered with hats and coats. And who was the thief that Walter saw near one of the coats, lifting its folds and examining them with such intentness of look that the ringing of the bell above the door as Walter entered, was scarcely noticed? [288]

"Guess those bright eyes don't see me," thought Walter. "I can say, 'Caught at last.' I'll make the door–bell tap again."

Jingle, jingle, jingle!

"Massy, Walter! how you skat me! Where did you come from? Now you'll say you've got me a–peekin' at folkses' clothes. I don't care if you have. Jest come here!" and Aunt Lydia mysteriously beckoned with a piece of cloth. Lifting the skirt of a blue frock conspicuously ornamented with big silver buttons, Aunt Lydia fitted this bit of cloth into the torn lining.

"There!" said she triumphantly. "The myst'ry is out. I haven't ben a–savin' this all this time for nothin'."

"Why, whose coat is this?"

"It is that *Thing's*, that Bel–ze–bub's!"

"Baggs'? Oh, yes, I've seen him with it on. I remember now."

"I suppose you want to know what I'm up to. Do you remember the fust mornin' you were clerk and opened the store? Wall, that mornin' I seed that Bel–ze–bub at the settin'–room winder, as ef he were a–lookin' in, though he seemed to be a good way in; and arter that, I found this piece of cloth on the blind. Now I think he was not so much a–lookin' in as a–gittin' out, and tore his linin' while he was a–tryin' to accomplish that gentlemanly action; and ef—and ef—" said the old lady, dropping her voice, but intensifying her emphasis, "ef he don't keep out of my settin'–room, I'll—I'll scald him! There!" [289]

Walter was as much excited as his Aunt Lydia.

"There, Aunt, that just confirms me in what I believe and know, that Baggs was in the store that morning when I had stepped out on to the doorstep."

"In the store? Where? To buy suthin'?"

"Back of the counter, where uncle keeps those books—that Bible, you know, and so on. He went out from the store into the sitting–

room, and then through the window undoubtedly." Walter told the story of the strange appearance in the store, the first morning of his clerkship. While Aunt Lydia was expressing her amazement, exclaiming, "Oh dear!" "Did you ever!" "Pizen!" the door into the store from the sitting–room opened, and there was the driver of the sleigh that Walter had so particularly noticed that morning, Squire Tuck. His sharp, keen eyes searched the store rapidly, and he said, "Ah, Mrs. Blake, you here? I wanted to see you one moment and ask you about a matter. Won't you walk in, please?" [290]

Aunt Lydia stepped toward the opened door, and with one hand that she held behind her back, she beckoned to Walter to follow. Walter did not wait for a second flourish from that mute object, but walked after Aunt Lydia and stood silently behind her, as if a special bodyguard to attend her and see that she suffered no harm.

It was an unusual scene witnessed that morning in the old–fashioned sitting–room. There on one side of a large square table in the center of the room, sat Baggs. He was very smiling, and when Aunt Lydia entered he very politely said, "Good mornin', Miss Blake." Near him sat his lawyer, who looked somewhat like Baggs, a stout individual with crafty eyes, who signed himself "P. Allston Varney." If the middle name had been "All–stone," somebody once said, it would have been an appropriate title. Opposite Baggs was his victim, Uncle Boardman, and he sat there with an astonished air. The vacant chair near Uncle Boardman had been occupied by Squire Tuck. After calling Aunt Lydia, he did not resume his seat, but remained standing, and proceeded to address the lady he had admitted.

"Mrs. Blake," he said courteously—Squire Tuck always had a dignified, stately way of addressing the ladies, bowing slightly as he spoke,—"I wish to ask you about this note." [291]

P. Allston Varney closely watched Squire Tuck as he picked up a document lying before Baggs. It was a piece of paper in the form of a money–note, long and narrow. Walter's attention was arrested immediately by the discovery of a blot in the corner of the note, and it made him think of the document he saw in the store the morning of Baggs' visit, carrying in one corner a blot like a pig.

"There's that pig again," he was saying to himself, when Squire Tuck remarked, "Before asking the question I have in mind, let me make an explanation. Your husband, Mrs. Blake, gave Mr. Baggs a note for five hundred dollars in return for money lent him that he might build the saw–mill. That is all he had against—I mean all that Mr. Baggs had against your husband, so the latter asserts. It became due the other day, and your husband went to pay it. I suppose you know this, and that it was paid also."

Aunt Lydia nodded assent.

"And you know that Baggs presented another note—this one for fifteen hundred dollars, which indeed is in your husband's handwriting, he allows, but says he never gave it, and can't explain it. This you know?" [292]

"I know what Baggs says, but my husband don't owe him any sich sum."

"Indeed!" exclaimed P. Allston Varney provokingly, while Baggs looked towards his lawyer with an amused air, as much as to say, "Only think of it!"

"As you generally know about your husband's affairs, Mrs. Blake, what I wished to ask was, if you knew of any such document—but you have already implied that you did not—and could throw any light in any way upon this subject, and you might look at this and examine it."

Baggs and Varney both stirred in their chairs and half arose, as if to intercept the passage of the precious document into Mrs. Blake's hands.

"Oh," said the Squire, "I will guarantee that no harm comes to the note. I will hold it and you can stand by and watch every thing done."

As the note was thus held before Aunt Lydia's sharply scrutinizing spectacles, her bodyguard in the rear looked over her shoulders and quickly read it.

"There is that pig!" thought Walter. "Yes, it's the same sort of looking document, only the other said five hundred, and not fifteen." [293]

The sun outdoors had been endeavoring to pierce the clouds and succeeded for a few moments, and a bright, needle–like ray darted

through the window and fell on the note.

“Doesn’t that ‘fifteen’ have a scratched look?” thought Walter. An idea came to him as if into his brain also a sunray had darted, making a sudden light there. It was not Walter’s nature to conceal anything, and he burst out saying, “Squire, may I call attention—”

Baggs immediately grew red in the face and nudged his lawyer, who sprang upon his feet at once.

“Who’s this talking? I object, Squire. He was not asked here!” shouted Varney.

“Oh, it is all right,” rejoined Squire Tuck, his tone and manner quieting and assuring. “Let the young man speak. You know, Squire Varney, it wouldn’t look well to shut him up. He may have something valuable to say, and truth will always stand criticism.”

Amid grunting by Varney and head–shaking by Baggs, Walter proceeded: “I wanted to call attention to this note. I saw it the first morning I was here, and I know it was that by that blot which it [294] seemed to me looked like a pig.”

“Pig!” ejaculated Varney, with a sneer. “Some folks see themselves in everything they look at.”

“Ha—ha!” roared Baggs.

“Let the young man proceed,” calmly remarked Squire Tuck.

Walter was not used to encounters of this kind, and he felt as if a head–wind had struck him. He recovered himself, though, and began to speak again.

A saucy answer was on the end of his tongue, but he remembered something his father said once, that in a discussion the man more likely to come out ahead is the man who can control his tongue as well as use it. He held to his point like a vessel to its course and said, “I saw something on that note which it may be wished I had not seen. The words ‘five hundred’ were then on it, not ‘fifteen hundred,’ and—and—that ‘fifteen’ to me has a scratched look.”

Everything was in intense confusion. Uncle Boardman jumped upon his feet, crying, “Let me see! I lost one note and gave another.” Varney shouted, advancing towards Walter, “Do you mean to say that my client is a forger? that Bezaleel Baggs is guilty of [295] scratching notes?”

Walter had no opportunity to reply, for a woman’s sharp voice piped forth, “Well, I mean to say that Beelzebub is equal to scratchin’ notes.”

“Who, madame?” politely asked Squire Tuck. “Undoubtedly that person is equal to the operation.”

“I mean—*him*!” declared Aunt Lydia, boldly pointing toward B. Baggs. “Before we came in here, my nephew here and me were a–comparin’ idees, and from what he says and the way this note looks, I think Beelzebub—I think—yes, I’ll stick to it, that’s his name—came into the store, took that note where he must have found out my husband kept sich things, his Bible in the store—”

“You certainly did know, Mr. Baggs,” said Uncle Boardman. “I remember you asked me about the time I gave the note, if I had a safe where I kept things, and I said I was apt to tuck notes and things into my Bible in the store,—a careless way I allow.”

“From his Bible, took the note,” resumed Aunt Lydia, “cleared out through the winder in my sittin’–room, and there’s the rag your coat—now in the entry—left behind when you climbed out and tore [296] the linin’!” Here Aunt Lydia held up before Baggs the little rag that she had so carefully retained.

All but Baggs had risen and were eagerly scrutinizing the note. Inwardly, Baggs was in a turmoil; outwardly, his face was flushed and his crooked eye was rolling like a vessel in a storm. When he spoke, he showed great self–control. His voice was placid as ever, and he waved his great, fat hands as if quieting an unnecessary tumult.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, what’s all this fuss for? I have doc—doc—doc—”

“Doctor?” suggested Varney, wishing to help up his stumbling client. “Want the doctor?”

“No—no! What kind of evidence do you call it? Doc—doc—”

“Documentary?” suggested Squire Tuck.

“Thank you, Squire,” said Baggs, bowing low. “I have dockermentry evidence about this note, and it’s in the coat that

Madame Blake spoke about."

Here Baggs bowed toward "Madame Blake."

"And," he continued, "if you will permit me, I will bring the very coat, and splain that rag business too."

[297] Here he triumphantly looked about upon his auditors as if he were carrying a point in the town meetings, where he had been famous as an orator.

"Yes, I will bring the coat, this very moment"—and as he spoke, he rose and stepped toward the door into the store—"and no one need feel s'cluded from the investigation. All please stay here. Our young friend there"—he pointed toward Walter—"may remain. I will satisfy all—yes—I will—" and he was gone.

"Well," declared Squire Tuck, "this is interesting business," and he looked toward Varney.

"Yes, but just wait and give the man a chance to speak for himself. It's a serious thing to charge a man with forgery."

"I should think, sir," roared Uncle Boardman, "to take away a man's property was a pretty serious matter also!"

"Yes; serious, vile, imperdent, reskelly—" Aunt Lydia stood with opened mouth pouring out a torrent of hot adjectives, when Squire Tuck interrupted her and interrupted also the tumult that had become general, saying, shouting rather, "Now all be quiet! We want to hear from Baggs. He ought to have got that coat by this time."

[298] The Squire stepped to the door into the store and opened it, wishing to assist the tardy Baggs. "Allow me, Brother Tuck, the pleasure of helping you," said Varney with much politeness, and he followed the Squire who had stepped out into the store. Those in the sitting–room now heard one word from the Squire and it came in no gentle tones: "Gone!" What a rush there was from that sitting–room!

"Oh!" exclaimed Aunt Lydia, "why didn't I hold on to that coat while I had the chance!"

"I know now why he was so willing that 'our young friend' should stay in the sitting–room," remarked Walter.

"But how did he get out?" inquired Uncle Boardman. "We did not hear the door–bell ring."

"There!" shouted the Squire, pointing at an opened window. "He was cunning enough not to ring that door–bell."

"Then he's used to climin' through folks' winders," said Aunt Lydia sarcastically.

"Why didn't I arrest him on the spot? Scatter, everybody, and chase hard! Come out here!" cried the Squire, and his gray hairs led off in the scramble made for the store door. The little bell rang violently now, and out they rushed, Aunt Lydia as forward as any.

[299] "He didn't take any sleigh, you see, for we would have noticed that from the windows of the sitting–room. You come too!" said the Squire to Don Pedro, who, bare–headed, chanced to be coming from the direction of the kitchen. He had been almost asleep in a snug warm corner back of the stove, but the late banging of the door and that violent ringing of the door–bell had fully aroused him. He had hastily come out to see what the matter was. Wishing to avoid the company in the sitting–room, he had not tried to reach the store from that quarter, and trying another way, he succeeded in meeting the company by the doorstep.

"What fur?" asked Don Pedro, with widening eyes.

"To chase that rascal, Baggs," said Squire Tuck.

"Dis moment I'm ready! I'll go for him! Whar?"

"Get a hat! Be awful spry."

Interpreting a hat as meaning any hat, Don Pedro went into the store, and took the first hat he saw in the line where Baggs and others had hung their wearing apparel.

"Mr. Blake," said Squire Tuck, "you go along the road through the woods, rousing neighbors and making inquiries. I'll take my team and dash down to The Harbor and rouse them there. Walter, you take the woods themselves, striking in at the left; and you, boy," [300] (addressing Don Pedro) "take the woods over here at the right. If you see Baggs, grip him and then shout for help, but hold him!"

Off went this police force, Uncle Boardman impressing into his constabulary force his patient old mare that chanced to be already harnessed to a red pung, and standing in a shed at the rear of the house. Squire Tuck sprang into his sleigh, eagerly caught up the

reins and was about to dash off, when he said to Varney, “The counsel on the other side can join in the pursuit, if he wishes.”

Varney’s answer was a look of scorn. He went to a corner of the house that gave him a short view of this interesting chase, and there watched Uncle Boardman who urged on the old mare as if a whirlwind were after him. Aunt Lydia was anxious to have a hand in the hunt. Closing and locking the store door, securing all others, even the back door, as she passed out, lest “the pest” might get in again, she determined to search the barn. Armed with a pitchfork, she visited every corner she could think of, prudently sending her fork ahead and thoroughly “jabbing” the darkness of any nook before giving it personal examination. No enemy could be found. If one had been there, after such a reconnoissance with the pitchfork, [301] he would have come out more dead than alive. Aunt Lydia chanced to think of one more place that might hide the fugitive. It was a little tool closet. She had laid down her weapon of search, as the door required a tug with both hands. The door yielded and flew open. And there in one corner, she spied a pair of sharp, black eyes!

“Massy!” exclaimed Aunt Lydia, turning to flee, but stumbling and falling. “Oh—h—h!” she screamed. “It’s he! Help—p!”

The next moment, she was conscious that a spring had been made over her shoulders, and out of the barn–door went Billy, the old black cat, mad to think he had been carelessly shut up twenty–four hours in that hungry place. And Aunt Lydia, who had previously thought she would be so glad to find Baggs, was just as glad now that this occupant of the tool closet was not Baggs, and went into the house thoroughly satisfied. The others still kept up the pursuit. Squire Tuck roused The Harbor after a fashion not known for years. Uncle Boardman stirred up every farmhouse on his road. Walter and Don Pedro searched the woods, but in silence. The command had been not to shout until a seizure had been made and help was [302] needed. The snow was not very deep in the woods, and progress was not difficult.

“I don’t see anything!” thought Walter. “A fox has been along there, I guess, and those are a man’s tracks; but they are old ones.”

Through the silent forest, under the green roof of the pines, across a frozen brook, Walter vigorously pushed. He saw nothing suspicious, heard nothing. “Caw—caw!” went an occasional crow overhead, but it was not Baggs forsaking his feet and taking to wings. Walter reached at last a low but vigorous young growth of spruce. Above their tops, did he see a gray stove–pipe hat? Did not Baggs wear such a hat that day? Walter’s heart leaped within him.

“It’s Baggs’ hat!” he excitedly declared. “Now if he don’t see me and dodge me, and if I can just follow him without his noticing me a few moments, I’ll slip up to him so near that though he may dodge all he pleases, I—shall have him!”

Suddenly, the hat—was it turning? Did Baggs see Walter, possibly? Walter stooped, then rose again, only to declare that the wearer was turning to make an observation. Several times this was done, and each time Walter slightly bowed himself to escape observation. Then the hat began to move rapidly.

“He’s running!” thought Walter. “Now, go for him sharp!” [303]

It was a furious chase, but Walter did not gain on that violently bobbing gray hat as he anticipated. “He runs the fastest I ever saw, for a short, fat man!” declared Walter. “I’ll have him though.” He knew the woods well enough to be aware that somewhere beyond the low spruce growth was a swamp, and a bad one. He had heard Uncle Boardman say that the swamp was not frozen, lately.

“That feller,” thought Walter, “will find he can’t cut through that swampy place so easily. It won’t hold him, and he will have to keep to the edge of the spruces and come out down here to the left, and I will aim for that point and meet him there, surprise and welcome him, and say, ‘How do you do, Mr. Baggs? Fine day!’ Ha—ha!”

Would Walter’s confident predictions be successful? That agitated old hat of gray was forced by the yet yielding swamp to keep to the left, only to be met by Walter, who in turn found under the hat a surprise, even—Don Pedro!

“Why, Don, you—booby, I’ve been chasing you all this time?”

Don Pedro’s eyes were large and staring.

“Walter, you—jes’ frighten me—a heap! My—breff—clean gone— [304] honey! Ef I didn’t t’ink you’se a robber. Why—didn’t—you—holler, an’ show—who you was?”

“Holler! We were told not to, till we got something to holler about. It would have frightened the game. What have you got on Baggs’ hat for? Oh dear—ha! ha! ha!” And Walter leaned against a tree and laughed till he was sore.

“Me got Baggs’ hat? Squire said I might hab any, an’ I tuk the fus’ one handy. And do you want to know why I ran so hard? Back dar a piece I met a man, and he looked bad, and he was a handlin’ a knife sort ob careless, a bad looking knife.”

Don Pedro rolled his eyes about tragically as he told his story, deepening his voice as he went on.

“I axed him ef he had seen a man by de name ob Baggs who had probed hisself to be a reskel, an’ we was a–hantin’ fur him. He opened his knife and felt the edge sort ob careless an’ tole me I’d better leab; dat ef he foun’ me in dese woods agin, I’d nebber hab a chance to leab ’em. Dat Baggs he said was whar I couldn’t tech him, an’ he ’vised me fur to go hum. When I saw you, I s’posed it was him, an’ didn’t I run! I jest saw a hat and didn’t s’pose you was [305] under it, but dat man, an’ it took de bref out ob me! What will ye do now?”

“The hunt for Baggs, I guess, is up. However, we will make sure and go to the end of the woods, and there are two or three houses along there. The people will tell us if any sign of Baggs has been seen.”

The end of the wood–lot was reached and inquiries were made at the farmhouses. No footprint of the runaway could be discovered anywhere, and Walter told Don Pedro they would go no farther.

“We might as well take to the woods again on our way back. I’d like to see who that fellow is round with a knife and telling what he will do. We will stop that nonsense.” Don Pedro only needed a leader to be as brave a soldier as ever followed a flag, and he readily assented. Nothing came from the return search. No object more hostile than a squirrel was seen, and he gave a very friendly wink with his bright eyes as he peeped out of his snug quarters for the winter. Don Pedro’s use of the wrong hat was not the only case of the kind that occurred. Miss Green called the evening of that day.

“Oh, Miss Blake, you ought to have seen that lawyer, that [306] Varney, to–day. He came riding by the post–office with a handkerchief tied round his head, and somebody said they saw him prancing round your house, trying every door, and he was as bare–headed as a bean when it has been shelled. I believe he borrowed a hat round here.”

“There!” said Aunt Lydia, “I must have locked that man out afore I went to the barn! But there was no hats left on the nails where his things had been, for I looked up to ’em myself and there was nothin’ there when I went to the barn.”

No, there were only naked nails in the wall. As for Varney’s hat, it had gone off on the head of Baggs, who had seized the first hat he met in his hasty exit, a conclusion the lawyer himself reached when making subsequent inquiries.

Guilty Baggs had gone—nobody knew where. And the mystery of that man with the knife, in the woods? It was minutely discussed at the station, where Joe Cardridge had suddenly disappeared, leaving only a message for the keeper saying he would be back soon and prove that Walter Plympton was “a good deal wuss than he ought to be.” Joe coolly wished also to have his place kept for him.

“I guess not,” remarked the keeper. “A man going off that way [307] without a notice, will have to wait a long time before he has a notice that he is wanted again. I will fill his place at once. Tucker Jones is home from his winter fishin’, and I will get him.”

Tucker Jones, a big–boned, rugged young fisherman, was quickly established in the vacant berth.

“Walter,” said Tom Walker, “putting all things together, I think it was Joe Cardridge that scared Don Pedro in the woods. He was a–hangin’ round the store somebody said. Probably he knew what was goin’ on, and followed his master, that Baggs. They were seen together by a man five miles from here. It is good that he has gone.”

Nobody lamented his departure, not even his family. His wife and children could manage without him, and far more agreeably. At the station, the only element of dissension in the crew was now taken away. All noticed the harmony that marked the station life.

“It only takes one stone in a fellow’s shoe,” remarked Tom Walker, “to upset everything, and Joe Cardridge has been the stone

in the shoe.”

Walter now fully enjoyed his life. True, there were rough, wild beats before him, but the warm, cheerful shelter followed them. [308] Then there was the constant sense of danger from that vast, uneasy sea, to give flavor to a life that might otherwise become insipid.

“I am sorry,” he thought, “that my time at the station is almost up. It’s up in a few days, and I wonder when the district superintendent will be here to investigate my trouble. I don’t care for it. Let them hunt. I am right.”

Yes, let slanders and envy hunt through our lives, and if we are right, who cares?

Keeper Barney had said, “Joe’s goin’ off leaves Walter without an accuser, and I can’t easily believe he is wrong, but there is that bottle! What about that?”

Yes, the flask, what about that? Joe had gone, but the flask remained on a shelf, and Walter still was confronted by this dumb, black accuser.

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[309]

CHAPTER XIX.

A WILD STORM.

At a life saving station, there are various drills in which the surfmen are exercised. There is the beach apparatus drill. “Open boat–room doors! Man the beach wagon!” shouts the keeper. Every man knows his place, the doors are opened, and the cart is rushed out. “Forward!” cries the keeper, and each man knows just where to station himself and pull. Then come the other orders. “Halt! Action!” A pole representing a wreck, the men proceed as if attempting a rescue, sending a line to the wreck. Then come other orders. “Man weather whip! Haul out! Man lee whip!”

“Haul ashore!” and the buoy for conveying the crew supposed to be wrecked, travels backward and forward as often as desired. Then there is the boat practice, and the boat must be launched through the surf, and the men drilled in the management of the oars. The [310] crew must also practice with signals. Stations may be near enough to communicate with one another, and this is done in the day time with flags and in the night with star rockets and Coston lights. An example would be the showing of a red flag by day and the burning of a red Coston light and firing of a red rocket by night. It is the danger signal, and means that a wreck has been seen, or a vessel is discovered to be in need of help. By means of the box of flags that every station keeps under its roof, the crew can talk with any vessel off shore and needing assistance. The crew must also be practiced in methods of restoring the apparently drowned. It was one dreary, rainy day that Keeper Barney was drilling the crew in these last methods. Cook Charlie had offered himself as a subject on whom the crew might practice. The keeper commenced a list of questions, asking: “What first is to be done to the patient?” Cook Charlie stretched upon the floor submitted patiently to the pressing and pounding and other parts of the process of resuscitation.

It was not a practice that on a dreary winter day when the sea was wrathfully roaring, could be classified as pleasantly suggestive.

While they were resuscitating Cook Charlie, Walter glanced [311] occasionally out of the window. The sea rapidly roughened, and huge waves were launching on the sands broken and angry masses of surf. A ragged curtain of fog was drawn across the rim of the sea, but it was only ragged near the shore. Farther out, its denseness was without a seam. The day ended with many jokes about Cook Charlie, the resuscitated mariner, but mingled with the laughter were dismal cries of the storm. The rain could be heard splashing against the window panes, and occasionally the whole window shook as if a violent hand had been laid upon it. All the while, there was the wrathful thunder of the sea as if over some invisible bridge just above the station, the heavy squadrons of the storm were gloomily marching. Still, around the old cook stove whose fire burnt jollily, echoed the laughter of the surfmen as they cracked their jokes and told humorous stories of the sea. So the evening wore away. The storm yet raged. As the different patrolmen arrived, they came with dripping hats, with faces wet by the storm, with clothes that hung stiffly about them.

“It’s a howlin’ night,” reported Tom Walker, slamming his lantern on the table.

“Just so at my end of the beach,” said Woodbury Elliott, who [312] immediately followed Tom. “Whew—w—w! An old–fashioned nor’easter!” “You saw nothin?” inquired Capt. Barney. And each patrol said, “Not a thing.”

“I hope it will stay so, for I think it’s goin’ to be the wust of the season. Come, boys, all pile upstairs early. There’s some hard trampin’ to be done ’fore daybreak.”

“Wall, we can say we have resuscitated one man to–day,” said Slim Tarleton.

“Ah, but we may have some real cases to–morrow. God forbid!”

It was Walter’s watch in the morning, from four till sunrise. He slept uneasily till his watch, vexed by dreams of wreck and rescue, of dead men’s faces and living wives’ sorrow. Rising, he dressed himself hurriedly a little before four. How the building shook in the wind, while the sea without was furious in its uproar!

“I’d like to stay in that warm bed. Booh! That cold walk makes

me shiver! No help for it," thought Walter, as he moved reluctantly toward the stairway and then descended it.

In the kitchen, dripping like a fish just pulled out of the water, was Slim Tarleton. He had finished his watch and Walter was his successor.

"I'd like to go for you, Walter, but it's four now, and morning's [313] not such a terrible way off."

"All quiet?"

"Everything except the sea, and that acts as bad as it can. Oh, I don't imagine there will be any trouble."

"Here is your Coston light, time–detector and so on," said Keeper Barney. "Dress snug, for it blows; and dress thick, for it is cold. If anything happens, let us know."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!" and out into the dark and the cold and the rain, strode our young knight, looking in his storm gear more like an Eskimo than a representative of any knightly age. The north–east wind blew at him as if it wanted to push this meddler back into the station; but with one arm around his lantern as if it were a baby that he wished to shield, he struggled over the rocks down to the strip of sand not yet covered by the tide. He saw nothing ten feet away, but he heard—no pen can describe the bellowing of this monster plunging and frothing at his feet. The lantern shot little gleams of light on the confused masses of foam along the edge of the shore, and he knew that there was a tumbling wall of ghastly white just beyond.

"What if my lantern should go out!" he exclaimed nervously. He turned from the wind and unbuttoning his outside coat, folded it [314] around his lantern, letting out only enough light to show him where to plant his feet. Then he struggled on. It was a hard walk in a storm that had no mercy. He was pushing ahead, when, lifting his face to the wild rain and attempting to look through it, he saw—a jagged line of fire curving up into the air! The next moment, he trembled with excitement.

"A wreck!" was the thought flashing through his mind. That one glance at the rocket above the sea seemed to change into an antelope the slowly plodding surfman. He sprang over the rocks that lined the beach. There was an ice wall that had bothered him a minute ago, but he now mastered it and climbed to high ground. Drawing out his signal, he fired it, and then waving madly this crimson answer of hope to a mariner's prayer of fire, he ran to the station. Over fragments of ice, into pools of water, along sharp ledges, he flew as if some kindly power had withdrawn his cowhide boots and furnished him with wings instead; but how much faster he did want to go! If he were only electricity, or light itself, and could shoot to the station at once! He reached it though, finally. Keeper Barney was sitting by the stove trying to read, when Walter threw open the kitchen door, and burst in, waving his lantern and crying, [315] "A wreck! Quick!"

"Heavens, boy! In this storm! All hands turn out!" he screamed, even before he reached the foot of the stairs leading up to the crew's room. He must have repeated it half a dozen times, on his way to their beds. The next moment there were several bounces upon the floor. After a hurried dressing, there was a confused rushing for the stairs. Men appeared wearing one boot and lugging the other, or with half their clothes in their arms, while Tucker Jones, the man who took Joe Cardridge's place, was trying to work his arms through the legs of his pants, thinking he was handling his jacket. Seavey Lowd, the other patrol, now arrived, or rather came rushing in, shouting and confirming the news. The little living–room was confused with excitement, the men hurrying here and there, trying to find hat or jacket or coat; and several were trying hard to find their senses. Keeper Barney had his, now, and he spoke coolly to the men.

"Now listen, boys! Steady! It will be useless to take the boat. We must go out with the beach apparatus. Do as well as you can. You all know your places. Hit as high a mark as you can." As he spoke, he lead the way into the boat–room, and then he issued the familiar [316] order: "Open boat–room doors! Man the beach wagon!"

How those young Titans worked! The outer doors flew open, and a strong, cold draft of wintry air rushed in. Every man knew his place in hauling. Two gripped the shafts, four laid hold of the drag ropes.

"Forward!" rang out the word of command from the keeper, who

followed with his lantern.

Through the thick slush or over masses of ice, the cart was dragged to the sands which the tide had not flooded.

“There’s the wreck!” some one shouted, or tried to shout amid the roar of the surf. An arrow of fire shooting up into the night shadows still lingering on the sea, showed the crew that they must go farther down the beach. What a wearisome journey with the cart it was!

“Cheer ’em up with a Coston light, boys!” the keeper would occasionally shout. At last, when he judged they were about opposite the wreck, he cried, “Halt!” There was a waiting for the light, that the exact location of the wreck might be declared, and in the meantime all possible preparations for the rescue were made.

The surf men knew what to do, as there had been many drills in [317] the handling of the apparatus. Each man, according to his number, had his particular piece of work. It was the place of No. 4, Seavey Lowd, to throw the breeches buoy off the cart, and Seavey did it. Walter, as No. 6, was one of those that removed the sand anchor, pick and shovel. The keeper, and No. 1, Tom Walker, took the gun down. Nos. 2 and 3, Slim Tarleton and Woodbury Elliott, removed the shot–line box.

“Bury the sand anchor up here!” called out the keeper. The sand anchor consisted of two stout pieces of hard wood, each six feet long, two inches thick and eight wide. These were crossed at their centers and securely fastened together. A stout iron ring projected from the center of the sand anchor. How rapidly pick and shovel were worked, and a deep trench dug in which the anchor was laid and there firmly imbedded! This buried anchor was designed to secure the shore end of the hawser to be sent out to the wreck. The hawser terminated in a double pulley–block, by which it could be tightened, and a short rope gripped the block and the anchor, binding them together. The “crotch” was made of two stout pieces of wood ten feet long. Near the top, these were crossed and when [318] set up suggested an X. It was No. 4, Seavey Lowd, who looked after the crotch, and at the proper time he was to set it up on the beach. It was Seavey’s duty also to carry the end of the hawser to the foot of the crotch over which it was to be stretched to the sand anchor.

In the meantime the captain and Tom Walker were supposed to look after the gun, while Slim Tarleton and Woodbury Elliott were expected to deposit the shot–line box about three feet from the gun. The line had been coiled about pins in a frame, and the latter was so arranged that it could be removed, leaving the line wound in diagonal loops, and at liberty to fly after the shot to which it was to be attached. During the interim of waiting, the life–car was also brought from the station. That dismal wreck could at last be plainly seen, about three hundred feet from the shore. The spray boiled about the dark hull as if it had been set in the crater of a volcano. The excitement among the surfmen increased. The keeper had loaded the gun, and the shot had been inserted and the line tied to an eye in the shank protruding from the shot. The keeper stood in the rear of the gun, and was sighting over it, shouting to Nos. 1 and 2, “Right!” or “Left!” And they trained the muzzle accordingly.

“Well!” he cried, and the gun came to a rest. [319]

It was pointing at the wreck. The necessary elevation was then given to the gun, and the primer inserted. When everything was arranged, the keeper shouted, “Ready!”

Whizz—z—bang—g—g!

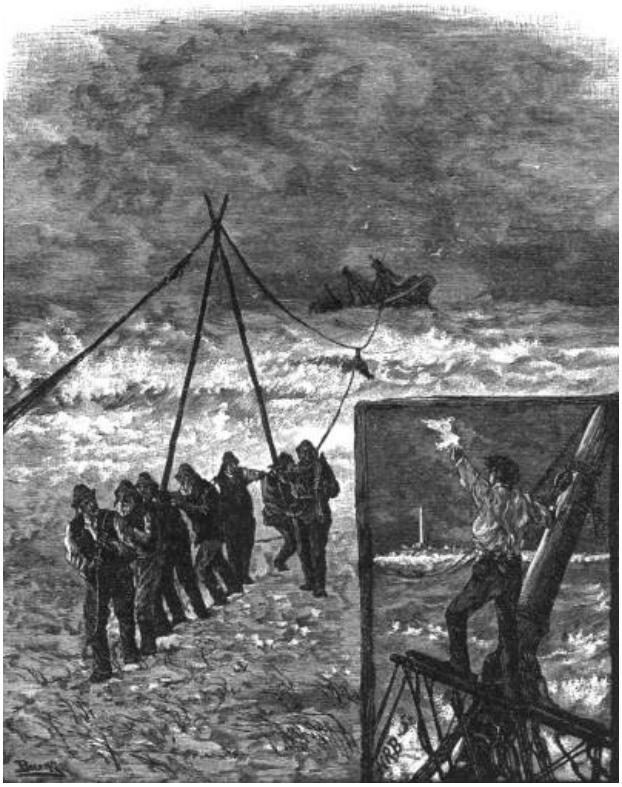
Away went the shot, the line faithfully following. How its flight was watched! Would it fall short of the wreck and uselessly drop into the water? No! it had fallen across the vessel and the crew quickly seized it. A shout went up from the surfmen: “Hur—rah—h! Hurrah—h—h!” To the shot–line, was now tied the “whip.” This was reeved through a single pulley–block, making what is termed an endless line. To it was attached a tally board carrying printed directions in English and French, telling those on board how to properly secure this “whip” or endless line. Keeper Barney was now signaling to the wreck.

“He means to have them haul the whip on board,” thought Walter.

Quickly the whip line was going out to the vessel, and was there made fast.

“They are signaling to us to go ahead, and do the next thing,”

thought Walter. All the surfmen knew what that next thing was. The whip had been secured to the sand anchor, and now Nos. 1 and 2, Tom Walker and Slim Tarleton were handling the hawser, a still stouter line, and they attached it to the whip. As the keeper paid out the hawser, others manned the whip and hauled off to the wreck the new sturdy friend coming to the rescue. The men on the vessel guided by a tally board attached to the hawser, secured it to the mast a foot and a half higher than the hauling line or whip. On shore, the hawser had been stretched across the crotch and connected with the sand anchor. There now swung above the frothing breakers, reaching from shore to ship, this stout hawser four inches in circumference, and below it was the endless line or whip. The breeches buoy was now brought forward. This buoy consisted of a cork life–preserver, circular, from which hung canvas breeches with very short legs. Four ropes that gripped the circle of cork, met above in a ring of iron, and this was connected with a block called a “traveler.” This block was “snapped on to the hawser,” and the ends of the whip were also bent into the block–strap and secured. Then the buoy began its travels to the wreck, the men hauling on the whip. “Somebody has jumped into that buoy,” cried Tom Walker as he watched the wreck. Strong hands were laid on the whip, and above the breakers danced the breeches buoy, a man’s head and body now rising above it while his legs dangled below. [320]



“Strong hands were laid on the whip” (p. 320)**.**

“Here she comes!” sung out Slim Tarleton. [321]

“Here *he* comes, I guess,” suggested Woodbury Elliott.

Come, he did, nearer, nearer, the surfmen steadily hauling on the line; and at last the breeches buoy was in the midst of the brave circle of rescuers.

“How are ye?” called out the occupant of the buoy, a sharp–nosed, red–headed man. “Much obleeged.”

“Oh, you’re welcome!” said Keeper Barney.

“How are all the folks at sea?” inquired Tom Walker.

“Does it look nat’ral round here?” asked Seavey Lowd.

“Altogether too nat’ral for me,” replied the arrival by this ocean air–line. “Ef we didn’t have a tough night!”

The man had now disembarked from this canvas–and–cork ship, and stood on the sands.

The keeper was hurriedly giving the order to “haul out,” when the stranger asked, “Haven’t ye suthin’ bigger and snugger ye could send out? Some of the folks there are awful weak.”

“Passengers?” inquired the keeper.

“Jest so.” [322]

“All right. We will put on the life–car soon as we get some of the crew ashore. People can ride snug in that life–car. How long will your craft hold together?”

“She’s a good deal smashed, Cap’n, but she can stand it a while longer.”

“Man the weather–whip! Haul out!” the keeper was shouting. Out to the wreck, the breeches buoy traveled, and then returned with its freight of a second man.

“Haul the hawser taut there!” cried the keeper to Walter and Woodbury, who stood near the sand anchor and handled the tackle for tightening the hawser. Each rescued man proved a rescuer, going to work at once. There were three more brought ashore by the buoy, and then the keeper ordered the life–car forward. The buoy was quickly removed, and in its place above the roaring surf hung the life–car, riding along the hawser on its way to the wreck. The life–car was shaped like a boat, made of galvanized sheet iron. It was about eleven feet long, three deep, and over four wide, and would carry a load of six or seven persons. It was roofed over, and its cargo was received through a hatch which was securely covered, but little openings in the top admitted the air. The car had now gone to the wreck, had received its load, and in response to the keeper’s “haul ashore!” was traveling landward along the hawser. It was a feeble, shivering lot of mortals who crawled through the hatch at the end of the trip.

[323]

“Come he did, nearer, nearer!” (p. 321)**.**

“Any more?” asked the keeper. “Two and the captain,” said an old man. Once more the life–car was hauled out to the wreck, while Walter was sent to the station with the chilled passengers and a sailor whom the storm had overcome. As Walter walked along the sands, he watched the terrible agitation of the water near him.

The sea would swell into long folds of angry green, and these would rush toward the shore, swelling, threatening, more and more angry, greener, perhaps tipped with a scanty wreath of foam, only to roll over menacingly, tumbling, crashing in furious uproar, breaking into a million bits of foam. As an opposing rock was struck by a wave, this would be thrown up into a huge mound of froth that broke all along its summit into a delicate, misty veil of lace. This wave was only the front rank of an army whose name was legion, rolling, rushing in wrath toward the land, breaking and foaming, clambering up the high shore–ledges to vainly tear at them, [324] smothering and drowning what could not be rooted up and borne away. In what faultless curves they turned over, these gigantic billows when they struck the shore, rings of emerald, wheels of porphyry, arcs of spheres of crystal! Down, down, down, then plunged the water, and these cataracts met their doom in a hopeless swirl of surf. All along the beach was the frothing tumble of these cascades of the ocean. Beyond the shore–waves it was one confusing mass of ghostly water, of white hands lifted and white faces raised, —in pity and prayer? No, in an anger where all color disappears, where is only the aspect, of a wrath, ghastly and awful. Occasionally some log would come out of this wild whirlpool of the demons, some fragment of a ship torn by the storm as if an animal, limb from limb, and flung in scorn upon the shore. What a tale each fragment could have told! Perhaps it was a handful of moss plucked from a rock, or a starfish, or the tiniest mussels gathered up from the bottom of the sea and then shot landward.

How the sea roared! It seemed as if into that wild chorus all the notes of angry winds and mad torrents, and the crash of thunder, and the voices of men in their human wrath, and the shouts of demons in their satanic fury had been gathered, and now were let [325] loose with all the confusion of the fiercest hurricane. Now and then, Walter thought he caught the dismal groan of a fog–horn attached to a buoy at the mouth of the river, and intended to warn mariners of the nearness of sand bar and rockledge. It was an illusion though, for who in the storm could hear any such agency piping out its feeble little note of warning?

In the meantime, the car had brought from the wreck its last load. The captain was a part of it, a stout, heavy, dark–bearded man.

“You all here?” asked Keeper Barney.

“All that started,” replied the captain. “Two men—they were passengers—left on a life–savin’ mattress. We told ’em to wait any way till daylight, but they said the tide was right and would drift ’em ashore and they’d risk it. They was fearful skittish lest the vessel might break up. Massy! The sea gobbled ’em up less than no time, is my ’pinion. They left some time ago.”

“Well, boys, I’ll have the beach patrolled, of course, and something may be seen of the men. Those whose watch it is are off already, and the rest of you pack up what things are here, and go back to the station, and Cook Charlie will have a hot breakfast ready for the men from the wreck, and for the rest too, soon as possible.” [326]

While hot coffee and dry clothes were making every one comfortable at the station, it was Tom Walker, one of the surfmen out patrolling, that hurried into the living–room, startling the station crew with the announcement, “There’s a man in the Chair!”

If a rocket from some wreck at sea had come up through the floor of the station and made its hideous, fiery racket in the very midst of the station crew, a greater excitement could not have followed. Clinging to the jagged rocks at the Crescent, was some poor soul thrown up by the sea, piteously looking in helpless appeal to the houses not so very far away and yet separated from him by a channel of foaming wrath! Every surfman could seem to make out in his thoughts a pale face frantically appealing to him through the wild storm, and they began to dress again for their perilous work.

“Cap’n Barney,” said Tom Walker to the keeper, “if I may suggest it, I think we might get somewhere near him with our surf–boat. We couldn’t have touched the wreck, and can’t now, out there on Split Ledge, but we might get our boat up to the village and then launch her in the river, and so work her down toward the Chair. The tide [327] has turned, and every moment, there is less water ’tween the Crescent and the shore, and that will help us.”

“Good idea, Tom,” replied the keeper. “And instead of getting horses, as it will take so much time, there are so many of us here and all will take hold, we can make better time to haul the boat–

carriage ourselves. What say? It is a man's life at stake."

"Aye, aye!" was the deep, hearty chorus in response from all.

As the boat made its appearance in the village volunteers appeared also, who dragged heartily on the ropes of the carriage. It was a strange sight in the little village, that stormy morning, the lengthening file of rough, strong–handed men pulling on the rope of the carriage while the boys shouted away and thrust in their small hands wherever any chance for grasping the rope showed itself, and some of the women that came out hurriedly from their homes, their shawls pinned over their heads, also joined the procession. The water was reached and the boat launched.

When, manned by a stalwart crew,—volunteers from The Harbor taking the place of the absent patrols,—the boat moved off into the river, cheers arose from those on shore. But what about the man all [328] this time in the Chair? Did he see the boat coming, and did he cheer also?

"Can you see him now?" eagerly asked the men of Keeper Barney, who was skillfully managing his steering oar amid the heavy swash of the current.

The keeper nodded his head in assent.

The boat cleared the last house in the village, and from this point the Chair could be more distinctly seen.

"See him now, Cap'n?"

The keeper nodded his head. The boat tossed more uneasily now, for the harbor here began to open into the sea, and the full strength of the wind from the stormy north–east smote it. The upper end of the Crescent was very near, and its first ledges, black and stubborn, rose out of the white, angry tumult. Any one seeking refuge here would not have found broad standing room, while at the Chair the exposure was far greater. The man, though, still maintained his hold.

"He's there, is he?" some one would shout through the noise of the storm, and Keeper Barney would silently nod assent.

I wonder what the man in the Chair was thinking of, as he grasped that rocky projection, that little low fence between him and [329] death! He was one of the two men who had trusted their chances to that life–preserver. God alone knew where the second man was in this hellish tumult of wind and sea. The man in the Chair had been flung into it by a violent wave and he had gripped it with all the energy he could possibly rally. He did not want to die. The sea looked cold and deep, and the white foam beating upon him, to his imagination had teeth that threatened to fasten into him and tear him. He could sometimes, when his back was half turned to the sea, catch the outlines of the big billows as they rolled up and rolled toward him, and they came on with such fury that he shrank closer to this rock, and he clung more tenaciously even when some of them failed to reach him. Occasionally a huge billow would strike him and drench him, and then he would shiver and throw off the foam as if trying to recover from some murderous blow given by an animal. It would have been easy to have yielded to one of those waves and allowed it to sweep him away into a swift death, but who does not cling to life? A wild sky, a pitiless rain, and only a black rock in a maelstrom—better this than a grave in that maelstrom. So the man felt. As he held on, his thoughts would go back in spite of him. Not [330] that he cared to think. He would gladly have given the subject a grave in that sea from which he shrank, but if he had tried to throw it off and drop it there, it would have had a resurrection and come up. He thought of the time when he was a little boy in this very neighborhood, visiting here, one far off summer. His younger sister was with him. He could easily recall her blue eyes that framed a constant smile. He heard the happy ring of her laugh, even out there in the noisy waters. He did not want to hear it, but hear it he did. There had been a quarrel with her one day, and he resolved in a mood of anger that was almost insane, to punish her. The quarrel had occurred at the Chair which he knew sometimes was a bad place to be in, the older people had told him. When the tide was high, and behind it was a storm pushing violently the waters landward, that lonely piece of rock, the Chair, was a dangerous position to occupy. There was a gray, misty sky that day, when the boy led his sister, at low tide, across the sands to the Crescent ledges. He pleasantly told her to stay at the Chair and he would come for her in a little while. "The waves were pretty," he said, "and she could watch them till he came back." Then he left her. In half an

hour he knew the tide would flood the sands and isolate the Chair. [331]
He would be absent, he said to himself, perhaps two hours. That would give her a good fright and would be enough to satisfy him. But he did not get back to the shore so soon as two hours. Something had detained him. In the meantime, the fog came on. The rain began to beat down. The men were almost all of them away on fishing cruises. Only a few decrepit fishermen were at home, and they did not like to venture off into the uneasy waters now enclosing the Crescent ledges unless it was some special reason urging them, and as the boy was ashamed to confess that he had left his sister at the Chair, no rough but friendly hand of any seaman was reached out to grasp her. In the morning though, his conscience frightened him into an explanation of his urgency, and a relief party of old men went at once. The Chair however was empty. That morning, there came ashore a sweet little face with closed eyes, and it confirmed the story told by that vacant Chair. So many, many years ago, did this all happen, and now it was coming back as a sad thing of yesterday.

"She's a–lookin' at me!" said the man in the Chair. "I can see her eyes!"

Yes, through the veil of the storm they seemed to penetrate and [332]
reproachfully search his heart.

"I will look another way," he thought, but they seemed to follow him. Tender and full of sorrow, they looked at him on every side. He saw the waves rushing at him and he shrank from them only to meet the eyes that he little cared to behold. He avoided these, but there were the billows rushing at him again. So he was pursued. It seemed to him as if he must lose his mind, and then would he not lose his hold on the rock? That tormented him anew.

But—but—look! Amid the ragged mass of flying foam jutting above the walls of the angrily rising waves, he saw a boat! Yes, he could make out the heads of the men that were rowing! They were coming to rescue him! He had enemies on shore who would seize him and put him behind stone walls, and these men in the boat might hand him over to those enemies, but no matter, he would be rescued from the place of torment he was in. Anything to be saved from that, and those men would save him! The rush of exultant feeling was so great that it affected him even as a wave threatening to carry him away, but he tightened his loosened grasp and looked up again. Yes, they were coming nearer. He could see them, count [333]
them,—one, two, three, four, five, six, besides the man steering. And they saw him! Yes, they all saw him. To reach him, the boat slightly changed its course, and now all the crew looking sidewise could see this castaway. It was Walter who recognized him. Raising his head, straining his vision to catch a fuller view of the man bending over and half veiled by the misty spray thrown up above the Chair there came before Walter once more the form that he had seen that morning in his uncle's store when the note so mysteriously disappeared, that form which he had seen again when patrolling the beach off the Crescent, one wild November day.

"Baggs!" he now shouted to the crew in the surf–boat. "It is Baggs!" As by a common impulse, every man ceased rowing and rested on his oar, the keeper holding the boat with his long steering–oar.

"Yes, yes!" "That is the man!" "It's Baggs!" were the various exclamations that broke from the crew's lips.

"He's waving a hand to us!" said Walter.

"Let him wave and die!" some one exclaimed.

"No, I'd save a dog off in that place!" said the keeper.

"That's so!" replied Walter. [334]

"That's so!" said several.

It was not so much an expression of opinion by one man or several, as the voice rather of that noble spirit which has its embodiment in our entire Life Saving Service and proves it by its yearly record.

"Row away, men!" shouted the keeper. "He's there! I see him."

But Baggs changed his position. He knew that it would be difficult to rescue him even with that boat, such a raging sea broke all about the rock to which he clung. The boat must be held off at a little distance from the ledge and then a rope thrown to him. He must stand his chances of grasping this only hope of safety. The tide had begun to subside, and another part of the ledge was now jutting

above the surf. Whether he thought he could be rescued better from this second position and so tried to reach it, or whether in the increasing nearness of the rescue–party he grew careless, and accidentally slipped out of the Chair and was quickly, eagerly, seized by a wave and hurried away, who could say? It was Slim Tarleton who just before had said to the keeper, “He’s holdin’ on, Cap’n, ain’t he?” And the keeper nodded yes with his head.

“Is he there now, Cap’n?” asked Seavey Lowd the next minute. [335] The keeper’s head did not move—he only fastened his eyes steadily on the ledge fringed by the surf, as if trying to determine a fact with certainty, and then rising in his seat, said solemnly, “I—b’lieve—he’s —gone! Yes, gone!”

Gone, and he left no more trace behind than a leaf falling through the air. Gone into that whirling, eddying sea, into that deep, dark grave so long clutching at him, and which now buried him under its waves forever! The boat could not possibly reach him. Gone, gone!

“Well, men,” said the keeper to the crew, who resting on their oars looked with sober faces at the empty Chair into which the waves now mockingly flung their spray as its only occupant, “we might take a turn round and then go home, but that hunt is all up. Don’t see a sign of him.”

The bow of the surf–boat was headed for The Harbor, after a season of waiting. And strong arms steadily pulled it home.

That afternoon, the captain of the wrecked vessel walking on the sands at low tide, reported at the station that a body had come ashore. “It’s t’other passenger,” he said, “who came ashore as I told you. You know two started on a life–savin’ thing. It’s ’bout two [336] hundred feet from here.”

Keeper Barney and Walter followed him to the designated spot, and there lying on the beach, his long dark hair hanging in a tangle over his face as if trying to veil from the world some dishonored object, was Joe Cardridge. The body was removed to a shed in a field that skirted the shore–rocks. Various articles were found upon the body, and they were removed by the keeper for preservation. “What is this?” asked the keeper, as he took from an inner pocket of the blouse that Joe had worn, an envelope. “A letter inside this,” said the keeper, “and it is directed to me!”

The address was worn and the water had affected it, and yet the superscription could be made out.

“A letter for me, brought by a strange mail–carrier,” said the keeper. “I will see what it is.”

“Why,” he exclaimed, “that is a letter from our district superintendent! Yes, it is the missin’ one that Walter couldn’t find! There is the date. That clears Walter.”

“I guess he was cleared afore,” declared Tom Walker, who was present.

Another mystery was solved that day. Many people were [337] attracted to the beach by the tragedy of the wreck, and among them came Miss P. Green, Aunt Lydia, and other women. Some of Joe Cardridge’s family were at the station. The blouse that he had worn, was drying before the stove.

“What’s that?” queried Aunt Lydia, who had come to the station. Her sharp bright eyes were fastened on a sleeve of the blouse, turned back at the wrist. “If there ain’t that blue W that I tucked away in the white linin’ of Walter’s blouse!”

“Where?” asked Tom Walker.

“There!” replied Aunt Lydia. “That is Walter’s coat, I know.”

“Walter’s coat?” asked Keeper Barney, who had joined the circle of inspection.

“Yes,” replied Aunt Lydia, “I sewed a blue W on to the white linin’ of Walter’s sleeve, and here it is.”

“Humph!” said the keeper. “Joe Cardridge exchanged blouses with Walter, that is what he did, and carried off the missin’ letter.”

“But—but—” said little Charlie Cardridge who was present, and overhearing the conversation wished to show that some of the property in the room did belong to his father, “that’s father’s. Looks like his, anyway.” He was pointing at the flask found in Walter’s [338] pocket and now standing on the sill of a window in the station. The flask was handed to Charlie. Turning it over, he exclaimed, “There’s a C! That is father’s.”

In the bottom of the flask the letter C had been blown, and it now proved who the real owner of that mysterious property had been.

“No doubt about it!” declared Tom Walker, who with others of the crew had come into the kitchen. “No doubt about it! There was an exchange of blouses by the owner of the flask, and the latter was left by Joe as a witness agin Walter. A pretty deep game! Walter, give us your hand. I knew before though that you were all right.”

Tom gripped Walter’s hand as if it were a pump–handle on a dry, hot, thirsty day. Others congratulated Walter, and none more readily than the keeper.

There was no investigation by the district superintendent when he arrived, and the news of the wreck brought him the next day.

CHAPTER XX.

CHRISTMAS.

Uncle Boardman was destined to have a Christmas present. At least, he began to think it looked like it, for there behind the kitchen stove, swinging from the wooden shelf over the fire–place, was Uncle Boardman's stocking on Christmas morning. If it were a joke, too bad to send a man barefoot over the cold floors hunting up his property. It was an enormous stocking. No mean, puny leg did Uncle Boardman carry about, and the stocking corresponded. It was a blue stocking, and it was thick and warm. What was a stocking for Uncle Boardman by day, would have made a good blanket for any baby by night. Uncle Boardman looked at the stocking and grinned. "Can't be anything in it," he said. "I thought Lydia and I gave up such things long ago." [340]

But the stocking seemed to say, "Try me and see what I can do for you."

"I will," thought Uncle Boardman. Down into the stocking he ran a good sized fist, and fished out a piece of paper neatly folded up.

"One of Lydia's jokes," he said. The paper though was directed to "Boardman Blake." He took it to the eastern window, at which the Christmas sun was hanging an outside curtain of crimson. He opened the missive and read:

> "*Dear Boardman:*—I have been thinking about your mortgage, and I have concluded to extend it as you wished, and I know you have had a hard time, and you may have it extended for one or two years, as you like, and not pay any interest. With a wish for a Merry Christmas,
>
> "Your old friend,
> John Elliott."

Uncle Boardman felt enough like a happy boy to shout "Hurrah!" and then he skipped upstairs to execute a dance in his wife's chamber.

"I thought it would make you happy," said Aunt Lydia. "Miss Green was in here last evenin' and brought it from the office, and so I tucked it into your stockin'."

"Well, Lydia, you shall have a new gown from this, for your present."

And what was it that moved Capt. Elliott to make that Christmas present? Could he say his prayers with comfort nowadays, and had he found such peace that he wished to take peace to another heart? [341]

His grandchild, Amy, was with him one day, while he was examining the Blake mortgage and other papers. Looking up, he thought, "That child is like the Atlantic Ocean." Like the Atlantic Ocean! She so little, and that so vast! It was an absurdity. And yet when one looked into her eyes, of such deep azure, when one witnessed the vivacity of her nature, the play of whose emotions was so varied, restless, and oftentimes intense, saw too the sparkles that kept coming and going in the depths of her eyes, one could but think of that Atlantic whose blue waves kept coming and going, each wave a crystal flashing in the sun.

Amy Elliott with a child's keenness of observation was watching her grandfather as he handled a certain document that had been lying beside his Bible. It was prayer time with him, one of those seasons when he would try to climb the stairway of a new and holy life, and somehow would be baffled and turn back. While reading his Bible, he chanced to notice a sheet of paper near it, and his thoughts wandering off to it, he interrupted his Bible reading long enough to find out what it was that called off his attention. It was Boardman Blake's note about the mortgage on his house, asking that a little indulgence be granted him. The sight of this irritated the old man, and he gave vent to his irritation in a sharp remark to Amy. "There, there, Amy, you interrupt me! You go and play somewhere." [342]

The child had not interrupted him, but that letter disturbed him, and it was convenient to blame Amy.

"Grandpa reading and praying?" inquired Amy. "That Grandpa's prayer to God? Did God hear?" As she spoke, she laid her tapering little finger on Boardman's letter. If she had struck him a cruel blow, she could not have wounded him more deeply. He clutched in his hand the letter, and muttering to himself, rose and went upstairs

to a dark little closet where he would sometimes shut himself in and pray. Down he dropped upon his knees. “Grandpa’s prayer to God!” Supposing it had been his prayer to God, what would God have done with it? If it had been John Elliott crying to God for favor, what would God have done?

“He hasn’t answered me,” murmured the old man. And then the inquiry arose in his heart, why God had not answered him?

Somehow there came into his mind with strange swiftness those old words: “With what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again.” [343]

Was not that letter the obstacle on the stairs of the better life he was trying to climb? Did he not stumble over it again and again? Would God extend mercy to him until he had had compassion on a fellow creature?

“I will!” he sobbed. “I will be merciful. I will extend the time for the payment of that note.”

And down into his soul as through some window opened just above him, streamed the light of the forgiving presence of God. No obstacle now on the stairway that John Elliott was trying to climb!

The first thing he did when he left that place of prayer, was to take pen and paper. At first he thought he would simply extend the time for the payment of that note.

“I can do better than that,” he said, and wrote the note already given.

To Aunt Lydia, he sent a request that the note might be handed to her husband, Christmas day. Aunt Lydia dropped it into that capacious stocking. There was a happy Christmas gathering at Boardman Blake’s. Walter’s father and mother were there, and some of the neighbors were invited to “drop in.” [344]

“We must ask the Elliotts,” said Aunt Lydia, and May, Amy, and Capt. Elliott came to represent them.

Miss P. Green too had been invited, and with her appeared her boarder, Chauncy Aldrich. Walter had faithfully kept his word to Chauncy, and careful nursing met with its reward. Back from the gates of death, was Chauncy brought, and he also came into a new life, spiritually. He walked after Christ in love and obedience. He returned after Christmas to the home of his parents, and he took his Christian principles with him and steadfastly adhered to them.

When the lights at the Christmas gathering had all been extinguished, and Walter was in his room upstairs, before retiring he looked out of the window toward the sea. He detected a bright little light crawling along through the darkness in the direction of the beach opposite the Crescent, “That is Tom Walker’s lantern,” thought Walter. “It is his watch, and he is out upon his beat.”

The light disappeared behind a projection of the shore ledges, and then Walter bowed in prayer and asked God to care for his brave old comrades who were caring for others and “*Fighting the Sea*.”

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTE:

—Obvious print and punctuation errors were corrected.

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