Shifting Winds
Vol.I

By
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Shifting Winds

Chapter One
The Cottage and its Inmates

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

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

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

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

I have said that the family circle sat by the fire, but this is not strictly correct.

One member of it, the little boy, stood in the middle of the room, howling!howling so violently that his fat face had changed from its wonted bright red to deep purple. Looking at himas he stood there arrayed in his uncle’s red night-cap, his own night-shirt, which was also a day-shirt and much too small, and his father’s pea-jacket, which was preposterously too largeone could not avoid the alarming surmise that there might be such a thing as juvenile apoplexy, and that that boy was on the point of becoming a living, if not a dead, example of the terrible disease.

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

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

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

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

Do not imagine that this is my account of myself; no, it is an ideal resulting from the oft-repeated assurances of my wife, who is a strong-minded woman, a few inches taller than myself, somewhat raw-boned and much more powerful, physically, though less rotund. In fact, if I were to attempt a brief comprehensive description of her, I would say, without the most distant feeling of disrespect of course, that she is square and skinnysingularly so!

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

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

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

If the men of the next century are destined to do good, “as their hands find opportunity,” without previous delay until thousands of opportunities are lost and gone for ever; if those who put their hands to a piece of work shall carry it out with vigour in their own lifetime; if those who counsel delay shall mean due time for full consideration by themselves, and shall not mean an extended procrastination which shall free themselves from worry, and leave their work to be handed down as a legacy to their children, who shall likewise hand it down to their children, and so on ad infinitum until “delay” shall become a

synonym for death and destruction to tens of thousands of better men than themselves,if this shall be the sentiment and practice of the men of next century, then I confess that my sympathies are with them, and I really suspect that I must have got into the wrong century by mistake. But as the position is irremediable now, I suppose I must, in an imbecile sort of fashion, go on my way rejoicingif I cansorrowing if I cannot rejoice.

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

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

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

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

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

"Hold yer noise," said Mrs Gaff sternly.

Billy obeyed, not by any means in consequence of the command, but because he was curious to know who was about to enter, and meant to resume yelling

immediately after his curiosity on this point should be satisfied.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Two.
Wrecked, Rescued, and ResuscitatedMrs Niven receives a Surprise, also the Gift of a Child.

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

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

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

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

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

There was one man among the number who did not shriek, who did not despair. He was not a hero of romance whose soul raised him above the fear of sudden deathno, he was only a true-hearted British tar, whose frame was very strong, whose nerves were tightly strung and used to danger. He had made up his mind to save his life if he could; if he should failwhat then? He never thought of “what then,” because, in regard to terrestrial matters, he had not been accustomed to cast his thoughts so far in advance of present exigencies.

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

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

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

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

The struggle was short with most of them. Previous exposure and anxiety had already quite exhausted all but the strongest among the men, and even these were unable to withstand the influence of the ice-cold water more than a few seconds. Some were struck by portions of the wreck and killed at once. Others

sank without an effort to save themselves. A few swam with unnatural vigour for a yard or two, and then went down with a gurgling cry; but in a very few minutes the work of death was complete. All were gone except the strong seaman, who clasped the little child in his left arm and buffeted the billows with his right.

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

For some time he lay there in a state of half-consciousness until his strength began to revive; then he arose, thanking God in an audible voice as he did so, and carried the child to a spot which was sheltered in some degree by a mass of cliff from the blinding spray and furious gale. Here he laid her with her face downwards on a grassy place, and proceeded to warm his benumbed frame.

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

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

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

“D’ye feel gettin’ better, Emmie?” said the man, in a low, soft voice.

A faint “yes” was all the reply.

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

“Is that ’oo, Gaff?”

“Ay, dear, ’tis me.”

“Where am Iwhere’s mamma?” inquired Emmie, looking round in some degree of alarm.

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

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

The man muttered to himself as if in perplexity

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

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

Stopping a moment at the outskirts of the village, Gaff laid down his burden, and tied a large blue cotton kerchief round his neck, so as to cover his mouth

and chin. By pulling his sou'wester cap well over his eyes, he concealed his face so effectually that little more than the point of his nose was visible. Not satisfied, however, with his disguise, he climbed a fence and struck into a bypath, which enabled him to avoid the village altogether.

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

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

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

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

The first summons passed unheard; the second caused Mrs Niven to open her eyes and shut her mouth, but she could not rise by reason of a crick in her neck. An angry shout, however, of "why don't you answer the bell?" from the master of the family, caused her to make a violent struggle, plunge her head into her lap, by way of counteracting the crick, rush up-stairs, and fling open the door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Three.
The Cottage at Cove invadedDan Horsey speaks “Toorko” to Russians, and fails to enlighten them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Took it to its friends.”

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

“An’ who saved ye, Stephen?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While Mrs Gaff obeyed in silent haste, the room was filled with men, some of whom supported or half-carried others, whose drooping heads, torn garments,

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

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

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

No answer, accompanied by a stare and a shake.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Arrah! d’ye think I’ll spake a word av ye stick yer great ugly fists into my

jooglar veins like that? Hands off," he cried indignantly, "or niver a taste o' spaitch ye'll git from me, bad or good. Besides, what duv I know about Roosian?"

"Ye've bin in Toorkey, han't ye?" inquired a fisherman.

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

"Ye can speak Toorko, can't ye?"

"Maybe I can," he replied cautiously.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Four.
The Rescue.

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

As the honorary agent for the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, I had been summoned by a special messenger as soon as it was known that vessels were

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

crowd on shore, and dragged out of danger by main force.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

having recovered, was lying on a blanket before the fire.

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

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

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

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

I observed, while I was busy with Furby, that my niece took Mrs Gaff aside, and appeared to be talking to her very earnestly. Lizzie was a lovely girl. She was tall and slightly formed, with rich brown hair and a dark clear complexion that might have been almost styled Spanish, but for the roses which bloomed on her cheeks. I could not help admiring the strong contrast between her and the fair face and portly figure of worthy Mrs Gaff, who listened to what she said with an air of deep respect.

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

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

My family and the Stuarts had become acquainted only a few weeks before the events of which I am now writing, and this was the first time that the young

people had met. They were not altogether unknown to each other, however, for Lizzie had heard of Kenneth from the fishermen, who used to speak with interest of his horsemanship and his daring feats in rescuing drowning people from the sea during the storms that so frequently visited our coast, and Kenneth had heard of Lizzie, also from the fishermen, amongst whom she was a frequent visitor, especially when sickness entered their cots, or when the storm made their wives widows, and their little ones fatherless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I must confess to being surprised at this, for it was quite evident to me that Kenneth admired Lizzie, and I was pretty certainso was my dear wifethat Lizzie admired Kenneth, although of course she never gave us the slightest hint to that effect, and it seemed to me such a good and reasonable opportunity forwell, well, I need not bore you, reader, with my wild ideas, so peculiarly adapted it would seem for the twentieth centurysuffice it to say, that I was surprised. But if truth must be told, I have always lived in a state of surprise in regard to the thoughts and actions of women, and on this particular night I was doomed to the unpleasant surprise of being received with a sharp rebuke from Mrs Bingley, who roundly asserted that she would stand this sort of thing no

longer. That she had no notion of being disturbed at such unearthly hours by the noisy advent of a disagreeably damp and cold husband, and that if I intended to continue to be an agent of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, she would insist upon a separate maintenance!

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

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

Chapter Five.
The Breakfast Party at Seaside Villa.

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

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

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

Having disposed of the cat, and looked twice at his watch, and blown his nose three timesthe last twice unnecessarilyMr Stuart rang the bell with violence.

Mrs Niven entered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Don’t you, auntwhy?”

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

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

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

“Well I’m sure I have no objection to the horse if you have none, Kennie, and it’s a good thing for a beast to be able to save human lives, though why human lives should require to be saved at all is a mystery that I never could fathom; surely if men would only agree to give up going to sea altogether, and never build any more ships, there would be no more drowning, and no need of lifeboats and cork bootsor coats, I forget whichthat enable them to walk on the

water, or float in it, I don’t remember which. I’m sure with all that I have to remember it’s no wonderwhat with ridiculous little trifles to worry one, such as keys, and thimbles, and scissors, when we should be giving our minds to the solemn realities of lifeand then,as if that were not enough for any woman’s shoulders,to have a little child left at one’s door.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is true that I pulled him out of the sea, aided and abetted by Bucephalus,

but whether all that you have heard of me is true I cannot tell, not knowing what you have heard. Who told you of it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Workhouse, brother!” exclaimed Miss Peppy in surprise.

“Workhouse, sir!” echoed Mrs Niven in horror.

“Father!” said Kenneth, remonstratively.

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

“According to law,” suggested the middy.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Six.
Kenneth indulges in Suspicions and Surmises.

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

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

Kenneth replied that he had a mount to give him, which, although not quite

thoroughbred, was nevertheless a good animal, and not addicted to the bad qualities objected to.

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

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

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

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

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

“Why to my father’s?” asked Gildart.

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

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

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

“Whew! in love!” exclaimed Gildart.

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

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

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

“Like you,” interpolated Gildart.

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

“Like me,” assented the middy.

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

“Ha!” ejaculated Gildart.

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

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

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

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

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

which they were to sail is named the ‘Hawk,’ and that is the ship that my father has heard of as having been seen yesterday.”

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

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

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

Kenneth shook his head gravely.

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

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

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

“What may that be?”

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

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

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

“That’s not Emma,” said Gildart.

“It is what I used to call my sister, however; and besides that there is a seaman named Stephen Gaff, who, I find, has turned up somewhat suddenly and

unaccountably last night from Australia. He says he has been wrecked; but he is mysterious and vague in his answers, and do what I will I cannot get rid of the idea that there is some connexion here."

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

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

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

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

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

Kenneth smiled, and promised.

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

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

"Come, Lizz, that's jolly, we're bound for the same port, and can set sail in

company; whether we keep together or not depends on circumstances, not to mention wind and weather. I rather think that if we take to racing, Bucephalus and Kenneth will be there first."

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Seven.
Lizzie Gordon is run away with, and Gaff is "pumped".

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

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

looking at the view of the sea, which appeared to them, as it has always been to me, enchanting.

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

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

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

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

"Or fallen over the cliffs," added Gildart.

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

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

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

"I love him," replied the youth enthusiastically.

"You love other creatures besides horses," thought I; but the thought had barely passed through my brain when Lizzie went off like an arrow. Kenneth sprang forward like a thunderbolt, and Gildart followedif I may so speaklike a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The 'Fairy Queen.'"

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

"Yes, from Australia."

“Did she go to pieces?”

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

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

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

“Then why did she make for Wreckumoft?” inquired Kenneth.

“That’s best known to the cap’n, who’s gone to his long home,” said Gaff gravely.

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

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

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

“I believe that every mother’s son o’ the crew wos lost but me,” replied Gaff evasively.

“Were none of the children saved?”

“What child’n?” asked the other quickly. “I didn’t say there was child’n aboord, did I?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And you agreed with him?” pursued Gaff.

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

“Did you?” said Gaff.

“Most truly I did.”

“Hum. You spoke of suspicionswot was your suspicions?”

“To be candid with you, then,” said Kenneth, “when I came to see you I suspected that it was you who left that child at our house, for I heard of your sudden re-appearance in Cove, but I am convinced now that I was wrong, for I

know you would not tell me a falsehood, Gaff."

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

Kenneth stopped and looked earnestly at his companion.

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

"Dead, both of 'em," said Gaff.

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

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

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

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

"Well, we worked a year in Melbourne to raise the wind. Tom, (he made me

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

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

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

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

"You don't say so, sir?"

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

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

Chapter Eight.
Dan Horsey does the Agreeable in the Kitchen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s a fine mornin’, my darlints,” said Dan, as he entered the kitchen with a

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

“None o’ yer imperance,” said cook, stirring the contents of a large pan carefully.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What’s a poplypus?” interrupted cook.

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

“Imperance!” ejaculated cook.

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

make a stone immage weep, all the while that Miss Penelope is snivellin' on one side o' the bed, an' Mrs Niven is snortin' on the other."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Nine.
The Sailors' Home and the Mad Skipper.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The Coffin?" said Susan, interrogatively.

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

"Are they all so bad as to deserve the name?" inquired Susan.

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

whole time."

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

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

"What!" exclaimed Susan, with a flush of indignation, "an' risk your life, father?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Go, Susan," said I, "see who it is."

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

with a letter and a very flushed face.

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

“Who brought it?” I inquired.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And hark’ee, lad,” cried Haco, again springing up and confronting the groom,

“d’ye see this young ’ooman?” (pointing to Susan.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Humph! an’ is he fond o’ you?”

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

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

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

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

“Father, that’s not true.”

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

“Horsey, father,” said Susan.

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

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

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

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

“No father, never.”

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

“I daresay I’m very stupid for being so ignorant, father; but I never heard of it. You know I’ve spent most o’ my life inland with old Auntie Bess, an’ only come here this year.

“Mayhap,” continued Haco, shaking his head gravely, “you’ve never heer’d, neither, o’ the Lifeboat Institootion.”

“Never,” said Susan meekly. “I’ve seen the lifeboat we have here, you know,

but I never heard of the Institootion.”

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

“Where shall we go to get it, father?”

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

Chapter Ten.

The Dinner in the RestaurantHaco meets an Old Friend and becomes Communicative.

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

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

Being the hour at which a number of seamen, labourers, clerks, and others were wont to experience the truth of the great fact that nature abhors a vacuum, the room was pretty full, and a brisk demand was going on for soup,

tea, coffee, rolls, and steaks, etcetera, all of which were supplied on the most moderate terms, in order to accommodate the capacities of the poorest purse.

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

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

“Yessir.”

“Soup for two, steaks an’ ’taties for ditto to foller.”

“Yessir.”

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

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

“Yessir. Roll with it, Miss?”

“Of course,” said Haco.

“Butter, Miss?”

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

“No sir.”

“Never mind. Look alive now, lad. Come, Susan, here’s a box with only one man in’t, we’ll Hallo! shiver my timbers if it ain’tnoit can’t beStephen Gaff, eh! or his ghost?”

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

“Thank ’ee, I’m pretty comf’rable. This is my darter Susan,” said Haco,

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

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

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

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

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

The waiter appeared at this point in the conversation with the soup, so Haco devoted himself to dinner, while Gaff ordered a plate of bread and cheese extra in order to keep him company. For some minutes they all ate in silence. Then Haco, during the interval between the courses, informed Gaff that he expected

to return to the port of London in a day or two; whereupon Gaff said that he just happened to be lookin' out for a ship goin' there, as he had business to do in the great city, and offered to work his way. The skipper readily promised to ship him as an extra hand, if the owner chose to send the 'Coffin' to sea without repairs, "which," observed Haco, "is not unlikely, for he's a close-fisted customer."

"Who is he?" inquired Gaff.

"Stuart of Seaside Villa," said Haco.

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

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

"How was that?"

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

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

"Yessir."

"Fetch me a pannikin o' tea, for it's dry work tellin' a anikdot. You see, Gaff,

I’m a reg’lar teetotallernever go the length o’ coffee even without a doctor’s surtificate. Another cup, Susan?”

“No thank ’ee, father, I couldn’t.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh, that alters the casewell?”

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

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

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

“A hamwhat?” said Haco interrogatively.

“A ham-big-oo-ous one.”

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

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

“H’mrather hazy ahead,” answered the skipper with a deeply sagacious look;

“a difficult letter to write in my opinion. How d’ye mean to do it?”

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

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

“You know my darter Tottie?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Eleven.
The Writing of the “Hambigoo-ous” Letter.

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

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

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

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

“What’s all the hurry, Stephen?”

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

The Bu’ster, who had suddenly willed to have a shy at the household cat with a small crab which he had captured, and which was just then endeavouring

vainly to ascend the leg of a chair, for a wonder did not carry out his will, but went at once to his sire.

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

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

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

“Are ye ready, Tot?” asked Gaff.

“Yes, quite,” answered the child.

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

“But what am I to say, daddy?”

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

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

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

“It’s a gentleman.”

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

“But he an’t dear to me,” said Gaff.

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

“Make it ‘sir,’ plain ‘sir’ means nothin’ in partickler, I b’lieve,” said Gaff with

animation, “so we’ll begin it with plain ‘sir.’ Now, then, fire away, Tottie.”

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

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

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

She held up the pen to view, and no one could deny the fact, not even Billy, who, feeling that he had repressed his natural flow of spirits rather longer than he was accustomed to, and regarding the incident as in some degree destructive of his mother’s peace of mind, hailed the discovery with an exulting cheer.

Mrs Gaff’s palm instantly exploded like a pistol-shot on Billy’s ear, and he measured his lengthexactly three feet sixon the floor.

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

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

“This is awk’ard,” said Gaff, rubbing his nose.

“Try some tar in it,” suggested Mrs Gaff.

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

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

“Now, then, ‘dear sir,’” said Tottie, once more dipping her pen.

“No, no; didn’t I say, plain ‘Sir,’” remonstrated her father.

“Oh, I forgot, wellthereitisnow, ‘Plane sur,’ but I’ve not been taught that way at school yet.”

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

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

“Three letters, daddie!” exclaimed the scribe with a laugh, “there’s eight of ’em no less.”

“Eight!” exclaimed Gaff in amazement. “Let’s hear ’em, dear.”

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

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

“No, daddie.”

“Are ye sure?”

“Quite sure, for I’ve scratched it into a hole right through the paper.”

“Never mind, it’s all the better.”

“Humph!” interjected Mrs Gaff. “He’ll think we began ‘dear sir,’ and then changed our minds and scratched out the ‘dear!’”

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

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

The Bu’ster came down on it like lightning with the blot-sheet, and squashed it

into an irregular mass bigger than half-a-crown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yoors to comand,

“The riter.”

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

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

Mr Stuart knew well the character of the man with whom he had to do, and

spoke thus with design. Haco fired at once, but he displayed no temper.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The man in request entered at the moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Twelve.
The Bu'ster wills to accomplish Mischief, and gets into Trouble.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

below.

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

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

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

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

“Dead calm,” said Gaff.

“Won’t last long,” said Haco.

“Won’t it?”

“No. Glass fallin’ fast.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Soon?” inquired Gaff.

“P’r’aps yes, p’r’aps no.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The second effort was more successful.

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

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

“Breakfast, Billy,” repeated Gaff.

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

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

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

He began operations by attempting to get at the needle of the compass, but finding that this was secured powerfully by means of glass and brass, he changed his mind, and devoted himself heart and soul to the wheel. Turning it round until the helm was hard down, he looked up at the sails, and with some curiosity awaited the result, but the vessel having no motion no result followed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

overboard, head first, hat, coat, and all, like an arrow, and caught Billy by the hair when he was about four feet below the surface.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Thirteen.
The Storm, and its Consequences.

It came at length with awful speed and fury.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"D'ye know," rejoined Gaff, "it has often bin in my mind, that as Christian men, (which we profess to be, whether we believe our own profession or not), we don't look at God's will in the right way. The devil himself is obliged to

submit to God whether he will or no, because he can't help it. Don't 'ee think it would be more like Christians if we was to submit because it is His will?"

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

"Mind your helm, lad!"

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

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

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

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

The look-out gave a shout.

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

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

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

The promptitude with which these orders were given and obeyed, prevented the steamer from running down the sloop altogether. A collision, however, was unavoidable. The crew of the sloop and the Russians, seeing this, rushed to the place where they expected to be struck, in order to leap, if possible, into the

head of the steamer. Even the steersman left his post, and sprang into the weather shrouds in the hope of catching some of the ropes or chains below the bowsprit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was no reply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

course for South America!

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

Observing this they called upon him for his opinion.

“Lads,” said he in decided tones, “I’ve got no opinion to offer. I amat least I strive to bea Christian man; an’, to be plain with ye, I won’t go for to consult or act with murderers, or mutineers, or pirates, which it appears you intend to become, if you’re not that a’ready. One opinion I will give ye, however, an’ one piece of advice I’ll offer. The opinion is, that if you go on as you’ve bin a-goin’ on since I came aboard, you’ll all live to be hanged. The advice is, that you should face yer troubles like mentake things as ye find ’em, an’ if ye can’t mend ’em, why grin and bear ’em.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Sarves him right!”

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

“Well, so it does sarve him right,” added one who had been a prominent

speaker in the recent debates; “but hark’ee, friend,” he said, turning to Gaff with a scowl, “you can’t knock the whole crew down in that fashion. I advise ye, for your own sake, to mind what ye’re about.”

“I means to do so,” said Gaff; “I’ll stick to my dooty and to the cap’n.”

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

“Tumble up there! tumble up, an’ reef tops’ls!” roared the captain down the hatch at that moment.

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

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

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

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

Now, philosophical readerif such you bedo not suppose that I advocate kicking and cuffing as the best possible cure for general mischievousness and badness

in a boy. By no means. My strong-minded wife says I do; but then she always forms, or rather partially forms, her opinions on assumptions, retains them in confusion, states them at haphazard, according to her mood at the time being, and, having stated them, sticks to them like a limpet to a rock.

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

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

Weeks rolled on; gales succeeded calms, and calms succeeded gales. The "line" was passed; southern seas were reached; new constellations glittered overhead; strange fish and luminous creatures gambolled in the sea, and the whalers' fishing-ground was entered. Latterly the men had ceased to grumble at the captain, although he had by no means ceased to swear at and bully the men, and Gaff began to hope that they had got over their bad fit, and were going to settle down to work peaceably.

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

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

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

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

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

seaman’s crown felling him at once.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Hear, hear!” from several voices emphatically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The captain, who sat in the stern with his chin resting in his hand, and a dark

scowl on his face, also watched the retreating vessel.

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

Chapter Fifteen.
The Dinner PartyA Sudden Piece of Questionable Good Fortune befalls Mrs Gaff.

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

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

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

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

In virtue of his rank, not his capacity of course, Sir Richard was in great

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

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

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

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

Miss Martha Puff was niece to Miss Flouncerage apparently sixteen. It struck me, as I sat looking at her placid face, that this young lady was well named. Her pink round visage was puffed up with something so soft that I could scarcely venture to call it fat. Her round soft arms were so puffy to look at,

that one could not help fearing that an accidental prick from a pin would burst the skin and let them out. She seemed so like trifle in her pink muslin dress, that I could imagine a puff of wind blowing her away altogether. She could not be said to be puffed up with conceit, poor girl; but she dined almost exclusively on puff paste, to the evident satisfaction of my gallant son Gildart, who paid her marked attention during dinner.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Flouncer, to whom the news was also fresh, exclaimed, “You don’t say

so!” with strong emphasis, and an immensely swan-like undulation of her body.

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

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

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

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

“Yes,” said Miss Puff.

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

“No,” answered Miss Puff.

These two wordsyes and nowere the utmost extent to which Miss Puff had yet ventured into the dreaded sea of conversation. I could perceive by the fagged expression of his face that the middy was beginning to lose heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is always the way,” said my wife.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furby was one of these.

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

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

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

“Well, ano. I have not the pleasurea”

Miss Flouncer was evidently a little put out.

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

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

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

“Ahem!” coughed Gildart slightly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The village was an inland one, far removed alike from the roar and the influences of the briny ocean. It must have cost the sailor some pain to reach it; for he walked with a crutch, and one of his bare feet was bandaged, and scarcely touched the ground at each step. He looked dusty and fatigued, yet he was a stout, well-favoured, robust young fellow, so that his hapless condition was evidently the result of recent misfortune and accidentnot of prolonged sickness or want. He wore the picturesque blue jacket, wide trousers, and straw hat of a man-of-war’s man; and exposed a large amount of brown chest beneath his blue flannel shirt, the broad collar of which was turned well over.

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

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

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

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

Having limped on until the village was quite hidden from view, the sailor quietly put his crutch across his broad shoulder, and brightening up wonderfully, walked across the moor at the rate of full five miles an hour, whistling gaily in concert with the larks as he sped along.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He could barely crawl up the beach through the heavy surf, dragging his burden after him. But he succeeded, and then lay for some time insensible. When he recovered, he found that the woman appeared to be dead. Anxious, however, to do all in his power to restore her, he tried to chafe her limbs; but seeing that he could make no impression, he hastened away to search for human dwellings and send help. Four miles did he stagger along before he came to a fishing village.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And with that he made a rush at them. They tumbled over each other in heaps, trying to get out of his way, so that he could only get a passing dig at one or two of them, and cleared away as fast as he could run.

They did not follow him far, so Jack soon stopped and sat down on the road-side, in a very savage state of mind, to wipe the blood from his face and knuckles.

While he was thus engaged, an elderly gentleman in the garb of a clergyman approached him.

“What has happened to you, my man?” he asked.

“That’s none o’ your business,” answered Jack with angry emphasis. “Ax no questions, an’ you’ll be told no lies!”

“Excuse me, friend,” replied the clergyman gently, “I did not mean to annoy you; but you seem to have been badly wounded, and I would assist you if you will allow me.”

“I ax yer parding, sir,” said Jack, a little softened, though by no means restored to his wonted good-humour; “no offence meant, but I’ve been shamefully abused by the scoundrels in yonder village, an’ I am riled a bit. It’s only a scratch, sir, you don’t need to consarn yerself.”

“It is more than a scratch, if I may judge from the flow of blood. Permit me to examine.”

“Oh, it’ll be all right d’rectly,” said Jack; but as he said so he fell back on the grass, fainting from loss of blood which flowed from a large wound on his head.

When the sailor’s senses were restored, he found himself in a bed in the clergyman’s dwelling, with his head bandaged up, and his body a good deal weaker than he had ever before felt it. The clergyman took care of him until he recovered; and you may be sure that he did not miss the opportunity to urge the sailor to think of his soul, and to come to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, whose name is Love, and whose teaching is all summed up in this, “Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.”

When Jack was quite recovered, the clergyman gave him some money to enable him to reach his home without begging his way.

Now this case also occurred before the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society was instituted. I cannot say that such cases of rough handling were frequent; but cases in which true-blue shipwrecked tars were treated as impostors were numerous, so that, in those days, knaves and rascals often throve as wrecked seamen, while the genuine and unfortunate men were often turned rudely from door to door. This state of things does not exist now. It cannot exist now, for honorary agents of the society are to be found on every part of our coasts, so that the moment a wrecked man touches the land, no matter whether he be a Briton or a foreigner, he is at once taken care of, clothed, housed, fed, supplied

with a little money, and forwarded to his home, or to the nearest consul of his nation. The society has therefore accomplished two great and good objects, for which the entire nation owes it a debt of gratitude; it has rid the land of begging impostors clad in sailors' clothes, and it has provided relief and assistance to the shipwrecked among our brave and hardy seamen who are in every sense the bulwarks of our island, and without whose labours, in the most perilous of all callings, Great Britain would be one of the poorest and most uninfluential kingdoms on the face of the earth.

But the society does a great deal more than that, for it comforts and assists with money and advice hundreds and thousands of widows and orphans whose husbands, fathers, or brothers have been drowned; and this it does from year to year regularlyas regularly as the storms come and scatter death and destruction on our shores. It cannot be too earnestly impressed on the people of England, and especially on those who dwell inland, that at least a thousand lives are lost, two thousand ships are wrecked, and two millions sterling are thrown away upon the coasts of this country every year.

It is owing to the untiring energy of the National Lifeboat Institution that those figures are not much, very much higher; and it is the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society that alleviates much, very much, of the woe resulting from storms and wrecks upon our shores. Sailors and fishermen know this well, and support both institutions largely. I would that ladies and gentlemen knew this better, and felt that they have a positive duty incumbent on them in regard to these societies, for they are not local but national.

"Now, madam," said I, again addressing myself pointedly to Miss Flouncer, "would you like to hear a few interesting facts in reference to the objects of this Society?"

Miss Flouncer smiled and undulated in order to express her readiness to listen; at the same time she glanced at Sir Richard, who, I observed, was sound asleep. I also noticed that Mrs Bingley sniffed impatiently; but I felt that I had a duty to perform, so with unalterable resolution I prepared to continue my address, when Miss Peppy, who had been nearly asleep during the greater part of the time I was speaking, suddenly said to Miss Flouncer

"Well, it is a most surprising state of things that people will go to sea and get wrecked just to let societies like these spring up like mushrooms all over the land. For my part, I think I would rather do without the things that ships bring to us from foreign lands than always hear of those dreadful wrecks, andbut really one cannot expect the world to alter just to please one, so I suppose people must go on being drowned and saved by rocket-boats and lifeboats; so we had better retire to the drawing-room, my dear."

The last observation was addressed to Mrs Bingley, who responded to it with a bow of assent as she drew on her gloves.

Immediately after, the ladies rose, and I was thus constrained to postpone my narration of interesting facts, until another opportunity should offer.

Chapter Seventeen.
Mrs Gaff endeavours fruitlessly to understand the Nature of Cash, Principal, and Interest.

At first, as I have said, poor Mrs Gaff was quite inconsolable at the bereavements she had sustained in the loss of her husband and son and brother. For a long time she refused to be comforted, or to allow her spirit to be soothed by the visits, (the “angel visits” as she styled them), of Lizzie Gordon, and the entrance of God’s Word into her heart.

Much of the violence of the good woman’s character was the result of training and example on an impulsive and sanguine, yet kindly spirit. She had loved Stephen and Billy with a true and ardent love, and she could not forgive herself for what she styled her “cruelty to the dear boy.” Neither could she prevail on herself to enjoy or touch a single penny of the money which ought, she said, to have been her husband’s.

Night after night would Mrs Gaff sit down by the cottage fireside to rest after her day of hard toll, and, making Tottie sit down on a stool at her feet, would take her head into her lap, and stroke the hair and the soft cheek gently with her big rough hand, while she discoursed of the good qualities of Stephen, and the bravery of her darling boy, to whom she had been such a cruel monster in days gone by.

Poor Tottie, being of a sympathetic nature, would pat her mother’s knee and weep. One evening while they were sitting thus she suddenly seemed to be struck with a new idea.

“Maybe, mother,” said she, “Daddy an’ Billy will come back. We’ve never hearn that they’s been drownded.”

“Tottie,” replied Mrs Gaff earnestly, “I’ve thoughten o’ that afore now.”

Little more was said, but from that night Mrs Gaff changed her manner and her practice. She set herself earnestly and doggedly to prepare for the return of her husband and child!

On the day that followed this radical change in her feelings and plans, Mrs

Gaff received a visit from Haco Barepoles.

“How d’ye find yerself to-day, Mrs Gaff?” said the big skipper, seating himself carefully on a chair, at which he cast an earnest glance before sitting down.

This little touch of anxiety in reference to the chair was the result of many years of experience, which told him that his weight was too much for most ordinary chairs, unless they were in sound condition.

“Well and hearty,” replied Mrs Gaff, sitting down and seizing Tottie’s head, which she began to smooth. She always smoothed Tottie, if she were at hand, when she had nothing better to do.

“Heh!” exclaimed Haco, with a slight look of surprise. “Glad to hear it, lass. Nothin’ turned up, has there?”

“No, nothin’; but I’ve bin busy preparin’ for Stephen and Billy comin’ home, an’ that puts one in good spirits, you know.”

A shade of anxiety crossed Haco’s brow as he looked earnestly into the woman’s face, under the impression that grief had shaken her reason, but she returned his glance with such a calm self-possessed look that he felt reassured.

“I hope they’ll come, lass,” he said sadly; “what makes ye think they will?”

“I feel sure on it. I feel it here,” replied the woman, placing her hand on her breast. “Sweet Miss Lizzie Gordon and me prayed together that the Lord would send ’em home if it was His will, an’ ever since then the load’s bin off my heart.”

Haco shook his head for a moment, then nodded it, and said cheerily, “Well, I hope it may be so for your sake, lass. An’ what sort o’ preparations are ye goin’ to make?”

Mrs Gaff smiled as she rose, and silently went to a cupboard, which stood close to the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, and took therefrom a tea-caddy, which she set on the table with peculiar emphasis. Tottie watched her with an expression of awe, for she had seen her mother weeping frequently over that tea-caddy, and believed that it must certainly contain something very dreadful.

“The preparations,” said Mrs Gaff, as she searched her pocket for the key of the box, “will depend on what I’m able to afford.”

“You’ll be able to afford a good deal, then, if all that’s reported be true, for I’m

told ye’ve got ten thousand pounds.”

“Is that the sum?” asked Mrs Gaff, still searching for the key, which, like all other keys in like circumstances, seemed to have gone in for a game of hide-and-seek; “I’m sure I ought to know, for the lawyer took great pains to teach me that; ay, there ye are,” (to the key); “found ye at last. Now then, Haco, we’ll have a look at the book and see.”

To Tottie’s surprise and no small disappointment, the only object that came out of the mysterious tea-caddy was a small book, which Mrs Gaff, however, seemed to look upon with respect, and to handle as if she half-expected it would bite.

“There, that’s my banker’s book. You read off the figures, Haco, for I can’t. To be sure if I had wanted to know, Tottie could have told me, but I haven’t had the heart to look at it till to-day.”

“Ten thousand, an’ no mistake!” said Haco, looking at the figures with intense gravity.

“Now, then, the question is,” said Mrs Gaff, sitting down and again seizing Tottie’s head for stroking purposes, while she put the question with deep solemnity“the question is, how long will that last?”

Haco was a good deal puzzled. He bit his thumb nail, and knit his shaggy brows for some time, and then said

“Well, you know, that depends on how much you spend at a time. If you go for to spend a thousand pounds a day, now, it’ll just last ten days. If you spend a thousand pounds a year, it’ll last ten years. If you spend a thousand pounds in ten years, it’ll last a hundred yearsd’ye see? It all depends on the spendin’. But, then, Mrs Gaff,” said the skipper remonstratively, “you mustn’t go for to live on the principal, you know.”

“What’s the principal?” demanded Mrs Gaff.

“Why, the whole sum; the money itself, you know.”

“D’ye suppose that I’m a born fool, Mr Barepoles, that I should try to live on the money itself? I never heerd on anybody bilin’ up money in a kettle an’ suppin’ goold soup, and I’m not a-goin’ for to try.”

With infinite difficulty, and much futile effort at illustration, did Haco explain to Mrs Gaff the difference between principal and interest; telling her to live on the latter, and never on any account to touch the former, unless she wished to “end her days in a work’us.”

“I wonder what it’s like,” said Mrs Gaff.

“What what’s like?” inquired the skipper.

“Ten thousand pounds.”

“Well, that depends too, you know, on what it’s made ofwhether copper, silver, goold, or paper.”

“What! is it ever made o’ paper?”

In attempting to explain this point, Haco became unintelligible even to himself, and Mrs Gaff became wildly confused.

“Well, well,” said the latter, “never mind; but try to tell me how much I’ll have a year.”

“That depends too”

“Everything seems to depend,” cried Mrs Gaff somewhat testily.

“Of course it does,” said Haco, “everything does depend on somethin’ else, and everything will go on dependin’ to the end of time: it depends on how you invest it, and what interest ye git for it.”

“Oh, dearie me!” sighed Mrs Gaff, beginning for the first time to realise in a small degree the anxieties and troubles inseparable from wealth; “can’t ye tell me what it’s likely to be about?”

“Couldn’t say,” observed Haco, drawing out his pipe as if he were about to appeal to it for information; “it’s too deep for me.”

“Well, but,” pursued Mrs Gaff, becoming confidential, “tell me now, d’ye think it would be enough to let me make some grand improvements on the cottage against Stephen and Billy’s return?”

“Why, that depends on what the improvements is to be,” returned Haco with a profound look.

“Ay, just so. Well, here are some on ’em. First of all, I wants to get a noo grate an’ a brass tea-kettle. There’s nothing like a cheery fire of a cold night, and my Stephen liked a cheery firean’ so did Billy for the matter o’ that; but the trouble I had wi’ that there grate is past belief. Now, a noo grate’s indispens’ble.”

“Well?” said Haco, puffing his smoke up the chimney, and regarding the

woman earnestly.

“Well; then I want to get a noo clock. That one in the corner is a perfit fright. A noo table, too, for the leg o’ that one has bin mended so often that it won’t never stand another splice. Then a noo tea-pot an’ a fender and fire-irons would be a comfort. But my great wish is to get a big mahogany four-post bed with curtains. Stephen says he never did sleep in a four-poster, and often wondered what it would be likeno more did I, so I would like to take him by surprise, you see. Then I want to git”

“Well?” said Haco, when she paused.

“I’m awful keen to git a carpit, but I doubt I’m thinkin’ o’ too many things. D’ye think the first year’swhat d’ye call it?”

“Interest,” said Haco.

“Ay, interestwould pay for all that?”

“Yes, an’ more,” said the skipper confidently.

“If I only knew how much it is to be,” said Mrs Gaff thoughtfully.

At that moment the door opened, and Kenneth Stuart entered, followed by his friend Gildart Bingley. After inquiring as to her welfare Kenneth said:

“I’ve come to pay you the monthly sum which is allowed you by the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society. Mr Bingley asked me to call as he could not do so; but from all accounts I believe you won’t need it. May I congratulate you on your good fortune, Mrs Gaff.”

Kenneth took out his purse as he spoke to pay the sum due to her.

Mrs Gaff seemed to be struck with a sudden thought. She thanked Kenneth for his congratulations, and then said:

“As to my not needin’ the money you’ve brought me, young man, I take leave to say that I do need it; so you’ll obleege me by handin’ it over.”

Kenneth obeyed in surprise not unmingled with disappointment in finding such a grasping spirit in one whom he had hitherto thought well of. He paid the money, however, in silence, and was about to take his leave when Mrs Gaff stopped him.

“This sum has bin paid to me riglarly for the last three months.”

“I believe it has,” said Kenneth.

“And,” continued Mrs Gaff, “it’s been the means o’ keepin’ me and my Tottie from starvation.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” returned Kenneth, who began to wonder what was to follow; but he was left to wonder, for Mrs Gaff abruptly asked him and Gildart to be seated, as she was anxious to find out a fact or two in regard to principal and interest.

Gildart could scarce avoid laughing as he glanced at his companion.

“Now,” began Mrs Gaff, seating herself opposite Kenneth, with a hand on each knee, “I wants to know what a principal of ten thousand pounds comes to in the way of interest in a twel’month.”

“Well, Mrs Gaff,” said Kenneth, “that depends”

“Dear me!” cried Mrs Gaff petulantly, “every mortial thing that has to do with money seeps to depend. Could ye not tell me somethin’ about it, now, that doesn’t depend?”

“Not easily,” replied Kenneth with a laugh; “but I was going to say that if you get it invested at five per cent, that would give you an income of five hundred pounds a year.”

“How much?” inquired Mrs Gaff in a high key, while her eyes widened with astonishment.

“Indeed I am not,” said Kenneth earnestly, with an appealing glance at Gildart.

“Trueas Johnson’s Dictionary,” said the middy. Mrs Gaff spent a few moments in silent and solemn reflection.

“The Independent clergyman,” she said in a low meditative tone, “has only two hundred a yearso I’m told; an’ the doctor at the west end has got four hundred, and he keeps a fine house an’ servants; an’ Sam Balls, the rich hosier, has got six hundredso they say; and Mrs Gaff, the poor critter, has only got five hundred! That’ll do,” she continued, with a sudden burst of animation, “shake out the reefs in yer tops’ls, lass, slack off yer sheets, ease the helm, an’ make the most on it while the fair wind lasts.”

Having thus spoken, Mrs Gaff hastily folded up in a napkin the sum just given her, and put it, along with the bank-book, into the tea-caddy, which she locked and deposited safely in the corner cupboard. Immediately after, her visitors, much surprised at her eccentric conduct, rose and took their leave.