Shifting Winds
Vol.II

By
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Shifting Winds

Chapter Eighteen
Mrs Gaff becomes a Woman of Business, and finds it awfully Hard Work.

Soon after the conversation narrated in the last chapter, the clerks in the bank of Wreckumoft were not a little interested by the entrance of a portly woman of comely appearance and large proportions. She was dressed in a gaudy cotton gown and an enormously large bonnet, which fluttered a good deal, owing as much to its own magnitude and instability as to the quantity of pink ribbons and bows wherewith it was adorned.

The woman led by the hand a very pretty little girl, whose dress was much the same in pattern, though smaller in proportion. Both woman and child looked about them with that air of uncertainty peculiar to females of the lower order when placed in circumstances in which they know not exactly how to act.

Taking pity upon them, a clerk left his perch, and going forward, asked the woman what she wanted.

To this she replied promptly, that she wanted money.

She was much flushed and very warm, and appeared to have come some distance on foot, as well as to be in a state of considerable agitation, which, however, she determinedly subdued by the force of a strong will.

“If you go to yonder rail and present your cheque,” replied the clerk kindly,

“you’ll get the money.”

“Present what, young man?”

“Your cheque,” replied the clerk.

“What’s that?”

“Have you not a cheque-bookor a slip of paper to”

“Oh! ay, a book. Of course I’ve got a book, young man.”

Saying this, Mrs Gaff, (for it was she), produced from a huge bag the bank-book that had erstwhile reposed in the mysterious tea-caddy.

“Have you no other book than this?”

“No, young man,” replied Mrs Gaff, feeling, but not exhibiting, slight alarm.

The clerk, after glancing at the book, and with some curiosity at its owner, then explained that a cheque-book was desirable, although not absolutely necessary, and went and got one, and showed her the use of it,how the sum to be drawn should be entered with the date, etcetera, on the margin in figures, and then the cheque itself drawn out in words, “not in figures,” and signed; after which he advised Mrs Gaff to draw out a cheque on the spot for what she wanted.

“But, young man,” said Mrs Gaff, who had listened to it all with an expression of imbecility on her good-looking face, “I never wrote a stroke in my life ’xcept once, when I tried to show my Billy how to do it, and only made a big blot on his copy, for which I gave him a slap on the face, poor ill-used boy.”

“Well, then, tell me how much you want, and I will write it out for you,” said the clerk, sitting down at a table and taking up a pen.

Mrs Gaff pondered for a few seconds, then she drew Tottie aside and carried on an earnest and animated conversation with her in hoarse whispers, accompanied by much nodding and quivering of both bonnets, leading to the conclusion that what the one propounded the other heartily agreed to.

Returning to the table, Mrs Gaff said that she wanted a hundred pounds.

“How much?” demanded the clerk in surprise.

“A hundred pound, young man,” repeated Mrs Gaff, somewhat sternly, for she had made up her mind to go through with it come what might; “if ye have as much in the shop just nowif not I’ll take the half, and call back for the other

half to-morrythough it be raither a longish walk fro' Cove and back for a woman o' my size."

The clerk smiled, wrote out the cheque, and bade her sign it with a cross. She did so, not only with a cross, but with two large and irregular blots. The clerk then pointed to a partition about five feet six in height, where she was to present it. Going to the partition she looked about for a door by which to enter, but found none. Looking back to the clerk for information, she perceived that he was gone. Pickpockets and thieves instantly occurred to her, but, on searching for the bank-book and finding that it was safe, she felt relieved. Just as she was beginning to wonder whether she was not being made game of, she heard a voice above her, and, looking up, observed a man's head stretched over the top of the partition and looking down at her.

"Now, then, good woman, what do you want?" said the head.

"I wants a hundred pound," said Mrs Gaff, presenting her cheque in a somewhat defiant manner, for she began to feel badgered.

The head put over a hand, took the cheque, and then both disappeared.

Mrs Gaff stood for some time waiting anxiously for the result, and as no result followed, she began again to think of thieves and pickpockets, and even meditated as to the propriety of setting up a sudden cry of thieves, murder, and fire, in order to make sure of the clerk being arrested before he should get quite clear of the building, when she became aware of a fluttering of some sort just above her. Looking up she observed her cheque quivering on the top of the partition. Wondering what this could mean, she gazed at it with an expression of solemn interest.

Twice the cheque fluttered, with increasing violence each time, as though it were impatient, and then the head re-appeared suddenly.

"Why don't you take your cheque?" it demanded with some asperity.

"Because I don't want it, young man; I wants my money," retorted Mrs Gaff, whose ire was beginning to rise.

The head smiled, dropped the cheque on the floor, and, pointing with its nose to a gentleman who stood behind a long counter in a sort of stall surrounded with brass rails, told her to present it to the teller, and she'd get the money. Having said which the head disappeared; but it might have been noted by a self-possessed observer, that as soon as Mrs Gaff had picked up the cheque, (bursting two buttons off her gown in the act), the head re-appeared, grinning in company with several other heads, all of which grinned and watched the

further movements of Mrs Gaff with interest.

There were four gentlemen standing behind the long counter in brazen stalls. Three of these Mrs Gaff passed on her way to the one to whom she had been directed by the head's nose.

"Now, sir," said Mrs Gaff, (she could not say "young man" this time, for the teller was an elderly gentleman), "I hope ye'll pay me the money without any more worrittin' of me. I'm sure ye might ha' done it at once without shovin' about a poor ignorant woman like me."

Having appealed to the teller's feelings in this last observation, Mrs Gaff's own feelings were slightly affected, and she whimpered a little. Tottie, being violently sympathetic, at once began to weep silently.

"How would you like to have it, my good woman?" asked the teller kindly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Mrs Gaff.

"Would you like to have it in notes or gold?" said the teller.

"In goold, of course, sir."

Tottie here glanced upwards through her tears. Observing that her mother had ceased to whimper, and was gazing in undisguised admiration at the proceedings of the teller, she turned her eyes in his direction, and forgot to cry any more.

The teller was shovelling golden sovereigns into a pair of scales with a brass shovel as coolly as if he were a grocer's boy scooping out raw sugar. Having weighed the glittering pile, he threw them carelessly out of the scale into the brass shovel, and shot them at Mrs Gaff, who suddenly thrust her ample bosom against the counter, under the impression that the coins were about to be scattered on the floor. She was mistaken. They were checked in their career by a ledge, and lay before her unbelieving eyes in a glittering mass.

Suddenly she looked at the teller with an expression of severe reproof.

"You've forgot to count 'em, sir."

"You'll find them all right," replied the teller, with a laugh.

Thereupon Mrs Gaff, in an extremely unbelieving state of mind, began to count the gold pieces one by one into a little cotton bag which had been prepared by her for this very purpose, and which Tottie held open with both hands. In ten minutes, after much care and many sighs, she counted it all, and

found that there were two sovereigns too many, which she offered to return to the teller with a triumphant air, but that incredulous man smiled benignantly, and advised her to count it again. She did count it again, and found that there were four pieces too few. Whereupon she retired with the bag to a side table, and, in a state of profuse perspiration, began to count it over a third time with deliberate care.

Tottie watched and checked each piece like a lynx, and the sum was at last found to be correct!

Mrs Gaff quitted the bank with a feeling of intense relief, and met Lizzie Gordon walking with Emmie Wilson just outside the door.

“My dear Miss Gordon,” exclaimed the poor woman, kissing Lizzie’s hand in the fulness of her heart, “you’ve no ideer what agonies I’ve bin a-sufferin’ in that there bank. If they’re a-goin’ to treat me in this way always, I’ll draw out the whole o’ my ten hundred thousand poundif that’s the suman’ stow it away in my Stephen’s sea-chest, what he’s left behind him.”

“Dear Mrs Gaff, what have they done to you?” asked Lizzie in some concern.

“Oh, it’s too long a story to tell ye here, my dear. Come with me. I’m a-goin’ straight to yer uncle’s, Captain Bingley. Be he to home? But stop; did ye ever see a hundred golden pounds?”

Mrs Gaff cautiously opened the mouth of her bag and allowed Lizzie to peep in, but refused to answer any questions regarding her future intentions.

Meanwhile Emmie and Tottie had flown into each other’s arms. The former had often seen my niece, both at the house of Mr Stuart and at my own, as our respective ladies interchanged frequent visits, and Miss Peppy always brought Emmie when she came to see us. Lizzie had taken such a fancy to the orphan that she begged Miss Peppy to allow her to go with her and me sometimes on our visits to the houses of distressed sailors and fishermen. In this way Emmie and Tottie had become acquainted, and they were soon bosom friends, for the gentle, dark-eyed daughter of Mrs Gaff seemed to have been formed by nature as a harmonious counterpart to the volatile, fair-haired orphan. Emmie, I may here remark in passing, had by this time become a recognised inmate of Mr Stuart’s house. What his intentions in regard to her were, no one knew. He had at first vowed that the foundling should be cast upon the parish, but when the illness, that attacked the child after the ship-wreck, had passed away, he allowed her to remain without further remark than that she must be kept carefully out of his way. Kenneth, therefore, held to his first intention of not letting his father or any one else know that the poor girl was indeed related to him by the closest tie. Meanwhile he determined that Emmie’s education

should not be neglected.

Immediately on arriving at my residence, Mrs Gaff was, at her own request, ushered into my study, accompanied by Tottie.

I bade her good-day, and, after a few words of inquiry as to her health, asked if I could be of any service to her.

“No, capting, thank ’ee,” she said, fumbling with her bag as if in search of something.

“No news of Stephen or Billy, I suppose?” said I in a sad tone.

“Not yet, capting, but I expect ’em one o’ these days, an’ I’m a-gettin’ things ready for ’em.”

“Indeed! what induces you to expect them so confidently?”

“Well, capting, I can’t well tell ’ee, but I do, an’ in the meantime I’ve come to thank ’ee for all yer kindness to Tottie an’ me when we was in distress. Yer Society, capting, has saved me an’ Tottie fro’ starvation, an’ so I’ve come for to give ye back the money ye sent me by Mr Stuart, for there’s many a poor widder as’ll need it more nor I do.”

So saying, she placed the money on the table, and I thanked her heartily, adding that I was glad to be able to congratulate her on her recent good fortune.

“Moreover,” continued Mrs Gaff, taking a small bag from the large one which hung on her arm, and laying it also on the table, “I feel so thankful to the Almighty, as well as to you, sir, that I’ve come to give ye a small matter o’ goold for the benefit o’ the Society ye b’longs to, an’ there it be.”

“How much is here?” said I, lifting up the bag.

“A hundred pound. Ye needn’t count it, capting, for it’s all c’rekt, though it was shovelled out to me as if it war no better than coals or sugar. Good-day, capting.”

Mrs Gaff, turning hastily round as if to avoid my thanks, or my remonstrances at so poor a woman giving so large a sum, seized Tottie by the wrist and dragged her towards the door.

“Stop, stop, my good woman,” said I; “at least let me give you a receipt.”

“Please, capting, I doesn’t want one. Surely I can trust ye, an’ I’ve had my heart nigh broke with bits o’ paper this good day.”

“Well, but I am required by the rules of the Society to give a receipt for all sums received.”

Mrs Gaff was prevailed on to wait for the receipt, but the instant it was handed to her, she got up, bounced out of the room, and out of the house into the street. I hastened to the window, and saw her and Tottie walking smartly away in the direction of Cove, with their enormous bonnets quivering violently, and their ribbons streaming in the breeze.

Half an hour afterwards, Dan Horsey, who had been sent to me with a note from my friend Stuart, went down into my kitchen, and finding Susan Barepoles there alone, put his arm round her waist.

“Don’t,” said Susan, struggling unsuccessfully to get free. “What d’ye think Mrs Gaff has bin an’ done?”

“Don’t know, my jewel, no more nor a pig as has niver seen the light o’ day,” said Dan.

“She’s binand goneand given” said Susan, with great deliberation, “onehundredgold sovereignsto the Shipwrecked thingumbob Society!”

“How d’ye know that, darlint?” inquired Dan.

“Master told Miss Lizzie, Miss Lizzie told missis, and missis told me.”

“You don’t say so! Well, I wish I wor the Shipwrecked thing-me-bob Society, I do,” said Dan with a sigh; “but I an’t, so I’ll have to cut my stick, clap spurs to my horse, as the story books say, for Capting Bingley towld me to make haste. But there’s wan thing, Susan, as I wouldn’t guv for twice the sum.”

“An’ what may that be?” asked Susan shyly.

“It’s that,” said Dan, imprinting a kiss on Susan’s lips, to the dismay of Bounder, who chanced to be in the back scullery and heard the smack.

Cook rushed to the kitchen, but when she reached it Dan was gone, and a few minutes later that worthy was cantering toward Seaside Villa, muttering to himself:

“Tin thousand pound! It’s a purty little bit o’ cash. I only wish as a brother o’ mine, (if I had wan), would leave me half as much, an’ I’d buy a coach and six, an’ put purty Susan inside and mount the box meself, an’ drive her to Africay or Noo Zealand, (not to mintion Ottyheity and Kangaroo), by way of a marriage trip! Hey! Bucephalus, be aisy now. It isn’t Master Kenneth that’s on

yer back just now, so mind what yer about, or it'll be wus for ye, old boy."

Chapter Nineteen.
The Open Boat on the PacificGaff And Billy in Dreadful CircumstancesA Message from the Sea, and a Madman's Death.

While these events are taking place in the busy seaport of Wreckumoft, let us return to the little boat which we left floating, a solitary speck, upon the breast of the great Pacific Ocean.

As long as the whale-ship continued visible, the three occupants of the boat sat immovable, gazing intently upon her in deep silence, as if each felt that when she disappeared his last hold upon earth was gone.

Billy was the first to break silence.

"She's gone, father," he whispered.

Both men started, and looked round at the boy.

"Ay, she's gone," observed Gaff with a sigh; "and now we'll have to pull for it, night an' day, as we are able."

He began slowly to get out one of the oars as he spoke.

"It would have been better if they had cut our throats," growled Captain Graddy with a fierce oath.

"You'd have been worse off just now if they had, captain," said Gaff, shaking off his depression of spirits by a strong effort of will. "Come, Cap'n Graddy, you an' I are in the same fix; let's be friends, and do our best to face the worst, like men."

"It makes little matter how we face it," said the captain, "it'll come to the same thing in the long run, if we don't manage to make it a short run by taking strong measures. (He touched the hilt of a knife which he wore at all times in his belt.) However, we may as well pull as not."

He rose and sulkily took an oar, while Gaff took another.

"Now, captain," said Gaff, "you know better than me how far we be fro' land, an' which is the way to pull."

"I should think we're five hundred miles from the nearest land," said Graddy, "in a nor'-east direction, an' there's no islands that I know of between us an' South America, so we may just pull about for exercise till the grub's done, an'

then pull till we're dead."

The captain burst into a loud, fierce laugh, as if he thought the last remark uncommonly witty.

Presently he said, "You may as well see how much we've got to eat an' drink before beginnin' our work."

"All right, my hearty!" cried Gaff, rising with alacrity to examine their store of provisions; "here's a small bag o' biscuit as'll last us three days, mayhap, on half allowance, so we'll be able to do with quarter allowance for the first few days, an' then reduce to an eighth, which'll make it spin out a few days longer. By that time we may fall in with a sail, who knows?"

"We're far beyond the track o' ships," said the captain bitterly. "Is there never a drop o' water in the boat?"

"Not a drop," replied Gaff, "I've searched all round, an' only found a empty bottle."

"Ay, meant for to smuggle brandy aboard when they got the chance, the brutes!" said the captain, referring to his recent crew. "Well, it don't matter. We've now the prospect of dyin' o' thirst before we die of starvation. For my part, I prefer to die o' starvation, so ye may put yourself an' your brat on full allowance as long as it lasts."

Poor Billy's horror at the prospect before him was much aggravated by the fierce and brutal manner of Graddy, and he would fain have gone and hid his face in his father's bosom; but he had been placed at the helm while the two were pulling, so he could not forsake his post.

It was a calm evening when they were thus cast adrift on the boundless sea, and as night advanced the calm deepened, so that the ocean became like a sea of ink, in which the glorious host of stars were faithfully mirrored.

Hour after hour the two men pulled at the oars with a slow-measured steady stroke, while Billy sat at the helm, and kept the boat's head in the direction of a certain star which the captain pointed out to him. At length the star became like a moon to Billy's gazing eyes; then it doubled itself, and then it went out altogether as the poor boy fell forward.

"Hallo, Billy! mind your helm!" cried his father.

"I felled asleep, daddy," said the Bu'ster apologetically, as he resumed his place.

“Well, well, boy; lie down and take a sleep. It’s too hard on you. Eat a biscuit first though before you lie down, and I’ll keep the boat’s head right with the oar.”

The captain made no remark, but the moon, which had just arisen, shone on his hard features, and showed that they were more fierce and lowering than at the beginning of the night.

Billy gladly availed himself of the permission, and took a biscuit out of the bag. Before he had eaten half of it he fell back in the stern-sheets of the boat, dropt into a sound sleep, and dreamed of home and his mother and Tottie.

Hour after hour the men pulled at the oars. They were strong men both of them, inured to protracted exertion and fatigue. Still the night seemed as if it would never come to an end, for in those high southern latitudes at that time of the year the days were very short and the nights were long.

At last both men stopped rowing, as if by mutual consent.

“It’s a pity,” said Gaff, “to knock ourselves up together. You’d better lie down, cap’n, an’ I’ll pull both oars for a spell.”

“No, no, Gaff,” replied Graddy, with sudden and unaccountable urbanity; “I’m not a bit tired, and I’m a bigger man than youmaybe a little stronger. So do you lie down beside the boy, an’ I’ll call ye when I want a rest.”

Gaff remonstrated, protesting that he was game to pull for hours yet, but the captain would take no denial, so he agreed to rest; yet there was an uneasy feeling in his breast which rendered rest almost impossible. He lay for a long time with his eyes fixed on the captain, who now pulled the two oars slowly and in measured time as before.

At last, in desperation, Gaff gave Billy a poke in the ribs which roused him.

“Come, boy,” said his father almost sternly, “you’ve slept long enough now; get up an’ steer. Don’t you see the cap’n’s pullin’ all alone!”

“All right, daddy,” said Billy, uttering a loud yawn and stretching himself. “Where am I? Oh! oh!”

The question was put before he had quite recovered consciousness; the terminal “oh!” was something like a groan of despair, as his eye fell on the forbidding countenance of the captain.

Billy took the tiller in silence. After a little while Gaff drew his son’s ear near to his mouth, and said in a low whisper

“Billy, my lad, I must have a sleep, but I dursn’t do it unless you keep a sharp eye on the captain. He’s after mischief, I’m quite sure o’ that, so give me a tremendous dig in the ribs if he offers to rise from his seat. Mind what I say now, lad. Our lives may depend on it.”

Billy promised to be watchful, and in less than two minutes afterwards Gaff was sunk in deep repose.

The boy was faithful to his trust. Without appearing to be watching him, he never for one moment removed his eyes so far from where the captain sat labouring at the oars as to give him a chance of moving without being seen. As time passed by, however, Billy found it difficult to keep awake, and, in proportion as this difficulty increased, his staring at the captain became more direct and intense. Of course Graddy perceived this, and the sneering smile that crossed his visage showed that he had made a shrewd guess at the cause of the lad’s attentions.

By degrees Billy’s eyes began to droop, and he roused himself frequently with a strong effort, feeling desperately alarmed lest he should be overcome. But nature was not to be denied. Again and again did his head fall forward, again and again did he look up with a startled expression to perceive that Graddy was regarding him with a cold sardonic smile. Gradually Billy’s eyes refused to convey a correct impression of what they rested on. The rower’s head suddenly became twice as large as his body, a sight which so alarmed the boy that he started up and could scarce restrain a cry, but the head had shrunk into its ordinary proportions, and the sardonic smile was there as before.

Oh! what would not Billy have given at that time to have been thoroughly wide-awake and fresh! He thought for a moment of awaking his father, but the thought was only half formed ere sleep again weighed down his spirit, causing his eyelids to blink despite his utmost efforts to keep them open. Presently he saw Graddy draw the right oar quietly into the boat, without ceasing to row with the left one, and slowly draw the knife which hung at his belt.

The boy tried to shout and arouse his father, but he was paralysed with horror. His blood seemed to curdle in his veins. No sound would issue from his lips, neither could he move hand or foot while the cold glassy eye of the captain rested on him.

Suddenly Graddy sprang up, and Billy’s voice found vent in a shrill cry. At the same moment Stephen Gaff awoke, and instinctively his hand grasped the tiller. He had no time to rise, but with the same force that drew the tiller from its socket in the helm he brought it forward with crashing violence on the

forehead of Graddy, who was stooping to plunge the knife into his breast. He staggered beneath the blow. Before he could recover himself it was repeated, and he fell heavily back into the bottom of the boat.

“Thank the Lord,” murmured Gaff, as he leaned over his fallen foe, “the villain’s hand has bin stopped short this time. Come, Billy, help me to lift him up.”

Gaff’s blows had been delivered with such vigour that Graddy’s head was much damaged, and it was a long time before the two could get him restored sufficiently to sit up. At length, however, he roused himself and looked with a bewildered air at the sun, which had just risen in a flood of golden light. Presently his eyes fell on Gaff, and a dark scowl covered his face, but being, or pretending to be unable to continue long in a sitting posture, he muttered that he would lie down and rest in the bow of the boat. He got up and staggered to the spot, where he lay down and soon fell fast asleep.

“Now, Billy lad, we’ll let him rest, an’ I’ll take the oars. You will lie down and sleep, for you’ve much need of it, my poor boy, and while I’m pullin’ I’ll consider what’s best for to be done in the circumstances.”

“Better let me take one o’ the oars, daddy. I’m wide-awake now, and not a bit tired.”

“No, boy, no. Lay down. The next time I require to sleep I must have you in a more wakeful conditionso turn in.” Gaff said this in a tone of command that did not admit of remonstrance; so Billy lay down, and soon fell into a deep slumber.

For a long time Gaff rowed in silence, gazing wistfully up into the sky, which was covered with gorgeous piles of snowy clouds, as if he sought to forget his terrible position in contemplating the glories of heaven. But earth claimed the chief share of his thoughts. While he rowed with slow unflagging strokes during these calm morning hours, he did indeed think of Eternity; of the time he had mis-spent on earth; of the sins he had committed, and of the salvation through Jesus Christ he had for so many years neglected or refused to accept.

But invariably these thoughts diverged into other channels: he thought of the immediate danger that menaced himself and his son; of death from thirst and its terrible agoniesthe beginning of which even at that moment were affecting him in the old familiar way of a slight desire to drink! He thought, too, of the fierce man in the bow of the boat who evidently sought his lifewhy, he could not tell; but he surmised that it must either be because he had become deranged, or because he wished to get all the food in the boat to himself, and so prolong for a few days his miserable existence. Finally, his thoughts

reverted to his cottage home, and he fancied himself sitting in the old chimney-corner smoking his pipe and gazing at his wife and Tottie, and his household goods.

“I’ll maybe never see them agin,” he murmured sadly.

For some minutes he did not speak, then he again muttered, while a grieved look overspread his face, “An’ they’ll never know what’s come o’ me! They’ll go on thinkin’ an’ thinkin’, an’ hopin’ an’ hopin’ year after year, an’ their sick hearts’ll find no rest. God help them!”

He looked up into the bright heavens, and his thoughts became prayer.

Ah! reader, this is no fancy sketch. It is drawn after the pattern of things that happen every yearevery monthalmost every week during the stormy seasons of the year. Known only to Him who is Omniscient are the multitudes of heartrending scenes of protracted agony and dreary death that are enacted year by year, all unknown to man, upon the lonely sea. Now and then the curtain of this dread theatre is slightly raised to us by the emaciated hand of a “survivor,” and the sight, if we be thoughtful, may enable us to form a faint conception of those events that we never see. We might meditate on those things with advantage. Surely Christians ought not to require strong appeals to induce them to consider the case of those “who go down into the sea in ships, who do business in the great waters!” And here let me whisper a word to you ere I pass on, good reader: Meditation, unless it results in action, is worse than useless because it deepens condemnation.

While Gaff was gazing upward a bright look beamed in his eyes.

“That’s not a bad notion,” he muttered, drawing in both oars, and rising. “I’ll do it. It’ll give ’em a chance, an’ that’s better than nothin’.”

So saying he put his hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket, and drew out a letter, which he unfolded, and tore off a portion of the last leaf which was free from writing. Spreading this upon the thwart, he sought for and found a pencil which he was in the habit of carrying in his vest-pocket, and prepared to write.

I have shown elsewhere that Gaff could neither read nor write. Yet it does not follow that he had no knowledge whatever of these subjects. On the contrary, he understood the signification of capital letters when printed large and distinct, and could, (with inconceivable pains and difficulty no doubt), string a few simple words together when occasion required. He could also sign his name.

After much deep thought he concocted the following sentence:

AT SEE IN PASIFIK. NO LAND FOR 5000 MILES. OPN BOET. THE SKIPER, BILLY, AND MEES KAST ADRIFT BY KREW. SKIPER MAD, OR ELSE A VILIN. FOAR OR FIVE DAIS BISKIT; NO WATTER. JESS, DEAR LAS, MY LAST THOATS ARE OF YOO.

STEPHEN GAFF.

He meant to put down 500, and thought that he was right!

Having completed his task, he folded up the letter carefully, and addressed it to “Mrs Gaff, sailor’s wife, The Cove, England.” Then he inserted it into the empty bottle to which reference has been made, and corking it up tight committed it to the waves with an earnest prayer for its safe arrival at its destination. He then resumed his oars with a feeling of great relief, as if a heavy weight had been taken off his mind, and watched the precious bottle until it was out of sight astern.

By this time the face of nature had changed somewhat. With the advancing day the wind arose, and before noon it was blowing a stiff breeze. The rolling of the boat awoke Billy, who looked up anxiously.

“Ay, it’ll be all over sooner than I thought on,” murmured Gaff, as he glanced to windward.

“What’ll be all over, daddy?” inquired the boy, who, being accustomed to boating in rough weather, thought nothing of the threatening appearance of things.

“Nothin’, lad, nothin’; I was only thinkin’ aloud; the wind’s freshenin’, Billy, an’ as you may have to sit a long spell at the tiller soon, try to go to sleep agin. You’ll need it, my boy.”

In spite of himself, Gaff’s tone contained so much pathos that Billy was roused by it, and would not again try to sleep.

“Do let me pull an oar, daddy,” he said earnestly.

“Not yet, lad, not yet. In a short time I will if the breeze don’t get stiffer.”

“Why don’t he pull a bit, daddy?” inquired Billy pointing with a frown at the figure that lay crouched up in the bow of the boat.

Just then a wave sent a wash of spray inboard and drenched the skipper, who rose up and cursed the sea.

“You’d better bale it out than curse it,” said Gaff sternly; for he felt that if

there was to be anything attempted he must conquer his desperate companion.

The man drew his knife. Gaff, noticing the movement, leaped up, and catching hold of the tiller, which Billy handed to him with alacrity, faced his opponent.

“Now, Graddy,” he said, in the tone of a man who has thoroughly made up his mind, “we’ll settle this question right off. One of us must submit. If fair means won’t do, foul shall be used. You may be bigger than me, but I don’t think ye’re stronger: leastwise ye’ll ha’ to prove it. Now, then, pitch that knife overboard.”

Instead of obeying, Graddy hurled it with all his force into Gaff’s chest. Fortunately the handle and not the point struck him, else had the struggle been brief and decisive. As it was, the captain followed up his assault with a rush at his opponent, who met him with a heavy blow from the tiller, which the other received on his left arm, and both men closed in a deadly struggle. The little boat swayed about violently, and the curling seas came over her edge so frequently that Billy began to fear they would swamp in a few moments. He therefore seized the baling-dish, and began to bale for his life while the men fought.

Gaff soon proved to be the better man, for he finally flung the captain over the middle thwart and almost broke his back.

“Now, do ye give in?” he shouted fiercely, as he compressed the other’s throat with both hands.

Graddy gasped that he did; so Gaff allowed him to rise, and bade him take the baling-dish from the boy and set to work without delay.

The wretched man was so thoroughly cowed that he thereafter yielded instant obedience to his companion.

The wind was blowing furiously by this time, and the waves were running high, so that it required constant baling, and the utmost care in steering, to keep the boat from being swamped. Fortunately the storm was accompanied by heavy rain, so that by catching a little of this in their jackets and caps, they succeeded in quenching their thirst. Hunger they had scarcely felt up to this time, but soon the cravings of nature began to be imperious, and Gaff served out the first ration, on the short allowance scale, which was so small that it served only to whet their appetites. There was no need to row now. It was absolutely necessary to run before the wind, which was so strong that a single oar, set up in the place where the mast should have been, was sufficient to cause the light craft to fly over the waves.

Each took the helm for a couple of hours by turns. Thus employed they spent the day, and still thus employed the dark night found them.

Bad though things looked when there was light enough to enable them to see the rush of the black clouds overhead, the bursts of the driving spray and the tumultuous heavings of the wild sea, it was inconceivably worse when the darkness settled down so thick that they could barely see each other's faces, and the steering had to be done more by feeling, as it were, than sight. Gaff took the helm during the greater part of the night, and the other two baled incessantly; but the gale increased so much that the water at last came in faster than it could be thrown out, and they expected to be swamped every instant.

"We're goin' down, daddy," said Billy, while a strong inclination to burst into tears almost choked him.

"Here, lad," shouted Gaff in a loud voice, for the noise of the wind and waves rendered any other sound almost inaudible, "take the helm and keep her right before the wind. Ye used to steer well; do yer best now, my boy."

While he spoke Billy obeyed, and his father sprang into the middle of the boat, and grasped the three oars and boat-hook with which the boat was supplied. There were two small sails, which he wrapped hastily round these, and then tied them all together tightly with a piece of rope. In this operation he was assisted by Graddy, who seemed to understand what his comrade meant to do.

The boat was now half full of water.

"Down the helmhard down," roared Gaff.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Billy, with the ready promptitude of a seaman.

The boat flew round; at the same moment Gaff hurled the bundle of sails and spars overboard, and eased off the coil of rope to the end of which it was attached. In a few seconds it was about forty yards away to windward, and formed a sort of floating breakwater, which, slight though it was, proved to be sufficient to check the full force of the seas, so that the little boat found partial shelter to leeward.

The shelter was terribly slight, however; only just sufficient to save them from absolute destruction; and it was still necessary for one of their number to be constantly employed in baling out the water.

During the night the clouds cleared away, but there was no abatement of the wind; and having no water they were obliged to eat their allowance of biscuit either in a dry state or moistened in the sea.

Next day the sun rose in a cloudless sky, and all day it shone upon them fiercely, and the wind moderated enough to render baling unnecessary, but still they did not dare to haul in their floating bulwark.

Extreme thirst now assailed them, and Graddy began in an excited state to drink copiously of salt water.

“Don’t go for to do that, cap’n,” remonstrated Gaff.

A derisive laugh was the only reply.

Presently Graddy arose, and going into the head of the boat, took up the baling-dish and again drank deeply of the sea-water. “Ha! ha!” he laughed, tossing his arms wildly in the air, and gazing at Gaff with the glaring eyes of a maniac, “that’s the nectar for me. Come, boys, I’ll sing you a ditty.”

With that he burst into a roaring bacchanalian song, and continued to shout, and yell, and drink the brine until he was hoarse. But he did not seem to get exhausted; on the contrary, his eyes glared more and more brightly, and his face became scarlet as the fires that were raging within him increased in intensity.

Billy clung to his father, and looked at the captain in speechless horror. Even Gaff himself felt an overpowering sense of dread creep over him, for he now knew that he had to deal with a raving maniac. Not knowing what to do, he sat still and silent in the stern of the boat with the tiller in his hand, and his eyes fixed immovably on those of the madman, who seemed to feel that it was a trial as to which should stare the other down, for he soon gave up singing and drinking, and devoted all his energies of body and soul to glaring at his enemy.

Thus they continued until the sun began to set. Then Gaff’s heart sank within him, for he felt sure that, whenever it was too dark for each to see the other, the madman would summon up courage to make a sudden attack.

The attack, however, was precipitated by Gaff inadvertently glancing over his shoulder to observe how far the sun had yet to descend.

Instantly, with the leap of a panther, Graddy was upon him with both hands grasping tightly at his throat. Down, down, he pressed him, until Gaff lay on his back with his head over the gunwale. His strength now availed him nothing, for unnatural energy nerved the madman’s arm.

Billy sprang up and tried to disengage him from his grasp. As well might the rabbit try to unlock the boa’s deadly coil. Wrenching the tiller from his father’s grasp he hit the madman on the head with all his might; but the poor boy’s

might was small. The blow seemed to have no effect at all. Again and again he brought it down in an agony of haste lest his father should be strangled before the other was felled. At last he hit him with all his force behind the ear, and Graddy's grasp relaxed as he fell prone on the body of his insensible victim.

To pull him off and haul his father into a more convenient position was the work of a few seconds.

"O daddy, daddy, speak to me," he cried, loosening his father's neckcloth and unbuttoning his shirt. "Oh, quick! get better before he does," cried Billy wildly, as he shook his father and laved water on his face; "oh! he'll get well first and kill you."

In order to do all that lay in his power to prevent this, Billy suddenly sprang up, and, seizing the tiller, dealt the prostrate Graddy several powerful blows on the head. It is not improbable that the frightened boy would have settled the question of his recovery then and there had not his father revived, and told him to stop.

For some minutes Gaff sat swaying about in a confused manner, but he was roused to renewed action by seeing Graddy move.

"We must hold him now, Billy. Is there a bit of rope about?"

"Not a inch, you tied it all round the oars."

"It's awkward. However, here's my necktie. It an't strong, but it's better than nothin'."

Gaff was about to take it off when Graddy recovered suddenly and attempted to rise. The others sprang on him and held him down; but they did so with difficulty, for he was still very strong.

All that night did they sit and hold him, while he raved and sang or struggled as the humour seized him. They did not dare to relax their hold for a moment; because, although he lay sometimes quite still for a lengthened period, he would burst forth again without warning and with increased fury.

And still, while they sat thus holding down the maniac, the wind blew fiercely over the raging sea, and the waves curled over and burst upon their tiny breakwater, sending clouds of spray over their head, insomuch that, ere morning, the boat was nearly half full of water.

When morning at last broke, father and son were so much exhausted that they could scarcely sit up, and their cramped fingers clung, more by necessity than by voluntary effort, to the garments of the now dying man.

Graddy was still active and watchful, however. His face was awful to look upon, and the fire of his restless eyes was unabated. When the sun rose above the horizon both Gaff and Billy turned their weary eyes to look at it. The madman noted the action, and seized the opportunity. He sprang with an unearthly yell, overturned them both, and plunged head foremost into the sea.

Twice he rose and gave vent to a loud gurgling cry, while Gaff and his son seized the rope attached to the oars, intending to pull them in and row to his assistance, for he had leaped so far out that he was beyond their reach. But before they had pulled in half of the cable the wretched man had disappeared from their view for ever.

Slacking off the rope they let the boat drift astern again to its full extent. Then, without a word, without even a look, father and son lay down together in the stern-sheets, and were instantly buried in a profound deathlike slumber.

Chapter Twenty.
The Voyage of the Bottle.

The little fragile craft which Stephen Gaff sent adrift upon the world of waters freighted with its precious document, began its long voyage with no uncertainty as to its course, although to the eye of man it might have appeared to be the sport of uncertain waves and breezes.

When the bottle fell upon the broad bosom of the South Pacific, it sank as if its career were to end at the beginning; but immediately it re-appeared with a leap, as if the imprisoned spirit of the atmosphere were anxious to get out. Then it settled down in its watery bed until nothing but the neck and an inch of the shoulder was visible above the surface. Thus it remained; thus it floated in the deep, in storm and calm, in heat and cold; thus it voyaged more safely, though not more swiftly, than all the proud ships that spread their lofty canvas to the breeze, night and day, for weeks and months, ay, and years togethernot irregularly, not at haphazard, but steadily, perseveringly, in strict obedience to the undeviating laws which regulate the currents in the ocean and the air as truly and unchangeably as they do the circulation of the blood in the human frame.

The bottle started from that part of the South Pacific which is known to mariners as the Desolate Regionso called from the circumstance of that part of the sea being almost entirely destitute of animal life. Here it floated slowly, calmly, but surely, to the eastward with the great oceanic current, which, flowing from the regions of the antarctic sea, in that part sweeps round the southern continent of America, and makes for the equator by way of the

southern Atlantic Ocean.

Now, reader, allow me to screw up a little philosophy here, and try to show you the why and the wherefore of the particular direction of our bottle's voyage.

Man has been defined by some lexicographer as a "cooking animal." I think it would be more appropriate to call him a learning animal, for man does not always cook, but he never ceases to learnalso to unlearn.

One of the great errors which we have been called on, of recent years, to unlearn, is the supposed irregularity and uncertainty of the winds and waves. Nothing is more regular, nothing more certainnot even the rising and setting of the sun himselfthan the circulation of the waters and the winds of earth. The apparent irregularity and uncertainty lies in our limited power and range of perception. The laws by which God regulates the winds and waves are as fixed as is the law of gravitation, and every atom of air, every drop of water, moves in its appointed course in strict obedience to those laws, just as surely as the apple, when severed from the bough, obeys the law of gravitation, and falls to the ground.

One grand and important fact has been ascertained, namely, that all the waters of the sea flow from the equator to the poles and back again.

Disturbed equilibrium is the great cause of oceanic currents. Heat and cold are the chief agents in creating this disturbance.

It is obvious that when a portion of water in any vessel sinks, another portion must of necessity flow into the space which it has left, and if the cause which induced the sinking continue, so the flow to fill up will continue, and thus a current will be established.

Heat at the equator warms the sea-water, and makes it light; cold at the poles chills it, and makes it heavy. Hot water, being light, rises; cold water, being heavy, sinks.

Here, then, is a sufficient cause to produce the effect of currents in the sea.

But there are other causes at work. Excessive evaporation at the equator carries off the water of the sea, but leaves the salt behind, thus rendering it denser and heavier; while excessive influx of fresh water at the poles, (from rain and snow and melting ice), renders the sea light;in addition to which corallines and shell-fish everywhere abstract the lime that is in the sea, by secreting it on their bodies in the form of shells, and thus increase the lightness of those particles of water from which the lime has been abstracted. The other

particles of water being generous in their nature, hasten to impart of their lime and salt to those that have little or none.

Here, then, we have perpetual motion rendered absolutely certain, both as to continuance and direction.

But the latter causes which I have named are modifying causes which tend to counteract, or rather to deflect and direct currents in their flow. Besides which, the rotation of the earth, the action of the winds, and the conformation of continents and islands, have a powerful influence on currents, so that some flow at the bottom of ocean, some on the surface, some from east to west or west to east, or aslant in various directions, while, where currents meet there is deflection, modification, or stagnation, but there is no confusion; all goes on with a regularity and harmony which inconceivably excels that of the most complex and beautiful mechanism of man's constructing, although man cannot perceive this order and harmony by reason of his limited powers.

Now, these are facts, not theories founded on speculation. They have been arrived at by the slow but sure method of induction. Hundreds of thousands of practical men have for many years been observing and recording phenomena of every kind in connexion with the sea. These observations have been gathered together, collated, examined, and deeply studied by philosophers, who have drawn their conclusions therefrom. Ignorance of these facts rendered the navigation of the sea in days of old a matter of uncertainty and great danger. The knowledge of them and of other cognate facts enables man in these days to map out the so-called trackless ocean into districts, and follow its well-known highways with precision and comparative safety.

Our bottle moved along with the slow but majestic flow of one of those mighty currents which are begotten among the hot isles of the Pacific, where the corallines love to build their tiny dwellings and rear their reefs and groves.

In process of time it left the warm regions of the sun, and entered those stormy seas which hold perpetual war around Cape Horn. It passed the straits where Magellan spread his adventurous sails in days of old, and doubled the cape which Byron, Bougainville, and Cook had doubled long before it.

Ah! well would it be for man if the bottle had never doubled anything but that cape! And alas for man when his sight is doubled, and his crimes and woes are doubled, and his life is halved instead of doubled, by"the bottle!"

Off Cape Horn our adventurous little craft met with the rough usage from winds and waves that marked the passage of its predecessors. Stormy petrels hovered over it and pecked its neck and cork. Albatrosses stooped inquiringly and flapped their gigantic wings above it. South Sea seals came up from

Ocean’s caves, and rubbed their furred sides against it. Sea-lions poked it with their grizzly snouts; and penguins sat bolt upright in rows on the sterile islands near the cape, and gazed at it in wonder.

Onward it moved with the north-western drift, and sighted on its left, (on its port bow, to speak nautically), the land of Patagonia, where the early discoverers reported the men to be from six to ten feet high, and the ladies six feet; the latter being addicted to staining their eyelids black, and the former to painting a red circle round their left eyes. These early discoverers failed, however, to tell us why the right eyes of the men were neglected; so we are forced to the conclusion that they were left thus untouched in order that they might wink facetiously with the more freedom. Modern travellers, it would seem, contradict, (as they usually do), many of the statements of ancient voyagers; and there is now reason to believe that the Patagonians are not much more outrageous in any respect than ordinary savages elsewhere.

Not long after doubling the Cape, the bottle sailed slowly past the Falkland Islands, whose rugged cliffs and sterile aspect seemed in accordance with their character of penal settlement. Sea-lions, penguins, and seals were more numerous than ever here, as if they were the guardians of the place, ready to devour all hapless criminals who should recklessly attempt to swim away from “durance vile.”

Indeed, it was owing to the curiosity of a sea-lion that at this point in its long voyage the bottle was saved from destruction. A storm had recently swept the southern seas, and the bottle, making bad weather of it in passing the Falklands, was unexpectedly driven on a lee-shore in attempting to double a promontory. Whether promontories are more capable of resisting the bottle than human beings, I know not; but certain it is that the promontory arrested its progress. It began to clink along the foot of the cliffs at the outermost point with alarming violence; and there can be no reasonable doubt that it would have become a miserable wreck there, if it had not chanced to clink right under the nose of a sea-lion which was basking in the sunshine, and sound asleep on a flat rock.

Opening its eyes and ears at the unwonted sound, the lion gazed inquiringly at the bottle, and raised its shaggy front the better to inspect it. Apparently the sight stimulated its curiosity, for, with a roar and a gush of ardent spirit, it plunged into the sea and drove the bottle far down into the deep.

Finding, apparently, that nothing came of this terrific onslaught, the lion did not reappear. It sneaked away, no doubt, into some coral cave. But the force of the push sent the bottle a few yards out to sea, and so it doubled the promontory and continued its voyage.

Shortly after this, however, a check was put to its progress which threatened to be permanent.

In a few places of the ocean there are pools of almost stagnant tracts, of various sizes, which are a sort of eddies caused by the conflicting currents. They are full of seaweed and other drift, which is shoved into them by the currents, and are named Sargasso seas. Some of these are hundreds of miles in extent, others are comparatively small.

They bothered the navigators of old, did those Sargasso seas, uncommonly. They are permanent spots, which shift their position so little with the very slight changes in the currents of the sea, that they may be said to be always in the same place.

Columbus got into one of these Sargassosthe great Atlantic one that lies between Africa and the West Indies,and his men were alarmed lest this strange weedy sea should turn out to be the end of the world! Columbus was long detained in this region of stagnation and calm, and so were most of the early navigators, who styled it the “Doldrums.” Now-a-days, however, our knowledge of the currents of ocean and atmosphere enables us to avoid the Sargasso seas and sail round them, thereby preventing delay, facilitating trade, saving time, and greatly improving the condition of mankind.

Now, our bottle happened to get entangled in the weed of the Sargasso that exists in the neighbourhood of the Falkland Islands, and stuck fast there for many months. It was heaved up and down by the undulations, blown about a little by occasional breezes, embraced constantly by seaweed, and sometimes tossed by waves when the outskirts of a passing gale broke in upon the stagnant spot; but beyond this it did not move or advance a mile on its voyage.

At last a hurricane burst over the sea; its whirling edge tore up the weed and swept the waters, and set the bottle free, at the same time urging it into a north-easterly current, which flowed towards the coast of Africa. On its way it narrowly missed entanglement in another Sargasso,a little one that lies between the two continents,but fortunately passed it in safety, and at last made the Cape of Good Hope, and sighted the majestic Table Mountain which terminates the lofty promontory of that celebrated headland.

Here the bottle met with the wild stormy weather that induced its Portuguese discoverer, Bartholomew Diaz, to name it the “Cape of Tempests,” and which cost him his life, for, on a succeeding voyage, he perished there. King John the Second of Portugal changed its name into the Cape of Good Hope, and not inappropriately so, as it turned out; for, a few years after its discovery in 1486,

Vasco de Gama doubled the Cape of Good Hope and discovered the shores of India, whence he brought the first instalment of that wealth which has flowed from east to west ever since in such copious perennial streams.

There was a perplexing conflict of currents here which seemed to indicate a dispute as to which of them should bear off the bottle. The great Mozambique current, (which, born in the huge caldron of the Indian Ocean, flows down the eastern coast of Africa, and meets and wars with the currents coming from the west), almost got the mastery, and well-nigh swept it into an extensive Sargasso sea which lies in that region; in which case the voyage might have been inconceivably delayed; but an eccentric typhoon, or some such turbulent character, struck in from the eastward, swept the bottle utterly beyond Mozambique influence, and left it in the embrace of a current which flowed northward toward the equator.

Thus the bottle narrowly missed being flung on “India’s coral strand,” and voyaged slowly northward in a line parallel with that coast where “Afric’s sunny fountains roll down their golden sands,”where slavers, too, carried off the blacks in days happily gone by, to toil in slavery among the fields of cotton and sugar-cane, and where British cruisers did their best, (but that wasn’t much!) to prevent the brutal traffic.

The chief point of interest in this part of the voyage was touching at Saint Helena, touching so sharply on the western promontory of that dreary islet, that the bottle again nearly made ship-wreck.

Admirably well chosen was this prominent, barren, isolated rock to be the prison of “Napoleon the Great,” for he was a conspicuous, isolated specimen of humanity, barren of those qualities that constitute real greatness. Great he undoubtedly was in the art of shedding human blood and desolating myriads of hearths and hearts without any object whatever beyond personal ambition; for the First Napoleon being a Corsican, could not even urge the shallow plea of patriotism in justification of his murderous career.

So, let the bottle pass! Its career has not been more deadly, perchance, than was his during the time that the earth was scourged with his presence!

On reaching the hot region of the equator, our little craft was again sadly knocked about by conflicting currents, and performed one or two deep-sea voyages in company with currents which dived a good deal in consequence of their superior density and inferior heat. At one time it seemed as if it would be caught by the drift which flows down the east coast of South America, and thus get back into the seas from which it set out.

But this was not to be. Owing to some cause which is utterly beyond the ken

of mortals, the bottle at last got fairly into the great equatorial current which flows westward from the Gulf of Guinea. It reached the north-west corner of South America, and progressing now at a more rapid and steady rate, progressed along the northern shore of that continentpassed the mouth of the mighty Amazon and the Orinoco, and, pushing its way among the West India Islands, crossed the Carribean Sea, sighted the Isthmus of Darien, coasted the Bay of Honduras, and swept round the Gulf of Mexico.

Here the great current is diverted from its westward course, and, passing through the Gulf of Florida, rushes across the Atlantic in a north-easterly direction, under the well-known name of the Gulf Stream. Men of old fancied that this great current had its origin in the Gulf of Mexico; hence its name; but we now know that, like many another stream, it has many heads or sources, the streams flowing from which converge in the Gulf of Mexico, and receive new and united direction there.

With the Gulf Stream the bottle pursued its voyage until it was finally cast ashore on the west of Ireland. Many a waif of the sea has been cast there before it by the same cause, and doubtless many another shall be cast there in time to come.

An Irishman with a jovial countenance chanced to be walking on the beach at the moment when, after a voyage of two years, our bottle touched the strand.

He picked it up and eyed it curiously.

“Musha! but it’s potheen.”

A more careful inspection caused him to shake his head.

“Ah, then, it’s impty.”

Getting the bottle between his eyes and the morning sun, he screwed his visage up into myriads of wrinkles, and exclaimed

“Sure there is something in it.”

Straightway the Irishman hurried up to his own cabin, where his own wife, a stout pretty woman in a red cloak, assisted him to reach the conclusion that there was something mysterious in the bottle, which was at all events not drinkable.

“Oh, then, I’ll smash it.”

“Do, darlint.”

No sooner said than done, for Pat brought it down on the hearthstone with such force that it was shivered to atoms.

Of course his wife seized the bit of paper, and tried to read it, unsuccessfully. Then Pat tried to read it, also unsuccessfully. Then they both tried to read it, turning it in every conceivable direction, and holding it at every possible distance from their eyes, but still without success. Then they came to the conclusion that they could “make nothing of it at all at all,” which was not surprising, for neither of them could read a word.

They wisely resolved at length to take it to their priest, who not only read it, but had it inserted in the Times on the week following, and also in the local papers of Wreckumoft.

Thus did Mrs Gaff, at long last, come to learn something of her husband and son. Her friends kindly told her she need not entertain any hope whatever, but she heeded them not; and only regarding the message from the sea as in some degree a confirmation of her hopes and expectations, she continued her preparations for the reception of the long absent ones with more energy than ever.

Chapter Twenty One.
The Fortunes of Gaff and Billy continued.

Now, while the bottle was making its long voyage, Stephen Gaff and his son Billy were exposed to the vicissitudes of strange and varied fortune.

We left them sound asleep in the stern of the little boat, tossed on the troubled breast of the Pacific.

They never knew how long they slept on that occasion, but when they awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and the breeze had considerably abated.

Gaff was the first to shake off the lethargy that had oppressed him. Gazing round for some time, he seemed to hesitate whether he should lie down again, and looked earnestly once or twice in the face of his slumbering boy.

“’Tis pity to rouse him,” he muttered, “but I think we must ha’ had a long sleep, for I feel rested like. Hallo, Billy boy, how are ’ee?”

Billy did not respond to the greeting. Indeed, he refused to be moved by means of shouts of any kind, and only consented to wake up when his father took him by the coat-collar with both hands, and shook him so violently that it seemed as if his head were about to fall off.

“Hallo! faither,” he cried in a sleepy voice, “wot’s up?”

“Ha! you’re roused at last, lad, come, it’s time to have a bit breakfast. It ain’t a heavy un you’ll git, poor boy, but ’tis better than nothin’, and bigger men have throve upon less at times.”

Billy was awake and fully alive to his position by this time. He was much depressed. He would have been more than mortal had he been otherwise, but he resolved to shake off the feeling, and face his fortune like a man.

“Come along, daddy, let’s have a spell at the oars before breakfast.”

“No, lad, take a bit first,” said Gaff, opening the sack which contained the biscuit, and carefully measuring out two small portions of the crumbs. One of the portions was rather larger than the other. Billy observed this, and stoutly refused to take his share when Stephen pushed the larger portion towards him.

“No, daddy,” said he, “you’re not a fair divider.”

“Am I not, lad?” said Stephen meekly. “I thought I’d done it pretty eekal.”

“No, my half is the biggest, so you’ll have to take some of it back.”

Gaff refused, but Billy insisted, and a small piece of the precious biscuit was finally put back into the bag. The meal was then eaten with much display of satisfaction by father and son, (a blessing having been first asked on it), and it was prolonged as much as possible in order to encourage the idea that it was not such a small one after all.

Billy had not been particular as to his crusts and fragments of victuals in days of yore, but it was wonderful how sharp his eye was on this occasion to note and pick up every minute crumb, and transfer it to his hungry mouth.

“Now, daddy, I’m ready.”

He swelled out his little chest, and gave it a sounding thump as he rose, and, rolling up his shirt-sleeves to the shoulder, seized an oar. Gaff took the other, and both sat down to the slow, dreary, monotonous toil of another day.

At first the Bu’ster was chatty, but by degrees his tongue flagged, and ere long it became quite silent.

For six or eight hours they pulled without intermission, except for a few minutes at a time, every hour or so, and Gaff directed the boat’s head in the direction to which the captain had pointed when he said the land might be about five hundred miles off.

When the sun was getting low on the horizon, Billy stopped with a sigh

“Ain’t it time for dinner, daddy, d’ye think?”

“Hold on a bit, lad, I’m goin’ to let ye tak’ a sleep soon, an’ it’ll be best to eat just afore lyin’ down.”

No more was said, and the rowing was continued until the sun had set, and the shades of night were beginning to descend on the sea.

“Now, lad, we’ll sup,” said Stephen, with a hearty air, as he pulled in his oar.

“Hooray!” cried Billy faintly, as he jumped up and went to the stern, where his father soon produced the biscuit-bag and measured out the two small portions.

“Cheatin’ again, daddy,” cried the Bu’ster with a remonstrative tone and look.

“No, I ain’t,” said Gaff sharply, “eat yer supper, you scamp.”

Billy obeyed with alacrity, and disposed of his portion in three mouthfuls. There was a small quantity of rain-waterabout half a pintwhich had been collected and carefully husbanded in the baling-dish. It was mingled with a little spray, and was altogether a brackish and dirty mixture, nevertheless they drank it with as much relish as if it had been clear spring water.

“Now, boy, turn in,” said Gaff earnestly; “you’ll need all the sleep ye can git, for, if I know the signs of the sky, we’ll have more wind afore long.”

Poor Billy was too tired to make any objection to this order, so he laid his head on a fold of the wet sail, and almost immediately fell asleep.

Gaff was right in his expectation of more wind. About two hours after sunset it came on to blow so stiffly that he was obliged to awaken Billy and set him to bale out the sprays that kept constantly washing over the gunwale. Towards midnight a gale was blowing, and Gaff put the boat before the wind, and drove with it.

Hour after hour passed away; still there was no abatement in the violence of the storm, and no relaxation from baling and steering, which the father and son took alternately every half hour.

At last Billy’s strength was fairly exhausted. He flung down the baling-dish, and, sitting down beside his father, laid his head on his breast, and burst into tears. The weakness, (for such Billy deemed it), only lasted a few moments however. He soon repressed his sobs.

“My poor boy,” said Gaff, patting his son’s head, “it’ll be soon over wi’ us, I fear. May the good Lord help us! The boat can’t float long wi’ such sprays washin’ over her.”

Billy said nothing, but clung closer to his father, while his heart was filled with solemn, rather than fearful, thoughts of death.

Their danger of swamping now became so imminent that Gaff endeavoured to prepare his mind to face the last struggle manfully. He was naturally courageous, and in the heat of action or of battle could have faced death with a smile and an unblanched cheek; but he found it much more difficult to sit calmly in the stern of that little boat hour after hour, and await the blow that seemed inevitable. He felt a wild, almost irresistible, desire to leap up and vent his feelings in action of some kind, but this was not possible, for it required careful attention to the helm to prevent the little craft from broaching-to and upsetting. In his extremity he raised his heart to God in prayer.

While he was thus engaged the roar of the storm increased to such a degree that both father and son started up in expectation of instantaneous destruction. A vivid flash of lightning glared over the angry sea at the moment, and revealed to their horrified gaze a reef of rocks close ahead, on which the waves were breaking with the utmost fury. Instant darkness followed the flash, and a deafening peal of thunder joined in the roar of breakers, intensifying, if possible, the terrors of the situation.

Gaff knew now that the crisis had certainly arrived, and for the next few moments he exerted every power of eye and ear in order to guide the boat into a channel between the breakersif such existed.

“Jump for’ard, lad,” he shouted, “and keep yer eye sharp ahead.”

Billy obeyed at once, with the seamanlike “Ay, ay, sir,” which he had acquired on board the whaler.

“Port, port! hard-a-port!” shouted the boy a moment after taking his place in the bow.

“Port it is,” answered Gaff.

Before the boat had time, however, to answer the helm, she was caught on the crest of a breaker, whirled round like a piece of cork, and, balancing for one moment on the foam, capsized.

The moment of hesitation was enough to enable Gaff to spring to his son’s side and seize him. Next instant they were buffeting the waves together.

It is not necessary to remind the reader that Gaff was an expert swimmer. Billy was also first-rate. He was known among his companions as The Cork, because of his floating powers, and these stood him in good stead at this time, enabling him to cling to his father much more lightly than would have been the case had he not been able to swim.

At first they found it impossible to do more than endeavour to keep afloat, for the surging of the breakers was so great, and the darkness so intense, that they could not give direction to their energies. But the increasing roar of the surf soon told them that they were near the rocks, and in a few seconds they were launched with tremendous force amongst them.

Well was it for them at that moment that the wave which bore them on its crest swept them through a gap in the reef, else had they been inevitably dashed to pieces. As it was, they were nearly torn asunder, and Gaff's shoulder just grazed a rock as he was whirled past it; but in a few seconds they found themselves in comparatively still water, and felt assured that they had been swept through an opening in the reef. Presently Gaff touched a rock and grasped it.

"Hold on, Billy my lad!" he exclaimed breathlessly, "we'll be safe ashore, please God, in a short bit."

"All right, daddy," gasped the boy; for to say truth, the whirling in the foam had well-nigh exhausted him.

Soon the two were out of the reach of the waves, clinging to what appeared to be the face of a precipice. Here, although safe from the actual billows, they were constantly drenched by spray, and exposed to the full fury of the gale. At first they attempted to scale the cliff, supposing that if once at the top they should find shelter; but this proved to be impossible. Equally impossible was it to get round the promontory on which they had been cast. They were therefore compelled to shelter themselves as they best might, in the crevices of the exposed point, and cling to each other for warmth.

It was a long long night to those castaways. Minutes appeared to pass like hours, and it seemed to them as if night had finally and for ever settled down on the dreary world. The wind too, although not very cold, was sufficiently so to chill them, and long before day began to break they were so much benumbed as to be scarcely able to maintain their position.

During all this time they were harassed by uncertainty as to the nature of the rock on which they were cast. It might be a mere barren islet, perhaps one which the sea covered at high-water, in which case there was the possibility of

their being swept away before morning.

When morning came, however, it revealed to them the fact that they were upon a small promontory, which was connected by a narrow neck of sand with the land.

As soon as the light rendered this apparent, Gaff put his hand on Billy's head and spoke softly to him

"Now then, lad, look upye an't sleepin', sure, are ye?"

"No, daddy, only dozin' and dreamin'," said Billy, rousing himself.

"Well, we must stop dreamin', and git ashore as fast as we can. I think there's dry land all the way to the beach; if not, it'll only be a short swim. Whether it's an island or what, I don't know; but let's be thankful, boy, that it looks big enough to hold us. Come, cheer up!"

To this Billy replied that he was quite jolly, and ready for anything; and, by way of proving his fitness for exertion, began to crawl over the rocks like a snail!

"That'll never do," said Gaff with a short laugh; "come, wrestle with me, youngster."

The Bu'ster accepted the challenge at once by throwing his arms round his father's waist, and endeavouring to throw him. Gaff resisted, and the result was that, in ten minutes or so, they were comparatively warm, and capable of active exertion.

Then they clambered over the rocks, traversed the neck of sand, and quickly gained the shore.

Ascending the cliffs with eager haste, they reached the summit just as the sun rose and tinged the topmost pinnacles with a golden hue. Pushing on towards an elevated ridge of rock, they climbed to the top of a mound, from which they could obtain a view of the surrounding country, and then they discovered that their place of refuge was a small solitary island, in the midst of the boundless sea.

Chapter Twenty Two.
The Island-Home Examined.

For a long time father and son stood on the elevated rock gazing in silence on the little spot of earth that was to be their home, it might be, for months, or

even years.

The island, as I have said, was a solitary one, and very smallnot more than a mile broad, by about three miles long; but it was covered from summit to shore with the richest tropical verdure, and the trees and underwood were so thick that the cliffs could only be seen in places where gaps in the foliage occurred, or where an aspiring peak of rock shot up above the trees. In order to reach the ridge on which they stood, the castaways had passed beneath the shade of mangrove, banana, cocoa-nut, and a variety of other trees and plants. The land on which these grew was undulating and varied in form, presenting in one direction dense foliage, which not only filled the little valleys, but clung in heavy masses to rocks and ridges; while in other places there were meadows of rich grass, with here and there a reedy pond, whose surface was alive with wild ducks and other water-fowl. Only near the top of the islandwhich might almost be styled a mountain ridgewas there any appearance of uncovered rock. There were two principal peaks, one of which, from its appearance, was a volcano, but whether an active one or not Gaff could not at that time determine. Unlike the most of the South Sea islands, this one was destitute of a surrounding coral reef, so that the great waves caused by the recent storm burst with thunderous roar on the beach.

At one point only was there a projecting point or low promontory, which formed a natural harbour; and it was on the outer rocks of this point that the father and son had been providentially cast. The whole scene was pre-eminently beautiful; and as the wind had gone quite down, it was, with the exception of the solemn, regular, intermittent roar of the breakers on the weather side, quiet and peaceful. As he sat down on a rock, and raised his heart to God in gratitude for his deliverance, Gaff felt the spot to be a sweet haven of rest after the toils and horrors of the storm.

A single glance was sufficient to show that the island was uninhabited.

The silence was first broken by Billy, who, in his wonted sudden and bursting manner, gave vent to a resonant cheer.

“Hallo! ho! hooray!” he shouted, while a blaze of delight lit up his face; “there’s the boat, daddy!”

“Where away, lad?” demanded Gaff, rising and shading his eyes from the sun, as he looked in the direction indicated.

“There, down i’ the cove; bottom up among the rocks; stove in, I daresay. Don’t ’ee see’d, faither?”

“Ay, lad; and mayhap it bean’t stove in; leastwise we’ll go see.”

As the two hastened down to the beach to ascertain this important point, Gaff took a more leisurely survey of things on the island, and Billy commented freely on things in general.

“Now, daddy,” said the Bu’ster, with a face of beaming joy, “this is the very jolliest thing that ever could have happened to usain’t it?”

“Well, I’m not so sure o’ that, lad. To be cast away on a lone desert island in the middle o’ the Pacific, with little or no chance o’ gittin’ away for a long bit, ain’t quite the jolliest thing in the world, to my mind.”

“Wot’s a desert island, daddy?”

“One as ain’t peopled or cultivated.”

“Then that’s no objection to it,” said Billy, “because we two are people enough, and we’ll cultivate it up to the mast-head afore long.”

“But what shall we do for victuals, lad?” inquired Gaff, with a smile.

The Bu’ster was posed. He had never thought of food, so his countenance fell.

“And drink?” added Gaff.

The Bu’ster was not posed at this, for he remembered, and reminded his father of, the pond which they had seen from the ridge.

“Aha!” he added, “an’ there was lots o’ ducks on it too. We can eat them, you know, daddy, even though we han’t got green peas or taties to ’em.”

“We can have other things to ’em though,” said Gaff, pointing to a tall palm-tree; “for there are cocoa-nuts; and farther on, to this side o’ the hollow there, I see banana-trees; and here are yams, which are nearly as good as taties.”

“I told ye it would be jolly,” cried Billy, recovering his delight, “an’ no doubt we’ll find lots of other things; and then we’ll have it all to ourselvesyou and me. You’ll be king, daddy, or emperor, and I’ll be prince. Won’t that be grand? Prince of a South Sea island! What would Tottie and mother say? And then the boat, you knoweven if it do be stove in, we can patch it up somehow, and go fishin’.”

“Without hooks or lines?” said Gaff.

Billy was posed again, and his father laughed at the perplexed expression on his countenance, as he said, “Never mind, boy, we’ll find somethin’ or other that will do instead o’ hooks an’ lines.”

“To be sure we will,” assented the other encouragingly; “an’ that’ll be one of the jolliest bits of it all, that we’ll spend lots of our time in tryin’ to find out things that’ll do instead o’ other things, won’t we? And thenhallo! was that a grump?”

“It sounded uncommon like one.”

“An’ that’s a squeal,” said Billy.

In another moment both “grump” and “squeal” were repeated in full chorus by a drove of wild pigs that burst suddenly out of a thick bush, and, rushing in mad haste past the intruders on their domain, disappeared, yelling, into a neighbouring thicket.

“Pork for our ducks, daddy!” shouted Billy, when the first burst of his surprise was over; “we’ll have plenty of grub now; but how are we to catch them?”

“Ha! we must find that out,” replied Gaff cheerfully; “it’ll give us summat to think about, d’ye see? Now then, here we are at the beach, an’ as far as I can see we have bright prospects in regard to victuals of another sort, for here be crabs an’ oysters an’ no end o’ cockles. Come, we’ll not be badly off, if we only had a hut o’ some sort to sleep in; but, after all, we can manage to be comfortable enough under a tree. It will be better than the housin’ we’ve had for the last few nights, anyhow.”

To their great delight they found that the boat had been cast ashore on a sandy place, and that it was uninjured. A short way beyond it, too, the oars were found stranded between two rocks.

This was a piece of great good fortune, because it placed within their reach the means of an immediate circumnavigation of their island. But before entering on this voyage of discovery they resolved to explore the woods near the place where they had landed, in search of a cavern, or some suitable place in which to fix their home.

Acting on this resolve they pulled the boat up the beach, placed the oars within it, and returned to the woods. As they went they picked up a few shell-fish, and ate them raw. Thus they breakfasted; but although the meal was a poor one it was unusually pleasant, because of the hunger which had previously oppressed them, and which Billy, in a fit of confidential talk with his father, compared to having his “interior gnawed out by rats!”

Passing through the woods they found a quantity of ripe berries, of various kinds, of which they ate heartily, and then came to a spring of clear cold water.

Gaff also climbed a cocoa-nut tree and brought down two nuts, which were clothed in such thick hard shells that they well-nigh broke their hearts before they succeeded in getting at the kernels. However, they got at them in course of time, and feasted sumptuously on them.

It was half an hour, or perhaps three-quarters of an hour, after the gathering of the cocoa-nuts, that they came suddenly on a spring of water above which there was a cloud of vapour resembling steam.

“It’s bilin’,” exclaimed Billy, as he ran forward and eagerly thrust his hand into the water.

Billy had said this in joke, for he had never conceived of such a thing as a spring of hot water, but he found that his jest might have been said in earnest, for the spring was almost “bilin’,” and caused the Bu’ster to pull his hand out again with a roar of surprise and pain.

Just beyond the hot spring they found a small cavern in the face of a cliff, which appeared to them to be quite dry.

“Here’s the very thing we want, daddy,” cried Billy in gleeful surprise.

“Don’t be too sure, lad; p’raps it’s damp.”

“No, it’s dry as bone,” said the boy, running in and placing his hands on the floor; “it’s wide inside too, and the entrance is small, so we can put a door to it; and look there! seean’t that a hole leadin’ to some other place?”

Billy was right. A small hole, not much larger than was sufficient to admit of a man passing through, conducted them into a larger cave than the first one, and here they found another hole leading into a third, which was so large and dark that they dared not venture to explore it without a light. They saw enough, however, to be convinced that the caverns were well ventilated and free from damp, so they returned to the entrance cave and examined it carefully with a view to making it their home.

Billy’s romantic spirit was filled to overflowing with joy while thus engaged, insomuch that Gaff himself became excited as well as interested in the investigation. They little knew at the time how familiar each rock and crevice of that cave was to become, and how long it was destined to be their island-home!

Chapter Twenty Three.
Relating to Improvements in the Hut, and Mrs Gaff’s Perplexities.

While Stephen Gaff and his son were busy preparing their residence in the South Sea island, Mrs Gaff was equally busy in preparing her residence for their reception on their return to Cove.

The little cottage had undergone so many changes during the past few months that it is doubtful whether its rightful owner would have recognised his own property,internally at least; externally it remained unaltered.

Having, with much pains, ascertained that she might venture to launch out pretty freely in the way of expenditure without becoming absolutely bankrupt, Mrs Gaff had supplied herself with a handsome new grate, a large proportion of which was of polished brass, that cost herself and Tottie much of their time to keep clean and brilliant; there were also fender and fire-irons to match, adorned with brass knobs and points, which latter were the special admiration of Tottie. There was a carpet, too, straight from the looms of Turkeyas the man who sold it informed Mrs Gaffwhich was the admiration of all Cove, for it was divided into squares of brilliant colours, with huge red roses in the centre of each. It was positively a superb, a resplendent, carpet, and rejoiced the hearts and eyes of Mrs Gaff and her child every time they looked at it, which you may be sure was pretty often. It kept them indeed in a constant state of nervous dread lest they should spill or capsize anything upon it, and in this respect might almost be said to have rendered their lives a burden, but they bore up under it with surprising cheerfulness.

There was also a new eight-day clock, with a polished mahogany case and a really white face, which by contrast made the old Dutch clock more yellow and bilious than ever, and if possible more horrified in its expression. Mrs Gaff had allowed the old clock to retain its corner, wisely concluding that it would be a pleasantly familiar sight and sound to her husband and son when they returned. It was quite apparent to the meanest capacity that there was a rivalry between the two timepieces; for, being both rather good timekeepers, they invariably struck the hours at the same time, but the new clock struck with such a loud overbearing ring that the old one was quite overpowered. The latter had the advantage, however, of getting the first two strokes before the other began, besides which it prefaced its remarks every hour with a mysterious hissing and whirring sound that the new clock could not have got up to save its life.

There were also half-a-dozen new cane chairs. The shopman who had sold Mrs Gaff the carpet told her that they would look more elegant and drawing-room-like than the six heavy second-hand mahogany ones, with the hair-cloth seats, on which she had set her heart. Mrs Gaff would not at first agree to take the cane chairs, observing truly that they “was too slim,” but she was shaken in her mind when the shopman said they were quite the thing for a lady’s

boudoir.

She immediately demanded to know what a “boodwar” was. The shopman told her that it was an elegant apartment in which young ladies were wont to sit and read poetry, and think of their absent lovers.

On hearing this she retired into a corner of the shop, taking refuge behind a chest of drawers, and held a long whispered conversation with Tottie, after which she came forth and asked the shopman if married ladies ever used boodwars where they might sit and think of their absent husbands.

The shopman smiled, and said he had no doubt they didindeed, he was sure of it; for, said he, there was a certain apartment in his own house in which his own wife was wont to sit up at night, when he chanced to be absent, and think of him.

The uncandid man did not add that in the same apartment he was in the habit of being taken pretty sharply to task as to what had kept him out so late; but, after all, what had Mrs Gaff to do with that? The result was that the six cane chairs were ordered by Mrs Gaff, who remarked that she never read “poitry,” but that that wouldn’t matter much. Thenceforth she styled the cottage at Cove the Boodwar.

It is worthy of remark that Mrs Gaff, being a heavy woman, went through the bottom of the first of the cane chairs she sat down on after they were placed in the boudoir, and that her fisher-friends, being all more or less heavy, went successively through the bottoms of all the rest until none were left, and they were finally replaced by the six heavy mahogany chairs, with the hair seats, which ever afterwards stood every test to which they were subjected, that of Haco Barepoles’ weight included.

But the chief ornament of the cottage was a magnificent old mahogany four-poster, which was so large that it took up at least a third of the apartment, and so solidly dark and heavy that visitors were invariably, on their first entrance, impressed with the belief that a hearse had been set up in a corner of the boudoir. The posts of this bed were richly carved, and the top of each was ornamented with an imposing ball. The whole was tastefully draped with red damask so dark with age as to be almost black. Altogether this piece of furniture was so grand that words cannot fully describe it, and it stood so high on its carved legs that Mrs Gaff and Tottie were obliged to climb into it each night by a flight of three steps, which were richly carpeted, and which folded into a square box, which was extremely convenient as a seat or ottoman during the day, and quite in keeping with the rest of the furniture of the “boodwar.”

In addition to all these beautiful and expensive articles, Mrs Gaff displayed her

love for the fine arts in the selection and purchase of four engravings in black frames with gold slips, one for each wall of the cottage. The largest of these was the portrait of a first-rate line-of-battle ship in full sail, with the yards manned, and dressed from deck to trucks with all the flags of the navy. Another was a head of Lord Nelson, said to be a speaking likeness!

This head had the astonishing property of always looking at you, no matter what part of the room you looked at it from! Tottie had expressed a wish that it might be hung opposite the new clock, in order that it might have something, as it were, to look at; but although the eyes looked straight out of the picture, they refused to look at the clock, and pertinaciously looked at living beings instead. Mrs Gaff asserted that it had a squint, and that it was really looking at the Dutch clock, and on going to the corner where that timepiece stood she found that Lord Nelson was gazing in that direction! But Tottie, who went to the opposite corner of the room, roundly asseverated that the head looked at her.

There was no getting over this difficulty, so Mrs Gaff gave it up as an unsolvable riddle; but Tottie, who was fond of riddles, pondered the matter, and at length came to the conclusion that as Lord Nelson was a great man, it must be because of his greatness that he could look in two directions at the same moment.

Mrs Gaff furthermore displayed her taste for articles of vertu in her selection of chimney-piece ornaments. She had completely covered every inch of available space with shells of a brilliant and foreign aspect, and articles of chinaware, such as parrots and shepherds, besides various creatures which the designer had evidently failed to represent correctly, as they resembled none of the known animals of modern times.

From this abode of elegance and luxury Mrs Gaff issued one forenoon in her gay cotton visiting dress and the huge bonnet with the pink bows and ribbons. Tottie accompanied her, for the two were seldom apart for any lengthened period since the time when Stephen and Billy went away. Mother and daughter seemed from that date to have been united by a new and stronger bond than heretofore; they walked, worked, ate, slept, and almost thought together. On the present occasion they meant to pay a business visit at the house of Mr Stuart.

While they were on their way thither, Miss Penelope Stuart was engaged in the difficult and harassing work of preparing for a journey. She was assisted by Mrs Niven, who was particularly anxious to know the cause of the intended journey, to the great annoyance of Miss Peppy, who did not wish to reveal the cause, but who was so incapable of concealing anything that she found it

absolutely necessary to take the housekeeper into her confidence.

“Niven,” she said, sitting down on a portmanteau, which was packed, beside one which was packing.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I may as well tell you why it is that I am going to visit my brother-in-law”

“Oh, it’s to your brother-in-law you’re goin’, is it?”

“Yes, I forgot that you did not know, but to be sure I might have known that you could not know unless you were told, although it’s difficult to understand why people shouldn’t know what others are thinking of, as well as what they are looking at. We can see them looking, but we can’t hear them thinkingreally it is very perplexingdear me, where can they be?”

“What, ma’am?”

“My thick walking-shoes. I’m quite sure that I had them in my hand a minute ago.”

“Ho! ma’am,” exclaimed Mrs Niven suddenly, “if you aren’t bin an’ put ’em into your bonnet-box among the caps.”

“Well now, that is odd. Put them into the bag, Niven. Well, as I was sayingwhere was I?”

“You was goin’ to tell me why you are goin’ to your brother, ma’am,” observed the housekeeper.

“Ah! to be sure; well then. But you must never mention it, Niven.”

Miss Peppy said this with much solemnity, as if she were administering an oath.

“On my honour, ma’am; trust me. I never mentions hanythink.”

Mrs Niven said this as though she wondered that the supposition could have entered into Miss Peppy’s head for a moment, that she, (Mrs Niven), could, would, or should tell anything to anybody.

“Well then, you must know,” resumed Miss Peppy, with a cautious glance round the room, “my brother-in-law, Colonel Crusty, who lives in the town of Athenbury, is a military man”

“So I should suppose, ma’am,” observed Mrs Niven, “he being called Kurnel,

w’ich is an army name.”

“Ah, yes, to be sure, I forgot that; well, it is two hours by train to Athenbury, which is a dirty place, as all seaports arefull of fishy and sailory smells, though I’ve never heard that such smells are bad for the health; at least the Sanitary Commissioners say that if all the filth were cleaned away the effluvia would be less offensive, andand. But, as I was saying, for those reasons I mean to pay my brother-in-law a short visit.”

“Beg parding, ma’am,” said Mrs Niven, “but, if I may remark so, you ’ave not mentioned your reasons as yet.”

“Oh, to be sure,” said the baffled Miss Peppy, who had weakly hoped that she could escape with an indefinite explanation; “I meant to say, (and you’ll be sure not to tell, Niven), that the Colonel has a remarkably pretty daughter, with such a sweet temper, and heiress to all her father’s property; though I never knew rightly how much it was, for the Crustys are very close, and since their mother died”

“Whose mother, ma’am? the Colonel’s or his daughter’s?”

“His daughter’s, of courseBella, she is called. Since she died, (not Bella, but her mother), since then I’ve never heard anything about the family; but now that Bella is grown up, I mean to get her and Kenneth to see each other, and I have no doubt that they will fall in love, which would be very nice, for you know Kenneth will have a good income one of those days, and it’s as well that the young people should bebe married if they can, and indeed I see nothing in the way; though, after all, they would probably be happier if they were not to marry, for I don’t believe the state to be a happy one, and that’s the reason, Niven, that I never entered into it myself; but it’s too late now, though I cannot conceive why it should ever be too late, for if people can be happy at all, any time, what’s to hinder?”

Miss Peppy paused abruptly here, and Mrs Niven, supposing that she awaited a reply, said

“Nothing whatever, ma’am.”

“Exactly so, Niven, that’s just what I think. Kenneth is young and tall and handsome, Bella is young and small and pretty, and that’s the reason the match is so suitable, though, to be sure, there are many people similarly situated whose union would not be suitable; dear me, this world of perplexities! No one can read the riddle, for this world is no better than a big round riddle, flattened a little at the poles, to be sure, like an orange, though to my eyes it seems as flat as a pancake, except in the Scotch Highlands, where it’s very

irregular, and the people wear kilts; still, upon the whole, I think the match will be a good one, so I am going to try to bring it about."

"But are you sure, ma'am, that Master Kenneth will go to visit Colonel Crusty?"

"O yes, he has promised to escort me there, and then he'll see Bella, and, of course, he won't wish to leave after that."

Mrs Niven shook her head, and observed that she rather feared Miss Lizzie Gordon's image was already indelibly impressed on Master Kenneth's heart, but Miss Peppy replied that that was all nonsense, and that, at all events, her brother, Mr Stuart, would never permit it. She did not find it difficult to gain over Mrs Niven to her views, for that worthy woman, (like many other worthy women in this world), held the opinion that a "good match" meant a match where money existed on one or both sides, and that love was a mere boyish and girlish idea, which should not be taken into consideration at all.

The two were still discussing this important subject when Mrs Gaff laid violent hands on the door-bell.

On being admitted to the presence of Miss Peppy, Mrs Gaff sat down on the packed trunk, and all but stove in the lid; whereupon she rose hastily with many apologies, and afterwards in her confusion sat down on the bonnet-box, which she stove in so completely as to render it hors-de-combat for all future time.

"I'm awful sorry," she began.

"Oh, no harm; at least no matter," said Miss Peppy, "it's quite a useless sort of thing," (this was literally true), "and I mean to get a new one immediately."

Mrs Gaff became suddenly comforted, and said, with a bland smile, that, having heard only that morning of her intention to visit the town of Athenbury, she had called to ask her to do her a great favour.

"With the greatest pleasure; what can I do for you?" said Miss Peppy, who was the essence of good-nature.

"Thank 'ee, ma'am, it's to take charge o' a bit parcel, about the size of my head, or thereaway, and give it to a poor relation o' mine as lives there when he an't afloat."

"A seaman?" said Miss Peppy.

"Yes, ma'am."

“Very well; but,” continued Miss Peppy, “you say the parcel is the size of your head: do you mean your head with or without the bonnet? Excuse me for”

“La! ma’am, without the bonnet, of course. It may perhaps be rather heavy, but I an’t quite sure yet. I’ll let you know in an hour or so.”

Mrs Gaff rose abruptly, left the house, with Tottie, precipitately, and made her way to the bank, where she presented herself with a defiant air to the teller who had originally supplied her with a hundred pounds in gold. She always became and looked defiant, worthy woman, on entering the bank, having become unalterably impressed with the idea that all the clerks, tellers, and directors had entered into an agreement to throw every possible difficulty in the way of her drawing out money, and having resolved in her own determined way that she wouldn’t give in as long as, (to borrow one of her husband’s phrases), “there was a shot in the locker!”

“Now, sir,” she said to the elderly teller, “I wants twenty pounds, if there’s as much in the shop.”

The elderly teller smiled, and bade her sit down while he should write out the cheque for her. She sat down, gazing defiance all round her, and becoming painfully aware that there were a number of young men behind various screened rails whose noses were acting as safety-valves to their suppressed feelings.

When the cheque was drawn out and duly signed, Mrs Gaff went to the rails and shook it as she might have shaken in the face of her enemies the flag under which she meant to conquer or to die. On receiving it back she returned and presented it to the elderly teller with a look that said plainly“There! refuse to cash that at your peril;” but she said nothing, she only snorted.

“How will you have it?” inquired the teller blandly.

“In coppers,” said Mrs Gaff stoutly.

“Coppers!” exclaimed the teller in amazement.

“Yes, coppers.”

“My good woman, are you aware that you could scarcely lift such a sum in coppers.”

“How many would it make?” she inquired with an air of indecision.

“Four thousand eight hundred pence.”

Mrs Gaff's resolution was shaken; after a few moments' consideration she said she would take it in silver, and begged to have it mixedwith a good number of sixpences amongst it.

"You see, my lamb," she whispered to Tottie, while the teller was getting the money, "my poor cousin George is a'most too old to go to sea now, and he han't got a penny to live on, an' so I wants to gladden his heart and astonish his eyes wi' a sight o' such a heap o' silver. Mix it all together, sir," she said to the teller.

He obeyed, and pushed the pile towards Mrs Gaff, who surveyed it first with unmixed delight; but gradually her face was clouded with a look of concern as she thought of the counting of it.

If the counting of the gold was terrible to her, the counting of the silver was absolutely appalling, for the latter, consisting as it did of half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences, numbered nearly five hundred pieces.

The poor woman applied herself to the task with commendable energy, but in ten minutes she perceived that the thing was utterly beyond her powers, so she suddenly exclaimed to Tottie, who stood looking on with tears in her eyes,"Surely the elderly teller must be an honest man, and would never cheat me;" having come to which conclusion she swept the silver into the bag previously prepared for it, and consigned that to the basket which was the inseparable companion of her left arm. Thereafter she left the bank and hastened to a grocer in the town with whom she was acquainted, and from whom she obtained brown paper and twine with which she made the money up into a parcel. Her next act was to purchase a new bonnet-box, which she presented to Miss Peppy with many earnest protestations that she would have got a better if she could, but a better was not to be had in town for love or money.

Having executed all her commissions, Mrs Gaff returned to Cove and spent an hour or two with Tottie in the four-posternot by any means because she was lazy, but because it afforded her peculiar and inexpressible pleasure to stare at the damask curtains and wonder how Gaff would like it, and think of the surprise that he would receive on first beholding such a bed. So anxious did the good woman become in her desire to make the most of the new bed, that she once or twice contemplated the propriety of Stephen and herself, and the Bu'ster and Tottie, spending the first night, "after their return," all together in it, but on mature consideration she dismissed the idea as untenable.

Chapter Twenty Four.
Miss Peppy undertakes a Journey.

The scene is changed now to the railway station at Wreckumoft, where there is the usual amount of bustle and noise. The engines are shrieking and snorting as if nothing on earth could relieve their feelings but bursting. Bells are ringing; porters are hurrying to and fro with luggage on trucks, to the risk of passengers' shins and toes; men, women, and children, young and old, high and low, rich and poor, are mixed in confusion on the platform, some insanely attempting to force their way into a train that is moving off, under the impression that it is their train, and they are too late "after all!" Others are wildly searching for lost luggage. Many are endeavouring to calm their own spirits, some are attempting to calm the spirits of others. Timid old ladies, who cannot get reconciled to railways at all, are convinced that "something is going to happen," and testy old gentlemen are stumping about in search of wives and daughters, wishing that railways had never been invented, while a good many self-possessed individuals of both sexes are regarding the scene with serene composure.

When Miss Peppy made her appearance she was evidently not among the latter class. She was accompanied by Kenneth, and attended by Mrs Niven.

Neither mistress nor maid had ever been in a railway station before. They belonged to that class of females who are not addicted to travelling, and who prefer stage-coaches of the olden times to railways. They entered the station, therefore, with some curiosity and much trepidationfor it chanced to be an excursion day, and several of the "trades" of Athenbury were besieging the ticket-windows.

"It is very good of you to go with me, Kennie," said Miss Peppy, hugging her nephew's arm.

"My dear aunt, it is a pleasure, I assure you," replied Kenneth; "I am quite anxious to make the acquaintance of Colonel Crusty and his pretty daughter."

"O dear! what a shriek! Is anything wrong, Kennie?"

"Nothing, dear aunt; it is only a train about to start."

"What's the matter with you, Niven?" inquired Miss Peppy with some anxiety, on observing that the housekeeper's face was ashy pale.

"Nothink, ma'am; only I feels assured that everythink is a-goin' to bu'st, ma'am."

She looked round hastily, as if in search of some way of escape, but no such way presented itself.

“Look-out for your legs, ma’am,” shouted a porter, as he tried to stop his truck of luggage.

Mrs Niven of course did not hear him, and if she had heard him, she would not have believed it possible that he referred to her legs, for she wore a very long dress, and was always scrupulously particular in the matter of concealing her ankles. Fortunately Kenneth observed her danger, and pulled her out of the way with unavoidable violence.

“It can’t ’old on much longer,” observed Niven with a sigh, referring to an engine which stood directly opposite to her in tremulous and apparently tremendous anxiety to start.

The driver vented his impatience just then by causing the whistle to give three sharp yelps, which produced three agonising leaps in the bosoms of Miss Peppy and Mrs Niven.

“Couldn’t it all be done with a little less noise,” said Miss Peppy to Kenneth, “it seems to me so aw oh! look! surely that old gentleman has gone mad!”

“Not he,” said Kenneth with a smile; “he has only lost his wife in the crowd, and thinks the train will start before he finds her; see, she is under the same impression, don’t you see her rushing wildly about looking for her husband, they’ll meet in a moment or two if they keep going in the same direction, unless that luggage-truck should interfere.”

“Look-out, sir!” shouted the porter at that moment. The old gentleman started back, and all but knocked over his wife, who screamed, recognised him, and clung to his arm with thankful tenacity.

A bell rang.

The crowd swayed to and fro; agitated people became apparently insane; timid people collapsed; strong people pushed, and weak folk gave way. If any man should be sceptical in regard to the doctrine of the thorough depravity of the human heart, he can have his unbelief removed by going into and observing the conduct of an eager crowd!

“What a hinfamous state of things!” observed Mrs Niven.

“Yell!shriek!” went the engine whistle, drowning Miss Peppy’s reply.

“Take your seats!” roared the guard.

The engine gave a sudden snort, as if to say, “You’d better, else I’m off without you.”

“Now aunt,” said Kenneth, “come along.”

In another moment Miss Peppy was seated in a carriage, with her head out of the window, talking earnestly and rapidly to Mrs Niven.

It seemed as if she had reserved all the household directions which she had to give to that last inopportune moment!

“Now, take good care of Emmie, Niven, and don’t forget to get her”

The remainder was drowned by “that irritating whistle.”

“Get her what, ma’am?”

“Get her shoes mended before Sunday, and remember that her petticoat was torn when shebless me! has that thing burst at last?”

“No, ma’am, not yet,” said Niven.

“Now then, keep back; show your tickets, please,” said the inspector, pushing Niven aside.

“Imperence!” muttered the offended housekeeper, again advancing to the window when the man had passed.

As the train was evidently about to start, Miss Peppy’s memory became suddenly very acute, and a rush of forgotten directions almost choked her as she leaned out of the window.

“Oh! Niven, I forgotthethedear me, what is it? I know it so well when I’m not in a flurry. It’s awful to be subjected so constantly tothe Child’s History of England! that’s iton the top of mymywhich trunk can it be? I know, oh yes, the leather one. Emmie is to readwell now, that is too bad”

As Miss Peppy stopped and fumbled in her pocket inquiringly, Mrs Niven asked, in some concern, if it was her purse.

“No, it’s my thimble; ah! here it is, there’s a corner in that pocket where everything seems towell,” (shriek from the whistle), “oh! andandthe baker’s bookit must beby the bye, that’s well remembered, you must get money from Mr Stuart”

“What now, ma’am,” inquired Mrs Niven, as Miss Peppy again paused and grew pale.

“The key!”

“Of the press?” inquired Niven.

“Yesno; that is, it’s the key of the press, and not the key of my trunk. Here, take it,” (she thrust the key into the housekeeper’s hand, just as the engine gave a violent snort.) “What shall I do? My trunk won’t open without, at least I suppose it won’t, and it’s a new lock! what shall”

“Make a parcel of the key, Niven,” said Kenneth, coming to the rescue, “and send it by the guard of next train.”

“And oh!” shrieked Miss Peppy, as the train began to move, “I forgot thethe”

“Yes, yes, quick, ma’am,” cried Niven eagerly, as she followed.

“Oh! can’t they stop the train for a moment? It’s theit’sdear methe piepie!”

“What pie, ma’am?”

“There’s three of themfor my brother’s dinnerI forgot to tell cookit’ll put him out sothere’s three of ’em. It’s not thethetwo but thetheother one, the what-d’ye-call-it pie.” Miss Peppy fell back on her seat, and gave it up with a groan. Suddenly she sprang up, and thrust out her head“The deer pie,” she yelled.

“The dear pie!” echoed the astonished Mrs Niven interrogatively.

Another moment and Miss Peppy vanished from the scene, leaving the housekeeper to return home in despair, from which condition she was relieved by the cook, who at once concluded that the “dear pie” must mean the venison pasty, and forthwith prepared the dish for dinner.

Chapter Twenty Five.
Perplexities and Musical Charms.

My son Gildart, with his hands in his pockets and his cap very much on one side of his head, entered my drawing-room one morning with a perplexed air.

“What troubles you to-day?” asked Lizzie Gordon, who was seated at the window winding up a ball of worsted, the skein of which was being held by Miss Puff, who was at that time residing with us.

“What troubles me?everything troubles me,” said the middy with a stern air, as he turned his back to the fire; “the world troubles me, circumstances trouble me, my heart troubles me, my pocket troubles me, my friends and relations trouble me, and so do my enemies; in fact, it would be difficult to name the sublunary creature or thing that does not trouble me. It blows trouble from

every point of the compass, a peculiarity in moral gales that is never observed in physical breezes."

"How philosophically you talk this morning," observed Lizzie with a laugh. "May it not be just possible that the trouble, instead of flowing from all points to you as a centre, wells up within and flows out in all directions, and that a warped mind inverts the process?"

"Perhaps you are right, sweet cousin! Anyhow we can't be both wrong, which is a comfort."

"May I ask what is the heart-trouble you complain of?" said Lizzie.

"Love and hatred," replied Gildart with a sigh and a frown.

"Indeed! Is the name of the beloved object a secret?"

"Of course," said the middy with a pointed glance at Miss Puff, who blushed scarlet from the roots of her hair to the edge of her dress, (perhaps to the points of her toesI am inclined to think so); "of course it is; but the hated object's name is no secret. It is Haco Barepoles."

"The mad skipper!" exclaimed Lizzie in surprise. "I thought he was the most amiable man in existence. Every one speaks well of him."

"It may be so, but I hate him. The hatred is peculiar, though I believe not incurable, but at present it is powerful. That preposterous giant, that fathom and four inches of conceit, that insufferable disgrace to his cloth, that huge mass of human bones in a pig-skinhehe bothers me."

"But how does he bother you?"

"Well, in the first place, he positively refuses to let his daughter Susan marry Dan Horsey, and I have set my heart on that match, for Susan is a favourite of mine, and Dan is a capital fellow, though he is a groom and a scoundreland nothing would delight me more than to bother our cook, who is a perfect vixen, and would naturally die of vexation if these two were spliced; besides, I want a dance at a wedding, or a shindy of some sort, before setting sail for the land of spices and niggers. Haco puts a stop to all that; but, worse still, when I was down at the Sailors' Home the other day, I heard him telling some wonderful stories to the men there, in one of which he boasted that he had never been taken by surprise, nor got a start in his life; that a twenty-four pounder had once burst at his side and cut the head clean off a comrade, without causing his nerves to shake or his pulse to increase a bit. I laid him a bet of ten pounds on the spot that I could give him a fright, and he took it at

once. Now I can't for the life of me think how to give him a fright, yet I must do it somehow, for it will never do to be beat."

"Couldn't you shoot off a pistol at his ear?" suggested Lizzie.

Miss Puff sniggered, and Gildart said he might as well try to startle him with a sneeze.

"Get up a ghost, then," said Lizzie; "I have known a ghost act with great effect on a dark night in an out-of-the-way place."

"No use," returned Gildart, shaking his head. "Haco has seen ghosts enough to frighten a squadron of horse-marines."

Miss Puff sniggered again, and continued to do so until her puffy face and neck became extremely pink and dangerously inflated, insomuch that Gildart asked her somewhat abruptly what in the world she was laughing at. Miss Puff said she wouldn't tell, and Gildart insisted that she would; but she positively declined, until Gildart dragged her forcibly from her chair into a window-recess, where she was prevailed on to whisper the ideas that made her laugh.

"Capital!" exclaimed the middy, chuckling as he issued from the recess; "I'll try it. You're a charming creature, Puff, with an imagination worthy the owner of a better name. There, don't pout. You know my sentiments. Adieu, fair cousin! Puff, good-bye."

So saying, the volatile youth left the room.

That afternoon Gildart sauntered down to the Sailors' Home and entered the public hall, in which a dozen or two of sailors were engaged in playing draughts or chatting together. He glanced round, but, not finding the object of his search, was about to leave, when Dan Horsey came up, and, touching his hat, asked if he were looking for Haco Barepoles.

"I am," said Gildart.

"So is meself," said Dan; "but the mad skipper an't aisy to git howld of, an' not aisy to kape howld of when ye've got him. He's goin' to Cove this afternoon, I believe, an'll be here before startin', so I'm towld, so I'm waitin' for him."

As he spoke Haco entered, and Dan delivered a letter to him.

"Who from?" inquired the skipper sternly.

"Mr Stuart, alias the guv'nor," replied Dan with extreme affability; "an' as no

answer is required, I'll take my leave with your highness's permission."

Haco deigned no reply, but turned to Gildart and held out his hand.

"You've not gone to stay at Cove yet, I see," said Gildart.

"Not yet, lad, but I go to-night at nine o'clock. You see Mrs Gaff is a-goin' to visit a relation for a week, an' wants me to take care o' the house, the boodwar, as she calls it, though why she calls it by that name is more than I can tell. However I'll be here for a week yet, as the 'Coffin' wants a few repairs, (I wonder if it ever didn't want repairs), an' I may as well be there as in the Home, though I'm bound to say the Home is as good a lodgin' as ever I was in at home or abroad, and cheap too, an' they looks arter you so well. The only thing I an't sure of is whether the repairs is to be done here or in Athenbury."

"The letter from Mr Stuart may bear on that point," suggested Gildart.

"True," replied the skipper, opening the letter.

"Ha! sure enough the repairs is to be done there, so I'll have to cut my visit to Cove short by four days."

"But you'll sleep there to-night, I suppose?" asked Gildart, with more anxiety than the subject seemed to warrant.

"Ay, no doubt o' that, for Mrs G and Tottie left this mornin', trustin' to my comin' down in the evenin'; but I can't get before nine o'clock."

"Well, good-day to you," said Gildart; "I hope you'll enjoy yourself at Cove."

The middy hastened away from the Sailors' Home with the air of a man who had business on hand. Turning the corner of a street he came upon a brass band, the tones of which were rendering all the bilious people within hearing almost unable to support existence. There was one irascible old gentleman, (a lawyer), under whose window it was braying, who sat at his desk with a finger in each ear trying to make sense out of a legal document. This was a difficult task at any time, for the legal document was compounded chiefly of nonsense, with the smallest possible modicum of sense scattered through it. In the circumstances the thing was impossible, so the lawyer rose and stamped about the floor, and wished he were the Emperor of Russia with a cannon charged with grape-shot loaded to the muzzle and pointed at the centre of that brass band, in which case he would. Well, the old gentleman never thought out the sentence, but he stamped on and raved a little as the band brayed below his window.

There was a sick man in a room not far from the old lawyer's office. He had

spent two days and two nights in the delirium of fever. At last the doctor succeeded in getting him to fall into a slumber. It was not a very sound one; but such as it was it was of inestimable value to the sick man. The brass band, however, brayed the slumber away to the strains of “Rule Britannia,” and effectually restored the delirium with “God Save the Queen.”

There were many other interesting little scenes enacted in that street in consequence of the harmonious music of that brass band, but I shall refrain from entering into farther particulars. Suffice it to say that Gildart stood listening to it for some time with evident delight.

“Splendid,” he muttered, as an absolutely appalling burst of discord rent the surrounding air and left it in tatters. “Magnificent! I think that will do.”

“You seem fond of bad music, sir,” observed an elderly gentleman, who had been standing near a doorway looking at the middy with a quiet smile.

“Yes, on the present occasion I am,” replied Gildart; “discord suits my taste just now, and noise is pleasant to my ear.”

The band ceased to play at that moment, and Gildart, stepping up to the man who appeared to be the leader, inasmuch as he performed on the clarionet, asked him to turn aside with him for a few minutes.

The man obeyed with a look of surprise, not unmingled with suspicion.

“You are leader of this band?”

“Yes, sir, I ham.”

“Have you any objection to earn a sovereign or two?”

“No, sir, I han’t.”

“It’s a goodish band,” observed Gildart.

“A fus’-rater,” replied the clarionet. “No doubt the trombone is a little cracked and brassy, so to speak, because of a hinfluenza as has wonted him for some weeks; but there’s good stuff in ’im, sir, and plenty o’ lungs. The key-bugle is a noo ’and, but ’e’s capital, ’ticklerly in the ’igh notes an’ flats; besides, bein’ young, ’e’ll improve. As to the French ’orn, there ain’t his ekal in the country; w’en he does the pathetic it would make a banker weep. You like pathetic music, sir?”

“Not much,” replied the middy.

“No! now that’s hodd. I do. It ’armonises so with the usual state o’ my feelin’s.

My feelin’s is a’most always pathetic, sir.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, ’cept at meal-times, w’en I do manage to git a little jolly. Ah! sir, music ain’t wot it used to be. There’s a general flatness about it now, sir, an’ people don’t seem to admire it ’alf so much as w’en I first began. But if you don’t like the pathetic, p’raps you like the bravoory style?”

“I doat on it,” said Gildart. “Come, let’s have a touch of the ‘bravoory.’”

“I’ve got a piece,” said the clarionet slowly, looking at the sky with a pathetic air, “a piece as I composed myself. I don’t often play it, ’cause, you know, sir, one doesn’t ’xactly like to shove one’s-self too prominently afore the public. I calls it the ‘Banging-smash Polka.’ But I generally charge hextra for it, for it’s dreadful hard on the lungs, and the trombone he gets cross when I mention it, for it nearly bu’sts the hinstrument; besides, it kicks up sich a row that it puts the French ’orn’s nose out o’ jintyou can’t ’ear a note of him. I flatter myself that the key-bugle plays his part to parfection, but the piece was written chiefly for the trombone and clarionet; the one being deep and crashing, the other shrill and high. I had the battle o’ Waterloo in my mind w’en I wrote it.”

“Will that do?” said Gildart, putting half-a-crown into the man’s hand.

The clarionet nodded, and, turning to his comrades, winked gravely as he pronounced the magic word“Banging-smash.”

Next moment there was a burst as if a bomb-shell had torn up the street, and this was followed up by a series of crashes so rapid, violent, and wildly intermingled, that the middy’s heart almost leapt out of him with delight!

In a few seconds three doors burst open, and three servant-girls rushed at the band with three sixpences to beseech it to go away.

“Couldn’t go under a shillin’ a head,” said the clarionet gravely.

A word from Gildart, however, induced him to accept of the bribe and depart.

As they went along the street Gildart walked with the clarionet and held earnest converse with himapparently of a persuasive nature, for the clarionet frequently shook his head and appeared to remonstrate. Presently he called on his comrades to stop, and held with them a long palaver, in which the French horn seemed to be an objector, and the trombone an assenter, while the key-bugle didn’t seem to care. At last they all came to an agreement.

“Now,” said the middy, taking out his purse, “that’s all fixed; here is five

shillings in advance, and twenty shillings will follow when the performance is over. Don’t forget the time and place: the village of Cove, the rear of Stephen Gaff’s cottageeverybody knows itand eight o’clock precisely.”

Chapter Twenty Six.
Mad Haco startled at last.

That evening Haco Barepoles was seen on the road to Cove, with his coat-skirts, his cravat-ends, and his hair streaming in the breeze.

An hour previously, however, a brass band was seen walking towards the same place, and, half an hour after that, a young midshipman was observed posting rapidly in the same direction.

It was dark when Gildart entered the village, and all the inhabitants were in their dwellings, so that he reached Gaff’s cottage unperceived.

The village was a primitive one. Locks were deemed unnecessary in most of the cottages, probably because there was nothing worth stealing within them. Gildart lifted the latch and entered. A fire, nearly out, with a large piece of coal on it, burned in the grate. The flicker of this was sufficient to illuminate the boudoir faintly.

Having surveyed the apartment, examined the closet, and looked under the bed, he went out, and, going to the back of the cottage, found the band waiting in some anxiety.

“Now, lads, come this way,” said Gildart; “and there’s only one piece of advice I’ve got to give you: don’t stir hand or foot after Haco enters the cottage. He’s as big as an elephant, and strong as a lion. If you stir, and he finds you out, he won’t spare you.”

“But you promise to come to the rescue, master,” said the French horn in some alarm.

“Ay, that will I; but he’ll have two of you floored, another strangled, and the fourth half-skinned before I can get him to stop.”

“I don’t half like it,” said the clarionet anxiously.

“Pooh! pooh!” exclaimed the key-bugle, “we’ll be more than a match for him; come on; it’s worth riskin’ for twenty-five bob.”

“Hear! hear!” cried the trombone.

“Well, then, enter,” said Gildart, pushing open the door, and holding it while

the band filed into the passage. He followed them and closed the door.

In a short time Haco Barepoles made his appearance. He also passed through the village unobserved, and, entering the cottage, closed the door. Thereafter he proceeded to make himself comfortable. The “boodwar” was emptyat least of human beings, though there was the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance in the corner, and the new clock near it, and the portraits and the great four-poster, and all the other articles of elegance and luxury with which Mrs Gaff had filled her humble dwelling.

“A queer place,” muttered the mad skipper in a soft voice to himself, as he moved about the room, poked up the fire, and made preparations for spending the night. “Gaff wouldn’t know the old cabinhumph! but it’s all done out o’ kindness; well, well, there’s no accountin’ for women, they’re paridoxies. Hallo! this here closet didn’t use to be bolted, but it’s bolted now. Hows’ever here’s the loaf and the tea-pot an’ the kettle. Now, Mrs Gaff, you’re an attentive creetur, nevertheless you’ve forgot bilin’ water, an’, moreover, there an’t no water in the house. Ah, here’s a bucket; that’ll do; I’ll go to the well an’ help myself; it’s well that I can do it,” said Haco, chuckling at his own pun with great satisfaction as he went out to the back of the house.

There was a sudden, though not loud, sound of hollow brass chinking under the four-post bed.

“Now then, can’t you keep still?” said the clarionet in a hoarse whisper.

“It’s cramp in my leg,” growled the trombone. “I’d have had to come out if he hadn’t guv me this chance.”

“Won’t you hold your tongues?” whispered Gildart from the closet, the door of which he opened slightly.

He shut it with a sudden clap, and there was another clanking of brass as Haco’s footsteps were heard outside, but dead silence reigned within the hut when the skipper re-entered, and set down on the floor a large bucket full of water.

“Now then for tea,” said Haco, rubbing his hands, as he set about the preparation of that meal. Being acquainted with the ways and localities of the cottage, he speedily had the board spread, and the tea smoking thereon, while the fire flared cheerfully on the walls, casting fine effects of light and shade on the pictures, and sprinkling the prominences of the clocks, bed, and furniture with ruddy gleams.

Having devoured his meal with an appetite and gusto worthy of his size, Haco

filled his much-loved German pipe, and, selecting the strongest chair in the room, sat cautiously down on it beside the fire to enjoy a smoke.

Meanwhile the brass band endured agonies unutterable. The trombone afterwards vowed that he “wouldn’t for fifty sovs” again go through what he had suffered during the hour that the mad skipper sat by that fire enjoying his evening pipe!

At last the pipe was smoked out, and Haco began to divest himself of his upper garments. Being an active man, he was soon undressed and in bed, where he lay for a long time perfectly still. Presently he gave vent to a deep sigh, and turned on his back, in which position he lay quite still for at least five minutes. At last he gave a soft puff with his lips, and followed it up with a mild snort from his nose.

This was immediately followed by a light single tap at the closet door.

Instantly the first bar of the Banging-Smash Polka burst from beneath the bed with such startling suddenness and energy that Gildart was himself rendered almost breathless. Haco awoke with a yell so dreadful that the brass band stopped for a single instant, but it burst forth again with a degree of fury that almost rent the trombone in twain!

The appalled skipper uttered another yell, and sprang up into the air. The four-poster could not stand the test. Haco went crashing through the bottom of the bed, flattened the French horn, and almost killed the trombone, while the broken ends of the planking of the bed pinned them to the floor. Escape was impossible.

Haco perceived the joke, and instantly recovered his self-possession. Springing from the bed, he seized the bucket of water which he had recently drawn, and dashed its contents on the struggling band. Thereafter he hauled the trombone out of the débris by the neck, flattened his instrument on his head, and twisted it round his neck. The key-bugle, who had struggled to his feet, fell before a well-aimed backhander, and the French horn was about to perish, when Gildart succeeded in restraining and pacifying the giant by stoutly asserting that he had won his bet, and insisted on having payment on the spot!

Haco burst into a loud laugh, flung the key-bugle from his grasp, and pulled on his nether garments.

“I confess that you’ve won it, lad, so now I’ll have another pipe.”

He proceeded to fill the German pipe, and stirred up the fire while the band

made good its retreat. Gildart paid the clarionet the stipulated sum of twenty shillings outside the door, after which he returned and seated himself beside the mad skipper.

Haco's laugh had changed into a good-humoured smile as he gazed into the fire and puffed volumes of smoke from his lips.

"It was a risky thing to do, lad," he observed, as Gildart sat down; "it's well for that feller wi' the long trumpet that the brass was so thin and his head so hard, for my blood was up, bein' taken by surprise, you see, an' I didn't measure my blows. Hows'ever, 'it's all well that ends well,' as I once heard a play-actor say."

"But it's not ended yet," said Gildart with decision.

"How so, lad?"

"You've got to pay up your bet."

Haco's brow became a little clouded. The bet had been taken more than half in joke, for he was not given to betting in earnest; but he was too proud to admit this on finding that Gildart took it in earnest.

"You'll not want it for a short while, I daresay?" he asked.

"Captain Barepoles"

"Skipper, lad, I don't like to be cap'ned."

"Well, Skipper Barepoles," said the middy with much solemnity, "I always pay my debts of honour on the spot, and I expect gentlemen who bet with me to do the same."

Haco grinned. "But I an't a gentleman," said he, "an' I don't set up for one."

"Still, as a man of honour you must feel bound"

"No, lad, not as a man of honour," interrupted the skipper, "but as a British seaman I'll hold the debt due; only, not bein' in the habit o' carrying the Bank of England in my weskit-pocket, you see, I must ask you to wait till to-morrow mornin'."

Haco said this with a slightly disappointed look, for he thought the middy rather sharp, and had formed a better opinion of him than his conduct on this occasion seemed to bear out.

"Now, skipper, I'll tell you what it is. I am not fond of betting, and this bet of

mine was taken in jest; in fact my usual bet is ten thousand pounds, sometimes a million! Nevertheless, you have admitted the debt as due, and although I do not mean to claim payment in the usual way, I don't intend to forego my rights altogether. I'll only ask you to do me a favour."

"What may it be, lad?"

"Will you grant it?"

"Well, that depends"

"No, it doesn't; say Yes, or I'll claim the ten pounds."

"Well, yes, if it's right and proper for me to do it. Now, what d'ye want?"

"Humph! Well then," said Gildart, "I want you to let your daughter Susan get spliced to Dan Horsey."

Haco frowned, and said, "Unpossible."

"Come now, don't be hard on them, skipper; Dan is a good fellow and a first-rate groom."

"He's an Irish blackguard," said Haco, "and not worth a pinch of his namesake."

"You're quite mistaken," said Gildart, who went on to speak so highly of the groom, that Haco, if not made to change his opinion, was so much impressed as to agree at least to take the whole subject once again into consideration.

"Another thing I wish you to do, skipper, which is to give me a passage in your sloop to Athenbury. You spoke of running round there for repairs soon, and I would rather go by sea than by that snorting railway. Will you do it?"

"With pleasure, lad."

"Thank'ee; now I'll bid you good-night. You may depend upon it that you won't be disturbed again by a band," said Gildart, laughing.

"I know that," replied Haco with a grin; "it's my opinion they've had enough of me for one night. But won't ye stop an' share the four-poster, lad? It's big enough, an' we'll soon repair the damage to its bottom-timbers. There's a knuckle o' ham too, an' a flask o' claret. I brought it with me, 'cause I never drink nothin' stronger than claretvang ordinair they calls it in France. What say you; you'll stop?"

"No, thank'ee, skipper, much obliged, but I've business on hand elsewhere.

Good-night, old boy.”

Chapter Twenty Seven.
Plot and Counterplot, ending in a Long Chase.

One day, not long after his arrival at Athenbury, Kenneth Stuart was seated in Colonel Crusty’s drawing-room, awaiting the summons to dinner.

Pretty Bella sat beside him, endeavouring to get up a flirtationfor Bella was an inveterate flirt. Besides being pretty, she was sprightly and full of lifea giddy gay thing, much addicted to that dangerous practice of fluttering round improprieties with cheerful recklessness. She was one of those human moths whose wings, alas! are being constantly singed, sometimes burned off altogether.

Kenneth was not so stern as to object to a little of what the world calls innocent flirtation, but he did not like Bella’s style of procedure; for that charming piece of wickedness made it her aim in life to bring as many lovers to her feet as she could, and keep them there. She never had too many of them, never tired of conquering them. In the language of pugilists, “One down another come on,” was her motto.

She had just floored a captain of dragoons, who was expected that day to dinner, and was now engaged at her fortieth round with Kenneth; but he was too strong for herat least she began to suspect so, and felt nettled.

“I never met with such a provoking man as you,” said Bella, pouting; “you promised to go round by Simpson’s and bring me a bouquet, and now you tell me you had not time. That is not what I would have expected of you. Sir Kenneth.”

Bella had knighted him with the poker the evening before!

“Well, really, I am sorry,” said Kenneth in a deprecating tone, “but I’m sure you will forgive me when I tell you that”

“I won’t forgive you,” interrupted Bella pettishly. “You are a false man. Nothing should have prevented you from walking round by Simpson’s, as you said you would do.”

“Indeed!” said Kenneth, smiling, “suppose I had broken my leg, now, would that not have”

“No, it wouldn’t have been any excuse at all. You would have hopped there if you had been a good and true man, like the knights of the olden time. Oh! how

I love that olden time, and wish that I had been born in it."

Captain Bowels was announced at this moment. He was a tall handsome man, with a heavy dark moustache and a set of brilliant teeth. Bella instantly put the question to him whether, in the event of his being interrupted in the fulfilment of a promise to a lady by the accident of having his leg broken, he would not deem it his duty, as a man of honour, to hop out the engagement.

The captain expressed his earnest belief that that would be his duty, and added that if both legs happened to be broken, he would deem it his duty to walk out the engagement on his hands and knees, always assuming that the lady to whom the promise was made should be young and beautiful, and that the engagement did not involve dancing!

From this point Bella and the captain of dragoons cantered off into a region of small-talk whither it is not necessary that we should follow them. They were interrupted by the entrance of Colonel Crusty and Miss Peppy.

The former shook hands with the captain somewhat stiffly, and introduced him to Miss Peppy.

"Dinner late as usual, Bella," said the colonel, taking out his watch.

"Now, papa, don't begin," cried Bella, running up to her father and kissing his cheek, "because when you do begin to scold you never stop, and it takes away your appetite. Dinners were meant to be lateit's the nature of such meals. No dinner that is ready at the appointed time can be good; it must be underdone."

The colonel was prevented from replying by the entrance of the footman with a letter, which he presented to Kenneth.

"No letters for me!" cried Miss Peppy, with a slight look of disappointment; "but, to be sure, I'm not at home, though, after all, letters might come to me when I'm away if they were only rightly addressed, but letters are never legible on the back; it is a perfect mystery to me how the postmen ever find out where to go to with letters, and they are such illiterate men too! But what can one expect in a world of inconsistencies, where things are all topsy-turvy, so to speak, though I don't like slang, and never use it except when there is a want of a proper what-d'ye-call-it to express one's thingumy-jigs. Don't you think so, Captain Bowels?"

"Certainly; I think your observations are very just, and much to the point."

Kenneth Stuart retired to a window and read his letter, which ran as follows:

"Wreckumoft, etcetera.

“My Dear KennethSince you left I have been thinking over your affairs, and our last conversation, (which you must allow me to style disagreeable), in regard to Miss Gordon. I trust that you have now seen the impropriety of thinking of that portionless girl as your wife. At all events, you may rest assured that on the day you marry her you shall be disinherited. You know me well enough to be aware that this is not an idle threat.

“In the hope and expectation that you will agree with me in this matter, I venture to suggest to you the propriety of trying to win the affections of Miss Crusty. You already know that her fortune will be a large one. I recommend this subject to your earnest consideration.

“Your affectionate father, George Stuart.”

“Deary me, Kennie,” said Miss Peppy, in some alarm, “I hope that nothing has happened! You seem so troubled that”

“Oh! nothing of any consequence,” said Kenneth with a laugh, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

“Ha! your lady-love is unkind,” cried Bella; “I know it is from her.”

“The writing is not lady-like,” replied Kenneth, holding up the back of the letter for inspection. “It is a gentleman’s hand, you see.”

“Ladies sometimes write what I may call a masculine hand,” observed the captain.

“You are quite right, Captain Bowels,” said Miss Peppy; “some write all angles and some all rounds. One never knows how one is to expect one’s correspondents to write. Not that I have many, but one of them writes square, a most extraordinary hand, and quite illegible. Most people seem to be proud of not being able to write, except schoolboys and girls. There is no accounting for the surprising things that are scratched on paper with a pen and called writing. But in a world of things of that sort what is one to expect? It is just like all the rest, and I have given up thinking about it altogether. I hope you have, Captain Bowels?”

“Not quite, but very nearly,” replied the gallant captain.

“Dinner at last,” said Colonel Crusty, as the gong sounded its hideous though welcome alarm. “Captain Bowels, will you take my daughter? Miss Stuart, allow me. Sorry we’ve got no one for you, Mr Stuart.”

Kenneth fancied there was a touch of irony in the last observation, but he did

not feel jealous, for two reasonsfirst, he knew, (from Miss Peppy), that the captain was no favourite with Colonel Crusty, and was only tolerated because of having been introduced by an intimate friend and old school companion of the former; and, second, being already in love with another, he did not wish to have the honour of handing Bella down to dinner at all.

During dinner Miss Peppy reminded Kenneth that he had promised to go to the Sailors' Home that evening with the parcel which Mrs Gaff wished to be delivered to her cousin George Dollins. Bella remarked, in a sweet voice, that Sir Kenneth's promises were not to be relied on, and that it would be wiser to transfer the trust to Captain Bowels, a proposal which the gallant captain received with a laugh and a sotto voce remark to Bella that his fidelity to promises depended on the youth and beauty of the lady to whom they were made.

Soon after the ladies retired Kenneth rose, and, apologising for leaving the table so early, set forth on his mission.

The night was calm and pleasant, but darka few stars alone rendering the darkness visible. Kenneth had to pass through the garden of the colonel's house before reaching the road that led to the heart of the town where the Sailors' Home was situated. He felt sad that evening, unusually so, and wandered in the grounds for some time in a meditative mood.

There was a bower at the extremity of the garden to which, during the few days of his visit, he had frequently repaired with the volatile Bella. He entered it now, and sat down. Presently there was a rustle among the leaves behind him, and a light hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Faithless man!" said Bella in a tremulous voice, "I have been expecting you for half-an-hour at least. My portmanteau is packed, and I only await the word from you, dearest Charles"

"Charles!" exclaimed Kenneth, starting up.

Bella uttered a suppressed scream.

"Oh! Mr Stuart, you won't tell my father? I mistook you for capt."

"Hold, Miss Crusty; do not speak hastily. I know nothing of that of which you seem desirous that I should not speak. Pray be calm."

"Of course I know that you don't know," cried Bella passionately, "but you are capable of guessing, andand"

The poor girl burst into a flood of tears, and rushed from the bower, leaving

Kenneth in a most unenviable state of perplexity.

The words that she had uttered, coupled with what he had seen of the intimacy subsisting between her and Captain Bowels, and the fact that the name of the captain was Charles, were quite sufficient to convince him that an immediate elopement was intended. He entertained a strong dislike to the captain, and therefore somewhat hastily concluded that he was a villain. Impressed with this conviction, his first impulse was to return to the house, and warn the colonel of his daughter's danger; but then he felt that he might be mistaken, and that, instead of doing good, he might lay himself open to severe rebuke for interfering in matters with which he had nothing to do. After vacillating therefore, a few minutes, he at last made up his mind first to execute his errand to the cousin of Mrs Gaff, and then consider what should next be done. He resolved on this course all the more readily that he was sure the mistake Bella had made would frustrate the elopement, at least on that night.

Kenneth carried the parcel, which Mrs Gaff had put up with so much care and anxiety, under his arm, and a thick stick in his right hand. He was so passionately fond of the sea and all connected with it, that he liked to dress in semi-sailor costume, and mingle with seamen. Consequently he went out on this occasion clad in a rough pea-jacket and a sailor's cap. He looked more like a respectable skipper or first-mate than a country gentleman.

Passing rapidly through the streets of Athenbury, he soon reached the docks, where he made inquiry for the Sailors' Home. He found it in a retired street, near the principal wharf.

A group of seamen were collected round the door, smoking their pipes and spinning yarns. The glare of a street-lamp shone full upon them, enabling Kenneth to observe their faces. He went up to one, and asked if a sailor of the name of Dollins was in the Home at the time.

The man said Dollins had been there that day, but he was not within at the present time. He was usually to be found at the tavern of the "Two Bottles."

Kenneth being directed to the "Two Bottles," made his way thither without delay.

It was a low public-house in one of the dirtiest localities of the town,a place to which seamen were usually tempted when they came off a voyage, and where they were soon fleeced of all their hardly-earned money. Sounds of dancing, fiddling, and drinking were heard to issue from the doorway as Kenneth approached, and, as he descended the stair, he could not help wondering that any man should prefer such a place of entertainment to the comfortable, clean, and respectable Home he had just left.

He was met by the landlord, a large, powerful, and somewhat jovial man, whose countenance betrayed the fact that he indulged freely in his own beverages.

“Is there a sailor here of the name of Dollins?” inquired Kenneth.

The landlord surveyed the questioner with a look of suspicion. Being apparently satisfied that he might be trusted, he replied that Dollins was not in the house at that moment, but he was expected in a few minutes. Meanwhile he advised that the visitor should wait and enjoy himself over “a pot o’ beer, or a glass o’ brandy and water, ’ot.”

Kenneth said he would wait, and for this purpose entered one of the numerous drinking-stalls, and ordered a pot of porter, which he had no intention whatever of drinking.

Seated in the dirty stall of that disreputable public-house, he leaned his head on his hand, and began to meditate how he should act in regard to Bella Crusty on his return to the colonel’s house.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of three men into the adjoining stall. Two of them belonged to the class of men who are styled roughs; one being red-haired, the other bearded; the third was a gentlemanly sort of man, about forty years of age, with a dissipated aspect.

They did not observe Kenneth, who had placed himself in the darkest corner of his stall.

“Now, lads, we’ll talk it over here, and settle what’s to be done; for whatever we do it must be done to-night.”

This much he heard of the conversation, and then his mind wandered away to its former channel. How long he might have meditated is uncertain, but he was suddenly aroused by the sound of his own name.

“We’ll have to do it to-night,” said a voice which Kenneth knew belonged to the gentlemanly man of dissipated aspect; “the young fellow won’t likely go back for a day or two, and the old ’un an’t over stout. There’s only one man in the house besides him, and he ain’t much worth speakin’ of; a groom, not very big, sleeps in the lower part o’ the house. Old Stuart himself sleeps in a wing, a good bit off from the servants. In fact, there’s nothing easier than to get into the house, and there’s no end of silver plate. Now, what say you to start by the nine o’clock train to-night? We’ll get there by eleven, and have supper before goin’ to work. You see, I think it’s always well to feed before goin’ at this sort

o’ thing. It don’t pay on an empty stomach. Shall we go?”

Kenneth’s heart beat fast as he listened for the reply.

“Wall, I doan’t much loik it,” said one of the roughs, in a coarse Yorkshire dialect; “but I’m hard oop for tin, so I says Yes.”

“Agreed,” said the other rough, who was evidently not a man of many words.

For some time Kenneth sat listening to the plans of the burglars, and considering how he should best frustrate their designs. He at length made up his mind to return the parcel to his aunt, say that unexpected and pressing business called him home, and start by the same train with the burglars for Wreckumoft. His intentions, however, were interfered with by the abrupt entrance of Dollins, who was drunk, and who, on being told that a friend wanted to see him within, came forward to Kenneth, and asked, “Wot it wos ’e wanted?”

Kenneth explained that he had been sent by a lady to deliver a parcel, which he presented, and, having fulfilled his mission, was about to return when the man caught him by the sleeve

“Wot, are you Mister Stuart? Jess Gaff wrote me a letter a day or two ago, tellin’ me you and yer aunt, Miss Peppy, as they calls her, wos a-comin’ here, and would send me a parcel.”

“Never mind, my good fellow, who I am,” said Kenneth sharply; “I’ve delivered the parcel, so now I’ll bid ye good-night.”

“It’s just him!” said one of the burglars in a hoarse whisper, as Kenneth reached the door. The latter could not avoid turning round at this.

“Yes,” he cried sternly; “and I’ll spoil your game for you to-night.”

“Will you?” shouted the gentlemanly house-breaker, as Kenneth sprang into the street, closely followed by the three men.

Kenneth regretted deeply that he had so hastily uttered the threat, for it showed that he knew all, and set the men upon their guard.

He looked over his shoulder, and observed that they had stopped as if to consult, so he pushed on, and, soon reaching one of the principal thoroughfares, walked at a more leisurely pace. As he went along he was deeply perplexed as to what course he ought to pursue, and while meditating on the subject, he stopped almost unintentionally in front of a brilliantly lighted window, in which were hanging a rich assortment of watches, gold

chains, and specimens of jewellery.

The gentlemanly house-breaker, who had followed him up, observed this. A sudden thought flashed across his mind, and he at once acted upon it. Stepping quickly up to Kenneth's side he stumbled violently against him, at the same time smashed a pane of glass in the shop-window with his gloved hand, turned quickly round, seized Kenneth by the collar, and shouted "Thief! help!" at the full pitch of his voice.

The red-haired and bearded accomplices at once responded to the call, came up behind, and also collared him, while a policeman, who chanced to be passing at the moment, seized him in front. The shopman ran out in a frantic state, and at once swore that he was the man, for he had seen him looking through the window a moment before. The whole scene passed in a few seconds, and Kenneth, thoroughly taken by surprise, stood in motionless and speechless amazement.

It is said, and apparently with truth, that thought flashes through the mind more rapidly than lightning darts through the sky. Kenneth had only a few moments to think, for the policeman was applying that gentle force to his collar which was meant as a polite hint to "come along" quietly, else stronger force should be applied; yet, before he had taken the first step towards the police-office, the extreme awkwardness of his position was fully impressed on him.

He perceived that he should certainly be locked up for the night and brought before a magistrate next morning, and that, although his accusers would of course not appear against him, and his friends would be there to testify to his character and get him off, the consequence would be that the burglars would be able to start by the nine o'clock train and accomplish their purpose while he was in jail. It did occur to him that he could warn the authorities, but he feared that they might refuse to believe or act upon the statements of a supposed thief.

The occasion was not a favourable one to correct or clear reasoning however, and as the policeman had applied a second persuasive pull to his collar, he suddenly made up his mind what he would do. Grasping the gentlemanly house-breaker by the waist, he suddenly hurled that unfortunate heels over head into the kennel, tripped up the policeman, knocked the bearded accomplice into the arms of the jeweller, the red-haired one into the broken window, and bolted!

Instantly a wild chase began. The crowd that had assembled on the first sound of the smash ran yelling after him, headed by the gentlemanly house-breaker,

whose fall had been partially broken by a little boy. The accomplices were too much damaged to do more than keep up with the tail of the crowd.

At first Kenneth ran without regard to direction, and with the simple view of escaping, but as he neared the head of the main street he determined to make for the house of Colonel Crusty. Being fleet of foot he soon left behind the mass of the crowd that followed in full cry, with the exception of a few young men who were more of a match for him. Ahead of all these ran the gentlemanly house-breaker and the policeman, both of whom were strong and supple.

The roar of the augmenting crowd, however, soon became so great that people in advance of him heard it, and some of these made demonstrations of a wish to try to stop him as he passed, but most of them wisely concluded that it would be nearly as safe to place themselves in the way of a runaway locomotive engine. One man proved an exception. He was a butcher, of great size and strength, who, being accustomed to knock down horned cattle with a hammer, naturally enough thought it not impossible to knock down a man with his fist, so he tried it.

Standing in the doorway of his own shop when Kenneth came tearing along, he waited until he was within four yards of him, and darted out. Kenneth had fortunately observed the man. He stooped, without slackening his pace, to let the blow delivered by his opponent pass over his head, and drove his right shoulder into the butcher’s broad chest. The shock was so great as to completely check his career, while it sent the butcher back into his shop, over his own bench, and prostrated him on the carcase of a slaughtered ox which had been carried in just two minutes before, as if to form a bloody and congenial bed for its owner.

Kenneth instantly started off again and doubled suddenly down a by-street which led to the colonel’s residence. Here he was smitten with a feeling of shame at the idea of appearing before his friends in such a plight, so, changing his mind, he doubled again into another by-street.

This chanced to be an unfortunate turn, for the policeman saw him take it, and, knowing every intricacy of the town, he was enabled to take a cross cut by a lane, accompanied by several of his brother constables, who had joined him by this time, and by such of the crowd as were good runners.

The worst runners now came in for an unexpected share of the sport in consequence of this new turn of affairs, for the by-road conducted Kenneth back to the main street, and when he debouched into it he ran into and overturned a number of those who had just made up their minds that it was

useless for them to run any farther.

The tide was now turned. The head of the crowd came rushing back, led by the policeman and the gentlemanly burglar. Kenneth thus found himself between two fires, so, like a wise general, he made a flank movement, crossed the street, and darted down a dark lane. Here the crowd gave in, but the policeman and the burglar continued the pursuit.

The lane led to the suburbs of the town, and the fugitive soon gained the open country, which in that part was a sort of uncultivated moorland.

The excitement of the chase and the suddenness of it had told upon the youth at first so much that he had been somewhat distressed while running; but this feeling now began to wear off. Like a true thoroughbred, he improved in condition the longer he ran, and when at last the perspiration began to pour over his cheeks he felt as if he could have run on for ever!

To some extent this feeling was also experienced by a few of his pursuers, who kept him well in view.

On passing over a rising ground which for some minutes concealed him, Kenneth suddenly resolved to strike aside from the high road and cross the moor. It was sufficiently light, he thought, to enable him to do this with safety. He was wrong, however, for he had not run a hundred yards when he went splashing into a boggy place, and his pursuers, who had again caught sight of him, instantly followed.

The running now became very severe, and tested Kenneth’s powers to the utmost. Of course it also proved as hard on the others, and he had at least the satisfaction of hearing them shout and gasp as they tumbled over stones and into hollows. Still they held on with unflagging vigour, until they were almost exhausted and quite covered with mud.

To Kenneth’s relief he unexpectedly stumbled on the high road again. Here he sat down for a few seconds to recover breath on one of the grey boulder stones with which the whole country was covered, and while wiping the perspiration from his brow his thoughts were busy. Having left his pursuers far behind, he felt sure that he could afford to rest for a few moments.

It occurred to him that even although he should succeed in escaping, there was no chance of his being able to get away by the train from Athenbury, for the burglars and police would certainly be at the station on the look-out for him. He remembered suddenly that there was a station twenty miles from Athenbury at which the ten o’clock train usually stopped. It was two hours yet to the starting of the train, so that he might count on nearly three to get to the

station.

“I’ll do it!” he exclaimed, starting up with animation, and looking in the direction of the moor. The pursuers were now pretty close to him. They panted much and ran very heavily. A quiet smile lit up Kenneth’s countenance, for he felt his strength recruited even with the few minutes’ rest he had obtained.

“Now, then, let the memory of Eton days come over me,” he muttered, as he tied his pocket-handkerchief tightly round his waist.

Pulling his hat firmly down over his brows, he prepared to start, just as the policemen and the gentlemanly burglar stumbled on to the road, in a state of complete exhaustion, and covered from head to foot with mud!

Kenneth could not repress a cheer as he waved his hat to them and shouted farewell.

He then turned, and, stooping low, sped over the country like a greyhound.

He had not gone above four miles when he overtook a stout countryman in a smock-frock and slouch-hat plodding heavily along the road.

A new idea flashed into Kenneth’s mind. He resolved to change costumes with this man; but felt that he had no time to waste in talking over the subject or explaining why he wanted to do so. He therefore stopped abruptly when close to him, and said

“My man, I’ve a fancy for your clothes.”

“You’ll ha’ to foight for ’em then.”

“Very well, begin at once,” said Kenneth, buttoning his coat, and suddenly seizing the countryman by the throat with a grip that made his eyes almost start out of their sockets. “How shall it be, wrestling or fisticuffs? But let me advise you to do it at once without fighting, for I don’t want to hurt you, and I do mean to have your clothes. Besides, I’ll give you mine in exchange. There now, strip!”

There was a fiery vehemence about Kenneth’s manner and look, and a tone of command in his voice that there was no resisting, especially when it was coupled with such physical strength, so the countryman heaved a sigh and took off his smock-frock and hob-nailed boots, while the supposed highwayman took off his coat and shoes.

“That’ll do, you needn’t mind the stockings,” said Kenneth, as he pulled on his new garments. “You’ll find that you gain considerably by the exchange. That’s

it; now here’s a sovereign for you, my fine fellow, and many thanks.”

He finished by lifting the slouch-hat off the countryman’s head and placing his own thereon in its stead.

“Now, good-night.”

“Good-noight,” replied the man, from the sheer force of innate politeness, for he stood in such a condition of open-mouthed amazement that it was quite plain he did not very well know what he said or did.

In another minute Kenneth was again coursing along the road at full speed.

Chapter Twenty Eight.
Plotters Counterplotted.

Meanwhile the gentlemanly house-breaker, returning to Athenbury, rejoined his rude colleagues, and these three choice spirits, after partaking of some refreshment, and treating the policeman who first came to their aid to a glass of gin, betook themselves to the railway station.

“He won’t come here, you may depend on’t,” observed the policeman to the gentlemanly burglar, when he had taken his ticket, “he’s too wide-awake for that.”

“Perhaps not; but it’s as well to watch.”

“Yes, it’s as well to watch,” assented the policeman.

“Besides, wide-awake fellows over-reach themselves sometimes,” continued the other. “I shouldn’t wonder, now, if he had the impudence to come straight here and denounce me as a thief, just by way o’ stoppin’ me from goin’ by the train, and so having some sort o’ revenge.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the policeman, in a tone and with a slight but peculiar look that made the gentlemanly man feel a little uneasy.

The fugitive did not appear, however. Every face that came on the platform was carefully scrutinised without any result, and at length the bell rang.

“Good-night, friend,” said the burglar, slipping a half-crown into the policeman’s hand as he was about to jump into the carriage. “It was no fault of yours that we didn’t catch him. You did your best.”

“Yes, I did my best.”

“Hallo! are you going by this train?” exclaimed the burglar.

“Yes, I’ve got business in Wreckumoft, so we’ll have the pleasure o’ travellin’ together.”

The gentlemanly man felt that the pleasure would be entirely confined to one side. However, he expressed much joy at the prospect of such good company, as the policeman sat down beside him.

The train gave a pant, then a snort, then an impatient whistle. Then the bell rang a second time, the whistle sounded a single note, and the carriages moved slowly away. A moment more, and they were sweeping out of the station; a moment more and they were rushing over the moor; another moment, and they were dashing through space, setting all terrestrial things at naught, until a station came in view; then the whistle uttered a prolonged shriek, and the train began to slow. Up to this point the policeman and his friends had sat together in comparative silence.

The former put his head out of the window, and remarked that, “there was a feller as would be too late for the train.”

The moonlight enabled him to perceive that the late man was a labourer of some sort.

The train ran into the station and stopped.

“Tickets ready!” shouted the guard.

“That’ll give him a chance,” observed the gentlemanly burglar.

“All right?” inquired the guard.

“All right,” replied the ticket-inspector. The bell rang, the guard whistled, so did the engine; it puffed too, and the train began to move.

“Look sharp now,” cried the station-master eagerly to some one outside the office. “Athenbury? Here you arefour shillings; run!”

The guard knew that it was a late passenger, and, being a good-hearted fellow, held the door of a carriage open, even although the train was on the move.

A man in a smock-frock and slouch-hat rushed across the platform at this moment, and made for the door which the guard held open.

“Jump!” said the guard.

The gentlemanly burglar and the policeman lent their aid to pull the man into

the train; the door banged, and they were away.

“You’ve all but missed it,” said the burglar.

The man in the smock-frock pulled his slouch-hat well over his eyes, and admitted that it was a “close shave.” Then he laid his head on the side of the carriage and breathed hard.

“Take a drop o’ gin,” said the burglar in a patronising way, “it’ll bring you to in a minute.”

Kenneth knew by his manner that he did not guess who it was that sat beside him, so he resolved to accept the offer.

“Thank’ee, I loik gin. It waarms the cockles o’ yer ’art, it do,” said Kenneth.

“Goin’ far?” inquired the policeman.

“To Wreckumoft.”

“You seems to have got on yer Sunday trousers?” observed the policeman.

“Wall, there an’t no sin in that,” replied the supposed labourer, somewhat sharply.

“Certainly not,” said the policeman. “It’s a fine night, an’t it?”

“It is a foine night,” responded the labourer, putting his head out of the window.

“Yes, a very fine night,” repeated the policeman, also thrusting his head out at the same window, and holding a sotto voce conversation with Kenneth, the result of which was that he became very merry and confidential, and was particularly polite to the burglars, insomuch that they thought him one of the jolliest policemen they had ever had to do withand this was not the first they had had to do with by any means!

In course of time the train ran into the station at Wreckumoft, and the occupants poured out on the platform, and took their several ways. The three friends kept together, and observed that the policeman, after bidding them good-bye, went away alone, as if he had urgent business on hand, and was soon lost to view. This was a great relief to them, because they could not feel quite at ease in his presence, and his going off so promptly showed, (so they thought), that he had not the remotest suspicion of their errand.

As for the country fellow in the smock-frock, they took no further notice of him after quitting the carriage. Had they known his business in Wreckumoft

that night, they might, perchance, have bestowed upon him very earnest attention. As it was, they went off to the Blue Boar Tavern and ordered three Welsh rabbits and three pots of porter.

Meanwhile Kenneth took the road to Seaside Villa. On the way he had to pass Bingley Hall, and rang the bell. The door was opened by Susan Barepoles.

“Is Maister Gildart to hoam?”

Susan said he was, and Kenneth was delighted to find that his change of voice and costume disguised him so completely that Susan did not recognise him.

“I wants to see him.”

Susan bade him wait in the lobby. In a few minutes Gildart came down, and the country fellow asked to have a word with him in private!

The result of this word was that the two sallied forth immediately after, and went towards Seaside Villa.

Here, strange to say, they found the policeman standing at the outer gate. Kenneth accosted him as if he had expected to meet him.

“They ain’t abed yet,” observed the policeman.

“No; I see that my groom is up, and there is a light in my father’s study. I’ll tap at the groom’s window.”

“Come in av yer feet’s clean,” was Dan’s response to the tap, as he opened the shutters and flattened his nose against a pane of glass in order to observe the intruder.

“Dan, open the back door and let me in!”

“Hallo! Mister Kenneth!”

Dan vanished at once, and opened the door.

“Hush, Dan; is my father at home?”

“He is, sur.”

“Come in, Gildart. Take care of that constable, Dan; give him his supper. There’s work both for him and you to-night. He will explain it to you.”

Saying this Kenneth took Gildart to the drawing-room, and left him there while he went to his father’s study.

At first Mr Stuart was alarmed by the abrupt entrance of the big labourer; then he was nettled and disgusted at what he deemed a silly practical joke of his son. Ultimately he was astonished and somewhat incredulous in regard to the prospects of housebreaking which his son held out to him. He was so far convinced, however, as to allow Kenneth to make what preparations he pleased, and then retired to rest, coolly observing that if the burglars did come it was evident they would be well taken care of without his aid, and that if they did not come there was no occasion for his losing a night's rest.

Between two and three o'clock that morning three men climbed over the garden wall of Seaside Villa, and, having deposited their shoes in a convenient spot, went on tiptoe to the dining-room window. Here they paused to consult in low whispers.

While they were thus engaged, three other men watched their movements with earnest solicitude from a neighbouring bush behind which they lay concealed.

After a few moments one of the first three went to the window and began to cut out part of a pane of glass with a glazier's diamond. At the same time, one of the second threea tall stout man in a smock-frockadvanced on tiptoe to watch the operation.

When the piece of glass was cut out the first three put their heads together for farther consultation. Immediately their respective throats were seized and compressed by three strong pair of hands, and the heads were knocked violently together!

Gildart addressed himself to the red-haired man; the policeman devoted himself to the one with the beard; and Kenneth paid particular attention to the gentlemanly burglar, whose expression of countenance on beholding into whose hands he had fallen, may be conceived, but cannot be described.

Dan Horsey, who had also been on the watch, suddenly appeared with three pair of handcuffs, and applied them with a degree of prompt facility that surprised himself and quite charmed the policeman.

Thereafter the three astounded burglars were led in triumph into Mr Stuart's study, where that sceptical individual received them in his dressing-gown and slippers, and had his unbelieving mind convinced. Then they were conveyed to the lockup, where we shall now leave them in peacesatisfied that they are safely in the hands of justice.

Chapter Twenty Nine.
Dreadful Suspicions aroused in Anxious Bosoms.

When Miss Peppy came down to breakfast next morning she found that she was the first of the household to make her appearance. This, however, was the natural consequence of her commendable desire to be always in good timea desire which resulted in her being at least a quarter of an hour too soon for everything, except on those occasions, of course, when she over-slept, or was detained by unavoidable circumstances.

On the present occasion Miss Peppy, having had a remarkably good night's rest, felt placid, and looked serene. She passed the spare quarter of an hour in perambulating the room, looking at the books and pictures, smoothing her cuffs, arranging her cap, and paying marked attention to a beautiful little dog which was Bella's own particular pet, and the colonel's particular abhorrence, because of its tendency to bark suddenly, sharply, and continuously at every visitor who entered the house.

Rosebud, (for thus was it misnamed), seemed to be, however, in no mood to receive attentions that morning. It was evidently ill at ease, without apparently knowing why.

"Did it growl, then?" said Miss Peppy in a reproachful tone, as she stooped to pat the head of the spoiled creature. "Ah, it mustn't growl, for that is naughty, you know, darling Rosebud. Eh! doing it again? Oh! bad little snarley-warley, growly-wowly. Doesn't it know that the poet says 'dogs delight to bark and bite?' and thatthathe means that they shouldn't delight to do such naughtinesses, although, after all, why they shouldn't when it's natural to them I don't know; and, besides, how does he know that they delight to do it? I never saw them look delighted in my life; on the contrary, they're very fierce, are they not, Rosebud? especially the big ones that sometimes try to worry you. How they can ever want to worry such a pitty-itty, dear, naughty growly-wowly, snarley-warley as you, is quite beyond my comprehension; but then, you see, we live in a world of puzzles, you and I, Rosebud, and so it's of no use being puzzled, because that does no good, and only worries one. Don't it, deary sweety petty? Well, you can't answer of course, though I know that you understand every word I say."

Miss Peppy suddenly shrieked, for the "sweety petty" bit her with sufficient force to show that he was not in a mood to be played with, and would do it harder next time.

Just then the colonel entered, and Rosebud at once received him with a tornado of maddening yelps, so that for at least five minutes it had the entire monopoly of the conversation, and Miss Peppy was obliged to say good-morning in dumb show. At the same time, the colonel frowned fiercely at

Rosebud, and said something which Miss Peppy could not hear because of the noise, but which, from the abrupt motion of the lips, she suspected must be something very wicked indeed.

When the darling creature at last consented to hold its tongue, the colonel said

“Are you aware, Miss Stuart, that your nephew has been out all night?”

“No, colonel, I was not aware of it,” said Miss Peppy with a slight elevation of her eyebrows; “I wonder at it, for although he often goes out all night to ride wild horses into the sea, and save drowned people, and things of that sort, he never goes out without telling Niven, and saying whether or not he’s likely to be back soon. Besides, he always has the door-key in his pocket, when he doesn’t forget it, which is pretty often. Perhaps he had your door-key in his pocket, but after all, even if he had, that wouldn’t alter the fact that he’s been out all night. But maybe he’s in beddid you look?”

“Yes, I looked, and he has evidently not lain on the bed at all last night.”

“Under it?” suggested Miss Peppy.

The colonel smiled slightly, and said that it had not occurred to him to look under the bed.

At that moment the door burst open, and Bella’s maid, rushing in, flung herself on her knees at the colonel’s feet, and, clasping her hands, cried in piteous tones

“Oh! sir, please, mercy please.”

“Are you mad, girl?” said the colonel, with a look of mingled displeasure and anxiety.

“Oh, sir, no sir, but,”(sob),“she’s gone.”

“Who’s gone, girl; speak!”

“Miss Bella, sir; oh sir, run away, sir, with Mr Stuart!”

Colonel Crusty turned pale, and Miss Peppy fell flat down on the rug in a dead faint, crushing Rosebud almost to death in her fall.

Instantly the entire house was in confusion. Every one rushed into every room, up and down every stair, looked into every closet and cupboard, and under every bed, as well as into every hole and crevice that was not large enough to conceal a rabbit, much less a young lady, but without avail. There could be no doubt whatever on the subject: Bella and Kenneth were both goneutterly and

absolutely.

Miss Peppy alone did not participate in the wild search.

That worthy lady lay in a state of insensibility for about five minutes, then she suddenly recovered and arose to a sitting posture, in which position she remained for a few minutes more, and became aware of the fact that her cap was inside the fender, and that her hair was dishevelled. Wondering what could have caused such an unwonted state of things, she gazed pensively round the room, and suddenly remembered all about it!

Up she leaped at once, pulled on her cap with the back to the front, and rushed up to her own room. On her way, and once or twice afterwards she met various members of the household, but they were much too wild and reckless to pay any regard to her. She was therefore left unmolested in her farther proceedings.

Having tied on her bonnet very much awry, and put on her shawl exceedingly askew, Miss Peppy went out into the street, and going straight up to the first man she saw, asked the way to the railway station.

Being directed, she ran thither with a degree of speed that any school-girl might have envied. A train was on the point of starting.

“Ticket to Wreckumoft,” she almost screamed into the face of the ticket-clerk.

“Which class?” demanded the clerk, with the amiable slowness of a man whose interests are not at stake.

“First!” exclaimed Miss Peppy, laying down her purse and telling the calm-spirited clerk to help himself.

He did so, returned the purse, and Miss Peppy rushed to the train and leaped into the first open door. It happened to be that of a third class, which was full of navvies and mechanics.

“You seems to be in a ’urry, ma’am,” said one of the former, making way for her, and wiping the seat beside him with the sleeve of his coat.

Miss Peppy could only exclaim, “Ho, yes!” and cover her face with her handkerchief, in which position she remained immovable until the train arrived at Wreckumoft, despite the kindly efforts at consolation made by the navvy, who arranged her shawl and offered her a glass of gin from his own private bottle; and, finally, seeing that all his efforts were fruitless, wound up by patting her on the shoulder, and advising her to cheer up, for “wotever it was that ailed her, there was sure to be better luck next time.”

Arrived at Wreckumoft, Miss Peppy hastened to her brother's residence. On the way she had to pass Bingley Hall, and, feeling that it would be an unutterable relief to her feelings to tell somebody something, or, more correctly, to tell anybody anything, she darted in and met my niece Lizzie, to whom she stated wildly that Bella Crusty had run off with Kenneth Stuart, and that in all probability the colonel was mad or dead by that time.

Having thus let off a little steam, the worthy lady rushed out of my house, entered the dining-room of Seaside Villa, where she found Kenneth and his father seated at breakfast, and related to them in wild surprise how that Bella and Kenneth had run away together the night before, and that she had come in hot haste to tell them so, but how it happened that Kenneth was there and Bella not there, she could not understand at all; and concluding that the incomprehensibilities of the world were culminating, and that the sooner she prepared for the final winding up of all terrestrial things the better, she ran to her own room, embraced the wondering Emmie, burst into a flood of tears, rummaged her pocket for her thimble, scissors, and key, and, not finding them there, fell into the arms of Mrs Niven, and fainted dead away for the second time that morning.

Chapter Thirty.
Strange Scenes and Doings far away.

Let us turn, now, to a very different region of the world from that in which the events just narrated took place.

It is an island of the sea. Nature has been bountiful to that island, for there is redundant verdure on every side. Paradise of old may have been something like it,could not have been much better, physically, although it was so in a moral point of view. Yet, even in that aspect our island is superior to many others, for there are only two human beings upon it, and these are less sinful specimens of humanity than one usually meets with. They are peculiar, too.

One is an athletic middle-aged man, whose clothing is goat-skin, evidently home-made, and cut in sailor fashion. Magnificent shaggy locks fall in heavy masses from his head, lip, and chin. Robinson Crusoe himself could not have looked grander or more savage in outward aspect.

The other is a boya lad. He is a stout well-grown fellow, neither so tall nor so muscular as his companion, but giving promise that he will excel him in due time. In the matter of hair, his head exhibited locks if possible more curly and redundant, while the chin and lip are not yet clothed with young manhood's downy shadow.

Both, the middle-aged man and the youth, have a pensive expression of countenance; but there is a gleam of fire in the eye of the latter, and a spice of fun about the corners of his mouth, which are wanting in his companion.

“Faither,” said the lad, rising from the rock on which they were seated, “what are ’ee thinkin’ on?”

“I’ve bin thinkin’, Billy, that it’s nigh five years sin’ we come here.”

“That’s an old thought, daddy.”

“May be so, lad, but it’s ever with me, and never seems to grow old.”

There was such a tone of melancholy in the remark of our old friend Gaff, that Billy forbore to pursue the subject.

“My heart is set upon pork to-day, daddy,” said the Bu’ster with a knowing smile. “We’ve had none for three weeks, and I’m gettin’ tired o’ yams and cocoa-nuts and crabs. I shall go huntin’ again.”

“You’ve tried it pretty often of late, without much luck.”

“So I have, but I’ve tried it often before now with pretty fair luck, an’ what has happened once may happen again, so I’ll try. My motto is, ‘Never say die.’”

“A good one, Billy; stick to it, lad,” said Gaff, rising. “And now, we’ll go home to supper. To-morrow we’ll have to mend the fence to keep these same wild pigs you’re so anxious to eat, out of our garden. The nets need mendin’ too, so you’ll have to spin a lot more o’ the cocoa-nut fibre, an’ I’ll have to make a fish-hook or two, for the bones out o’ which I made the last were too small.”

Father and son wended their way down the steep cliffs of the mountain at the foot of which was their cavern home.

“What’s that?” exclaimed Gaff in a low whisper, as they passed along the top of a precipice.

“Pigs,” said Billy with glee; “hold on now, daddy, and let me go at ’em.”

The Bu’ster was no longer the little boy whom I introduced to the reader at the commencement of this narrative. Five years’ residence in the desert island had made him such a strapping young fellow that he seemed much more fitted to cope with a lion than a wild pig! He was not indeed tall, but he was unusually strong.

Gaff sat down on a ledge of rock while Billy crept cautiously to the edge of the precipice and looked down.

A smile of satisfaction lit up the lad's countenance as he beheld a big sow and six young pigs busily engaged in digging up roots directly below him. To seize a large stone and drop it into the centre of the group was the work of a moment. The result was in truth deadly, for the heavy stone hit one of the little pigs on the nape of the neck, and it sank to the ground with a melancholy squeak which proved to be its last.

The crash of the stone and the squeak of the pig caused the rest of the family to turn and fly from the fatal spot with porcine haste, filling the air as they ran with shrieks and yells, such as only pigsand bad babiesknow how to utter.

"Got him, daddyHooray!" shouted the Bu'ster, as he leaped up and ran by a circuitous route to the foot of the precipice, whence he speedily returned with the pig under his arm.

"A fat 'un, daddy," he observed, holding it up by the tail.

"Capital!" said Gaff, pinching the pig's sides, "we shall grub well for some days to come."

"I should think so, daddy; why, we've more than we know what to do wi'; for, what with the crab-pies you made this mornin', and the cocoa-nut soup and yams and dove-hash left fro' yesterday's dinner, an' this little grumpy, we stand a good chance o' aperplexy or somethin' o' that sort."

"Was there many more o' 'em, lad?"

"Ay, five moloncholly brothers and sisters, an' a hideously fat mother left to mourn the loss o' this chap. I'll be after them to-morrow. They won't go far, for I've noticed that when pigs take a fancy to a spot they don't leave it for a good while. Here we are at home, an' now for a splendid roast. There's nothin' like grub when ye're hungry."

"'Xcept drink when ye're dry," observed Gaff.

"Of coorse, an' a snooze when ye're sleepy; but don't let's git too pheelosophical, daddy; it an't good for digestion to argufy on a empty stummik. An' I see ye wants me to argue, but I won't do it; there now!"

It was one of Billy's devices to keep himself and his father cheery in their prolonged exile, to pretend that he didn't like to argue, and to stoutly assert that he would not do it, while at the same time he led his parent into all sorts of discussions.

On the present occasion, while he was engaged in preparing the pig for the spit, and his father was mending the handle of a fish-spear of his own fabrication, the discussion, or rather the conversation, turned upon the possibility of two people living happily all their days on a desert island.

Billy thought it was quite possible if the grub did not fail, but Gaff shook his head, and said it would be a blue look-out if one of them should get ill, or break his leg. Billy did not agree with this at all; he held that if one should get ill it would be great fun for the other to act the part of nurse and doctor, while the sick one would learn to value his health more when he got it back. As to breaking a leg, why, it was no use speculating how things would feel if that should occur; as well speak of the condition of things if both of them should break their necks.

The discussion diverged, as such discussions usually did, to home and its inmates, long before any satisfactory conclusion was come to, and it was brought to a close in consequence of Billy having to go out of the cave for firewood to roast the pig.

The cavern home had assumed a very different aspect from that which it presented when Gaff and his son took possession of it five years before. It now bore, externally and internally, the appearance of an old much-used dwelling. The entrance, which was an irregular archway of about ten feet in diameter, had been neatly closed up with small trees, over which strong banana leaves were fastened, so as to make it weather-tight. In this screen two holes were lefta small one for a door, and a still smaller one for a window. Both were fastened with a goat-skin curtain, which could be let down and fastened at night. In the daytime both door and window were always left wide-open, for the island on which our friends had been cast was one of a group of uninhabited islets, the climate around which is warm and delightful during the greater part of the year.

The ground outside of the cave was trodden by long use to the hardness of stone. The small vegetable garden, close to the right of the door, was enclosed by a fence, which bore evidence of having been more than once renewed, and frequently repaired. Some of the trees that had been cut downwith stone hatchets made by themselveswhen they first arrived, had several tall and sturdy shoots rising from the roots. There was a flat stone deeply hollowed out by constant sharpening of the said hatchet. There was a rustic seat, the handiwork of Billy, that bore symptoms of having been much sat upon. There were sundry footpaths, radiating into the woods, that were beginning to assume the hardness and dimensions of respectable roads; while all round the place there were signs and symptoms of the busy hand of man having been at

work there for years.

High up, on a mighty cliff that overlooked and almost overhung the sea, a rude flagstaff had been raised. This was among the first pieces of work that Gaff and his son had engaged in after landing. It stood on what they termed Signal Cliff, and was meant to attract the attention of any vessel that might chance to pass.

To Signal Cliff did Gaff and Billy repair each morning at daylight, as regularly as clockwork, to hoist their flag, made from cocoa-nut fibre; and, with equal regularity, did Billy go each night at sunset to haul the ensign down.

Many an anxious hour did they spend there together, gazing wistfully at the horizon, and thinking, if not talking, of home. But ships seldom visited that sea. Twice only, during their exile, did they at long intervals descry a sail, but on both occasions their flag failed to attract attention, and the hopes which had suddenly burst up with a fierce flame in their breasts were doomed to sink again in disappointment.

At first they had many false alarms, and frequently mistook a sea-gull in the distance for a sail; but such mistakes became less frequent as their hopes became less sanguine, and their perceptions, from practice, more acute. Sometimes they sat there for hours together. Sometimes, when busy with household arrangements, or equipped for fishing and hunting, they merely ran to hoist the flag; but never once did they fail to pay Signal Cliff a daily visit.

On Sundays, in particular, they were wont to spend the greater part of their time there, reading the New Testament.

It happened that, just before Gaff left Cove in the sloop of Haco Barepoles, Lizzie Gordon had presented him with a Testament. Being a seriously-minded man, he had received the gift with gratitude, and carried it to sea with him. Afterwards, when he and poor Billy were enduring the miseries of the voyage in the whale-ship, Gaff got out the Testament, and, aided by Billy, tried to spell it out, and seek for consolation in it. He thus got into a habit of carrying it in his coat-pocket, and it was there when he was cast on the desert island.

Although, of course, much damaged with water, it was not destroyed, for its clasp happened to be a very tight one, and tended greatly to preserve it. When father and son finally took up their abode in the cavern, the former resolved to devote some time night and morning to reading the Testament. He could spell out the capital letters, and Billy had, before quitting home, got the length of reading words of one syllable. Their united knowledge was thus very slight, but it was quite sufficient to enable them to overcome all difficulties, and in time they became excellent readers.

The story of Christ's redeeming love wrought its legitimate work on father and son, and, ere long, the former added prayer to the morning and evening reading of the Word. Gradually the broken sentences of prayer for the Holy Spirit, that light might be shed upon what they read, were followed by earnest confessions of sin, and petitions for pardon for Christ's sake. Friends, too, were remembered; for it is one of the peculiar consequences of the renewal of the human heart that the subjects of this renewal begin to think of the souls of others as well as of their own. Unbelievers deem this presumptuous and hypocritical, forgetting that if they were called upon to act in similar circumstances, they would be necessarily and inevitably quite as presumptuous, and that the insulting manner in which the efforts of believers are often received puts hypocrisy out of the question.

Be this as it may, Gaff prayed for his wife and child at first, and, when his heart began to warm and expand, for his relatives and friends also. He became more earnest, perhaps, when he prayed that a ship might be sent to take them from the island, (and in making this and his other petitions he might have given an instructive lesson to many divines of the present day, showing how wonderfully eloquent a man may be if he will only strive after nothing in the way of eloquence, and simply use the tones and language that God has given him); but all his prayers were wound up with "Thy will be done," and all were put up in the name of Jesus Christ.

To return from this digression. The inside of the cavern bore not less evidence of long-continued occupation than the outside. There was a block of wood which served father and son for a seat, which had two distinct and highly-polished marks on it. There was a rude table, whose cut, scratched, and hacked surface suggested the idea of many a culinary essay, and many a good meal. There was a very simple grate composed of several stones, which were blackened and whitened with soot and fire. There was no chimney, however, for the roof of the cave was so high that all smoke dissipated itself there, and found an exit no one knew how! In a recess there was a sort of small raised platform, covered with soft herbage and blankets of cocoa-nut fibre, on which, every night, father and son lay down together. The entrance to the inner cave, which formed a store-room and pantry, was covered with a curtain, so that the habitation with its rocky walls, earthen floor, and stalactite roof had quite a snug and cosy appearance.

Soon Billy returned with an armful of dry wood.

"Have ye got a light yet, daddy?"

Gaff, who had been endeavouring to produce a light by using his knife on a bit

of flint for five or ten minutes, said he had “just got it,” and proved the truth of his assertion by handing his son a mass of smoking material. Billy blew this into a flame, and applied it to the wood, which soon kindled into a roaring fire.

“Now, then,” cried the Bu’ster, “where’s the spit? Ah! that’s it; here you go; oh dear, how you would yell just now, Mister Grumpy, if you were alive! It’s a cruel thought, but I can’t help it. There, now, frizzle away, and I’ll go clean up my dishes while you are roasting.”

No sooner had the pig been put on the spit, and the first fumes arisen, than there was a loud yell in the forest, followed immediately by the pattering of small feet, as if in tremendous haste.

“Aha! Squeaky, I knew you would smell out the supper double quick,” cried Billy with a laugh, as he looked towards the door.

“He never misses it,” said Gaff with a quiet smile. Next moment a small pig came scampering into the cave and rushed up to the fire, where it sat down promptly as if the sole object it had in view were to warm itself!

And this was indeed its only object, for that pig was passionately, ludicrously fond of the fire! It was a pet pig.

One day when Billy was out hunting, he had caught it in a somewhat singular fashion. He usually went out hunting with a bow and arrow of his own making, and was very successful in bringing down white doves, parroquets, and such creatures, but could make nothing of the pigs, whose skins were too tough for his wooden and unshod arrows. He let fly at them, nevertheless, when he got a chance.

Well, on the day referred to, Billy had shot nothing, and was returning home in a somewhat pensive mood when he heard a squeak, and at once fitted an arrow to his bow. A rush followed the squeak, and dreadful yells accompanied the rushyells which were intensified, if possible, when Billy’s arrow went into an old sow’s ear after glancing off the back of one of her little ones.

Billy ran after them in wild despair, for he knew that the shot was thrown away. One of the pigs had sprained its ankle, apparently, for it could only run on three legs. This pig fell behind; Billy ran after it, overtook it, fell upon it, and almost crushed it to deatha fact which was announced by an appalling shriek.

The mother turned and ran to the rescue. Billy gathered up the pig and ran for his, (and its), life. It was a hard run, and would certainly have terminated in favour of the sow had not the greater part of the chase been kept up among

loose stones, over which the lad had the advantage. In a few minutes he descended a steep cliff over which the bereaved mother did not dare to run.

Thus did Billy become possessed of a live pig, which in a few weeks became a remarkably familiar and fearless inmate of the cavern home.

Billy also had a pet parroquet which soon became tame enough to be allowed to move about at will with a cropped wing, and which was named Shrieky. This creature was a mere bundle of impudent feathers, and a source of infinite annoyance to the pig, for, being possessed of considerable powers of mimicry, it sometimes uttered a porcine shriek, exciting poor Squeaky with the vain hope that some of its relations had arrived, and, what was far worse, frequently imitated the sounds of crackling fire and roasting food, which had the effect of causing Squeaky to rush into the cave, to meet with bitter disappointment.

“Now, Squeaky,” said the Bu’ster, hitting the pig on its snout with a bit of firewood, “keep your dirty nose away from yer cousin.”

Squeaky obeyed meekly, and removed to another spot.

“Isn’t it a strange thing, daddy, that you and I should come to feel so homelike here?”

“Ay, it is strange,” responded Gaff with a sigh, as he laid down the hook he was working at and glanced round the cavern. “Your mother would be astonished to see us now, lad.”

“She’ll hear all about it some day,” said Billy. “You’ve no notion what a splendid story I’ll make out of all this when we get back to Cove!”

It was evident that the Bu’ster inherited much of his mother’s sanguine disposition.

“P’raps we’ll never git back to Cove,” said Gaff sadly; “hows’ever, we’ve no reason to complain. Things might ha’ bin worse. You’d better go and haul down the flag, lad. I’ll look arter the roast till ye come back.”

“The roast’ll look after itself, daddy,” said the Bu’ster; “you look after Squeaky, however, for that sly critter’s always up to mischief.”

Billy hastened to the top of Signal Cliff just as the sun was beginning to descend into the sea, and had commenced to pull down the flag when his eye caught sight of a sailnot on the far-off horizon, like a sea-gull’s wing, but close in upon the land!

The shout that he gave was so tremendous that Gaff heard it in the cave, and

rushed out in great alarm. He saw Billy waving a shred of cocoa-nut cloth frantically above his head, and his heart bounded wildly as he sprang up the hill like a stag.

On reaching the flagstaff he beheld the vessel, a large full-rigged ship, sailing calmly, and, to his eye, majestically, not far from the signal cliff.

His first impulse was to wave his hand and shout. Then he laid hands on the halliards of the flag and gave it an extra pull to see that it was well up, while Billy continued to stamp, cheer, yell, and wave his arms like a madman!

Only those who have been long separated from their fellow-men can know the wild excitement that is roused in the breast by the prospect of meeting with new faces. Gaff and Billy found it difficult to restrain themselves, and indeed they did not try to do so for at least ten minutes after the discovery of the ship. Then a feeling of dread came suddenly upon the former.

“Surely they’ll never pass without takin’ notice of us.”

“Never!” exclaimed Billy, whose sudden fall of countenance belied the word.

Gaff shook his head.

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” said he; “if she’s a whaler like the one we came south in, lad, she’ll not trouble herself with us.”

Billy looked very grave, and his heart sank.

“My only consolation is that she looks more like a man-o’-war than a whaler.”

“I wish we had a big gun to fire,” exclaimed Billy, looking round in perplexity, as if he half hoped that a carronade would spring up out of the ground. “Could we not make a row somehow?”

“I fear not,” said Gaff despondingly. “Shoutin’ is of no use. She’s too far-off for that. Our only chance is the flag.”

Both father and son stood silent for some moments earnestly gazing at the ship, which was by this time nearly opposite to their flagstaff, and seemed to be passing by without recognising the signal. This was not to be wondered at, for, although the flag was visible enough from landward, being well defined against the bright sky, it was scarce perceptible from seaward, owing to the hills which formed a background to it.

“I know what’ll do it!” exclaimed Billy, as he leaped suddenly to one side. “Come along, daddy.”

A few yards to one side of the spot on which the flagstaff was reared there was a part of the precipice which sloped with a steep descent into the sea. Here there had been a landslip, and the entire face of the cliff was laid bare. At the top of this slope there was a great collection of stones and masses of rock of considerable size. At various points, too, down the face of the steep, masses of rock and débris had collected in hollows.

Billy now went to work to roll big stones over the edge of this cliff, and he did it with such good-will that in a few minutes masses of a hundred weight were rolling, bounding, and crashing down the steep. These, in many cases, plunged into the collections of débris, and dislodged masses of rock that no efforts of which Billy was capable could have otherwise moved.

The rattling roar of the avalanche was far more effective than a salvo of artillery, because, besides being tremendous, it was unceasing, and the result was that the vessel ran up a flag in reply to the strange salute. Then a white puff of smoke from her side preceded the roar of a heavy gun. Immediately after, the vessel's head came round, and she lay-to.

"It's a man-o'-war," cried Billy excitedly.

"Ay, and a British one too," exclaimed Gaff; "let's give him a cheer, lad."

Billy complied with a will! Again and again did they raise their strong voices until the woods and cliffs became alive with full, true, ringing British cheers!

Chapter Thirty One.
Delivered, Wrecked, and Rescued.

It is unnecessary, indeed impossible, to describe the feelings with which Gaff and Billy descended from Signal Cliff to the beach to meet the boat which put off from the man-of-war and made for the little creek just below the cave.

As the boat's keel grated on the sand, the midshipman in command leaped ashore. He was a particularly small and pert midshipman, a smart conceited vigorous little fellow, who delighted to order his big men about in the voice of a giant; and it was quite interesting to observe how quietly and meekly those big men obeyed him, just as one sometimes sees a huge Newfoundland dog or mastiff obey the orders of a child.

"Why, where on earth did you come from, and what are you doing here?" demanded the little middy, as he approached Gaff, and looked up in that man's rugged and unshorn countenance.

Poor Gaff could scarce command himself sufficiently to reply

“We’re Englishmenbin cast awayfive years now”

He could go no farther, but, seizing the boy’s hand, shook it warmly. The Bu’ster, being equally incapable of speaking, seized the hand of the sailor next him, and also shook it violently. Then he uttered a cheer, and turning suddenly round ran along the beach for half a mile like a greyhound, after which he returned and asserted that his feelings were somewhat relieved!

Meanwhile the middy continued to question Gaff.

“What! d’ye mean to say you’ve been five years hereall alone?”

“Ay, all but a few days,” said Gaff, looking round on the men with a bewildered air. “How strange yer voices sound! Seems as if I’d a’most forgotten what men are like!”

“Well, you are a queer fish,” said the boy with a laugh. “Are there no more here but you two?”

“No more; just Billy and mealso Squeaky and Shrieky.”

Gaff said this quite gravely, for nothing was farther from his thoughts at that time than jesting.

“And pray, who may Squeaky and Shrieky be?”

“Squeaky’s a pig, and Shrieky’s a little parrot.”

“Well,” observed the middy with a laugh, “that’s better than no company at all.”

“Yours is an English man-o’-war, I think?” said Gaff.

“You’re right, old fellow; she’s the ‘Blazer,’ 74, Captain Evans, bound for England. Took a run farther south than usual after a piratical-looking craft, but missed her. Gave up the chase, and came to this island to get water. Little thought we should find you on it. Astonish the captain rather when we go back. Of course you’ll want us to take you home. Will you go off with me at once?”

Gaff and Billy hesitated, and both looked back with a strange mixture of feelings at their island-home.

“Oh, we won’t hurry you,” said the boy, with a kindly and patronising air; “if there are any traps you want to pack up, we’ll wait for you. It’ll take us some time to get the breakers filled. Can you show me a good spring?”

“Ay, an’ we can show you a hot one,” cried Billy, with a smile. “But come up to the cave with us and have some grub.”

The midshipman expressed his readiness to comply, and ordered one of the men to stay and watch the boat.

“You needn’t leave any one with the boat,” said Gaff; “there’s nobody here to touch it.”

“Nevertheless I will leave a guard. Now, then show us the way.”

It is needless to describe the surprise of the sailors at everything they saw and heard; and the mixed feelings that agitated the breasts of Gaff and his sonanxiety to return to England, with regret to quit the cavern home where they had spent so many quiet and comparatively happy years.

Suffice it to say that they, and the few things they possessed, were speedily transferred to the “Blazer,” on board of which they received the most considerate attention and kindness. And you may be sure, reader, that Billy did not forget to take the pig and the parroquet along with him.

Fair winds sprang up, and for many weeks the “Blazer” bowled along steadily on her course. It seemed as if the elements had agreed to be favourable, and expedite the return of the exiles. But this state of things did not last.

Towards the end of the voyage fogs and gales prevailed, and the “Blazer” was driven considerably out of her course to the northward, insomuch that she finally made the land on the north-western coast of Scotland. This induced the captain to run through the Pentland Firth, after passing through which they were beset by calms.

One day a small steamer passed close alongside the “Blazer.”

“That’s an Aberdeen steamer,” said the captain; “would you like to be put on board, Gaff?”

Gaff said that he would, as it was probable he should reach home sooner by her than if he were to accompany the “Blazer” to London.

Accordingly the steamer was signalled, and Gaff and Billy were put on board.

Scarcely had this been done when a stiff easterly gale set in, and before morning a heavy sea was running, before which the steamer rolled heavily.

It seemed as if Gaff and his son were doomed to be drowned, for disaster by sea followed them wherever they went. At last, however, the morning broke

bright and clear, and the wind abated, though the sea was still running very high.

That forenoon the steamer sighted the coast of Aberdeenshire and the tall column of the Girdle-ness lighthouse came into view.

“We’ll be home soon now, daddy,” said Billy, as they walked the quarter-deck together.

“P’raps, but we an’t there yet,” said Gaff; “an’ I never count my chickens before they are hatched.”

Gaff and his son no longer wore the rough skin garments which had clothed them while in their island-home. They had been rigged out in man-o’-war habiliments by the kindness of those on board the “Blazer,” but they had steadily refused to permit the barber to operate upon them, and still wore their locks shaggy and long. They were, perhaps, as fine specimens of a hardy and powerful man and boy as could be found anywhere; for Gaff, although past his prime, was not a whit less vigorous and athletic than he had been in days of yore, though a little less supple; and Billy, owing probably to his hardy and healthy style of life on the island, was unusually broad and manly for his age.

In a few hours the steamer made the harbour of Aberdeen. The passengers, who had been very busy all the morning in packing up the things they had used on the voyage, were now assembled in groups along the side of the vessel trying to make out objects on shore. The captain stood on the bridge between the paddles giving directions to the steersman, and everything gave promise of a speedy and happy landing.

A heavy sea, however, was still running, filling the bay to the northward of the harbour with foaming breakers, while the pier-head was engulfed in clouds of spray as each billow rolled past it and fell in thunder on the bar.

Every one on board looked on with interest; but on that clear bright day, no one thought of danger.

Just as the steamer came close up to the bar, a heavy sea struck her on the port bow, driving her a little too near the pier. The captain shouted to the steersman, but the man either did not understand him, or did not act with sufficient promptitude, for the next wave sent them crashing on the portion of bulwark or breakwater that juts out from the head of the Aberdeen pier.

The consternation and confusion that ensued is beyond description. The women screamed, the men shouted. The captain ordered the engines to be reversed, and this was done at once, but the force of the next billow was too

great. It lifted the vessel up and let her fall heavily again on the pier, where she lay hard and fast with her back broken. Another wave lifted her; the two halves of the vessel separated and sank on each side of the pier, leaving the passengers and crew in the waves.

It would be difficult to say whether the shouts of the multitudes who stood on the pier-head or the shrieks of the wrecked people were loudest.

Instantly every exertion was made to save them. Boats were launched, ropes were thrown, buoys were cast into the sea, and many of the people were saved, but many were also drowned before assistance reached them.

Gaff and Billy, being expert swimmers, seized the persons nearest to them, and took them safe to the pier, where ready hands were stretched out to grasp them. The former saved a lady, the latter a little girl. Then they plunged back into the sea, and saved two more lives.

While this was going on, several of the passengers were swept round into the bay, where they would have perished but for the prompt and able assistance of a man who was known as “The Rescue.”

This man was so named because he undertook the dangerous and trying duty of watching the bathers during the summer months, and rescuing such of them as got out of their depth.

In this arduous work that heroic man had, during five years of service, saved with his own hands between thirty and forty livesin some cases with a boat, but in most cases by simply swimming out and seizing the drowning persons, and without using corks or floats of any kind. When asked why he did not use a lifebelt, he said that it would only impede his motions and prevent him from diving, which he was often compelled to do when the drowning persons had sunk. His usual method was to swim off when there was a shout for help, and make for the struggling man or boy so as to come up behind him. He then seized him under the armpits, and thus effectually prevented him from grasping him in any way. Drawing him gently upon his breast while he lay over on his back, he then made for the shore, swimming on his back and using his feet only.

On the present occasion the “Rescue” saved four or five of those who were washed into the bay, and then ran out to the end of the pier to render assistance there.

In height he was not above the middle size, but he had a very muscular and well-knit frame. Just as he drew near, Gaff, who was bearing a little boy through the surf in his arms, was hurled against the stones of the pier, rendered

insensible, and sucked back by the retreating water. Billy was farther out at the moment, and did not see what had occurred.

The shout of alarm from those in front of the crowd was almost immediately answered by a cry from behind of:

“The Rescue! The Rescue! This way!”

Without checking his speed, the Rescue sprang into the sea, caught Gaff by the hair of the head, and was next moment hurled on the breakwater. He was prepared for the shock, and caught the hands of two men, who, with ropes round their waists, waded into the water as far as they dared. Billy was washed ashore at the same moment, almost in a state of helpless exhaustion, and all were hauled out of the sea amid the wild cheers of the excited crowd.

Gaff, being laid under the lee of the pier-wall, soon recovered, and then he and Billy were led tenderly up to the town, where they were kindly entertained and cared for during several days, by the hospitable Rescue, in whose house they lodged during their stay in the fair city of Aberdeen.

Most of the cattle that happened to be on board the ill-fated steamer were saved, and among them was Squeaky. Shrieky, too, managed to escape. His cage having been smashed in the general confusion he was set free, and flew wildly towards the pier, where he took refuge in the bosom of a sailor, who took care of him. Ultimately he and his companion in distress were restored to their friends.

Chapter Thirty Two.
Home Again.

A few days after the events narrated in the last chapter, Gaff and his son arrived by stage-coach in the town of Wreckumoft, and at once started off for the village of Cove.

It was night. There was no moon, but the stars shone brightly in a clear sky, affording sufficient light to show them their road.

Neither of them spoke. Their minds were filled with anxiety, for the thought that was uppermost and ever-present in each was, “Are they well? are they alive?” They did not utter the thought, however.

“It’s a long bit since you an’ I was here, Billy,” observed Gaff in a low voice.

“Ay, very long,” replied the lad.

They walked on again at a smart pace, but in silence.

Presently they heard footsteps approaching, and a man soon came up from the direction of Cove.

“Foine noight,” said the man.

“Fine night it is,” responded Gaff and Billy in the same breath.

Gaff suddenly turned and accosted the stranger just as he had passed them.

“D’ye belong to Cove?”

“No, I doan’t; only stoppin’ there a bit.”

“Ye don’t happen to know a ’ooman o’ the name o’ Gaff, do ye?”

“GaffGaff,” repeated the man, meditating; “no, I niver heern on her.”

“Hm; thought pr’aps ye mightgood-night.”

“Good-noight.”

And the man went his way.

“Ah! Billy, my heart misgives me, boy,” said Gaff after a pause.

It was evident that Billy’s heart misgave him too, for he made no reply.

The distance to Cove being only three miles, they were not long in reaching the cottage, although their pace had become slower and slower as they approached the village, and they stopped altogether when they first came in sight of their old home.

A light shone brightly in the little window. They glanced at each other on observing this, but no word escaped them. Silently they approached the cottage-window and looked in.

Gaff started back with a slight exclamation of surprise, for his eye fell on the new and strange furniture of the “boodwar.” Billy looked round with a searching eye.

“There’s nobody in,” he said at length, “but look, daddy, the old clock’s there yet.”

Gaff did not know whether this was a good or a bad omen, for any one who had taken and refurnished the cottage might have bought the old clock and kept it as a sort of curiosity.

While they were gazing, the door of the closet opened and Mrs Gaff came out. She was a little stouter, perhaps, than she had been five years before, but not a whit less hale or good-looking.

“MotherGod bless her!” murmured Billy in a deep earnest voice.

“Where can Tottie be?” whispered Gaff anxiously.

“Maybe she’s out,” said Billy.

The lad’s voice trembled while he spoke, for he could not but reflect that five years was a long long time, and Tottie might be dead.

Before Gaff spoke again, the closet door once more opened, and a slender sprightly girl just budding into womanhood tripped across the room.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Billy, “who can thatsurely! impossible! yes it is, it must be Tot, for I could never mistake her mouth!”

“D’ye see any sign ofofa man?” said Gaff in a voice so deep and peculiar, that his son turned and looked at him in surprise.

“No, daddywhy? what d’ye ask that for?”

“’Cause it’s not the first time a sailor has comed home, after bein’ many years away, and found that his wife had guv him up for dead, an’ married again.”

Gaff had often thought of the possibility of such a thing during his prolonged residence on the island, and the thought had cost him many a bitter pang, but he had never mentioned it to Billy, on whom the idea fell for the first time like a thunderbolt. He almost staggered, and put his hand quickly on the window-sill.

“But come, lad, let’s bear up like men. I’ll go in first. Don’t let on; see if they’ll remember us.”

So saying, Gaff lifted the latch of the door and stood before his wife and child. Billy also entered, and stood a pace behind him.

Mrs Gaff and Tottie, who were both engaged about the fireplace at the time, in the preparation of supper, turned and looked at the intruders in surprise, and, for a few seconds, in silence.

The light that fell upon father and son was not very strong, and the opening of the door had caused it to flicker.

“Come in, if ye wants a word wi’ me,” said Mrs Gaff, who was somewhat uneasy at the rugged appearance of her visitors, but was too proud to show it.

“Hast forgotten me, Jess?”

Mrs Gaff rushed at once into his arms.

“‘Bless the Lord, O my soul,’” murmured Gaff, as he smoothed the head that lay on his shoulder.

Tottie recognised her brother the instant he advanced into the full light of the fire, and exclaiming the single word “Billy,” leaped into his open arms.

“Not lost after all, thank God,” said Gaff, with a deep prolonged sigh, as he led his wife to a chair and sat down beside her.

“Lost, Stephen, what mean ye?”

“Not married again,” said Gaff with a quiet smile.

“Married again! an’ you alive! oh, Stephen!”

“Nay, lass, not believin’ me alive, but ye’ve had good reason to think me dead this many a year.”

“An’ d’ye think I’d ha’ married agin even though ye was dead, lad?” asked the wife, with a look of reproach.

“Well, I believe ye wouldn’t; but it’s common enough, ye must admit, for folk to marry a second time, an’ so, many and many a long day I used to think p’raps Jess’ll ha’ found it hard to keep herself an’ Tottie, an’ mayhap she’ll have married agin arter givin’ me up for dead.”

“Never!” exclaimed Mrs Gaff energetically.

“Well, forgive me for thinkin’ it, lass. I’ve been punished enough, for it’s cost me many a bitter hour when I was on the island.”

“On the island!” exclaimed Tottie in surprise.

“Ay, Tot, but it’s an old story that, an’ a long one.”

“Then you’ll have to tell it to me, daddy, and begin at once,” said Tottie, leaving the Bu’sterwho was more entitled to his nickname on that evening than he had ever been in all his life,and sitting down beside her father on the floor.

“Come, let’s have fair exchange,” said Gaff, pushing his wife towards Billy,

who grasped his mother round her ample waist, and pulled her down upon his knee!

“You’re so big and strong an’ handsome,” said Mrs Gaff, running her fingers through her son’s voluminous locks, while a few tears tumbled over her cheeks.

“Mother,” said Billy with a gleeful look, “give me a slap on the face; do, there’s a good old woman; I want to feel what it’s like now, to see if I remember it!”

“There!” cried Mrs Gaff, giving him a slap, and no light onea slap that would have floored him in days of yore; “you deserve it for calling me an old woman.”

Mrs Gaff followed up the slap with a hug that almost choked her son.

“Make less noise, won’t you?” cried Tottie. “Don’t you see that daddy’s going to begin his story?”

Silence being with difficulty obtained, Gaff did begin his story, intending to run over a few of the leading facts regarding his life since he disappeared, but, having begun, he found it impossible to stop, all the more so that no one wanted to stop him. He became so excited, too, that he forgot to take note of time, and his audience were so interested that they paid no attention whatever to the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, which, by the way, looked if possible more horrified than it used to do in the Bu’ster’s early days. Its preliminary hissing and frequent ringings were unheeded; so were the more dignified admonitions of the new clock; so was the tea-kettle, which hissed with the utmost fury at being boiled so long, but hissed in vain, for it was allowed to hiss its entire contents into thin air, and then to burn its bottom red hot! In like manner the large pot of potatoes evaporated its water, red-heated its bottom, and burned its contents to charcoal.

This last event it was that aroused Mrs Gaff.

“Lauks! the taties is done for.”

She sprang up and tore the pot off the fire. Tottie did the same to the kettle, while Gaff and Billy looked on and laughed.

“Never mind, here’s another kettle; fill it, Tot, fro’ the pitcher,” said Mrs Gaff; “it’ll bile in a few minutes, an’ we can do without taties for one night.”

On examination, however, it was found that a sufficient quantity of eatable potatoes remained in the heart of the burned mass, so the misfortune did not

prove to be so great as at first sight it appeared to be.

“But now, Jess, let me pump you a bit. How comes it that ye’ve made such a ’xtraornary affair o’ the cottage?”

Mrs Gaff, instead of answering, hugged herself, and looked unutterably sly. Then she hugged Billy, and laughed. Tottie laughed too, much more energetically than there was any apparent reason for. This caused Billy to laugh from sympathy, which made Mrs Gaff break out afresh, and Gaff himself laughed because he couldn’t help it! So they all laughed heartily for at least two minutesall the more heartily that half of them did not know what they were laughing at, and the other half knew particularly well what they were laughing at!

“Well, now,” said Gaff, after a time, “this may be uncommonly funny, but I’d like to know what it’s all about.”

Mrs Gaff still looked unutterably sly, and giggled. At length she said

“You must know, Stephen, that I’m a lady!”

“Well, lass, you an’t ’xactly a lady, but you’re an uncommon good woman, which many a lady never wos, an’ never will be.”

“Ay, but I am a lady,” said Mrs Gaff firmly; “at least I’m rich, an’ that’s the same thing, an’t it?”

“I’m not so sure o’ that,” replied Gaff, shaking his head; “seems to me that it takes more than money to make a lady. But what are ye drivin’ at, Jess?”

Mrs Gaff now condescended on explanation. First of all she made Gaff and Billy go round the apartment with her, and expounded to them the signification of the various items, after the manner of a showman.

“Here, you see,” said the good woman, pointing to the floor, “is a splendid carpit strait fro’ the looms o’ Turkey; so the man said as sold it to me, but I’ve reason to believe he told lies. Hows’ever, there it is, an’ it’s a fuss-rater as ye may see. The roses is as fresh as the day it was put down, ’xceptin’ that one where Tottie capsized a saucepan o’ melted butter an’ eggs last Christmas day. This,” (pointing to the bed), “is a four-poster. You’ve often said to me, Stephen, that you’d like to sleep in a four-poster to see how it felt. Well, you’ll git the chance now, my man! This here is a noo grate an’ fire-irons, as cost fi’ pun’ ten. The man I got it fro’ said it wos a bargain at that, but some knowin’ friends o’ mine holds a different opinion. Here is a noo clock, as goes eight days of his own accord, an’ strikes the halves an’ quarters, but he’s not so good

as he looks, like many other showy critters in this world. That old farmiliar face in the corner does his dooty better, an' makes less fuss about it. Then this here is a noo set o' chimbley ornaments. I don't think much o' them myself, but Tot says they're better than nothing. Them six cheers is the best I ever sat on. Nothin' can smash 'em. Mad Haco even can't"

"Ah! is Haco alive still?" interrupted Gaff.

"Alive, I should think so. Nothin' 'll kill that man. I don't believe buryin' him alive would do it. He's up at the Sailors' Home just now. But I'm not done yet. Here's a portrait o' Lord Nelson, as can look all round the room. See, now, git into that corner. Now, an't he lookin' at ye?"

"That he is, an' no mistake," replied Gaff.

"Well, git into this other corner; now, an't he lookin' at ye still?"

"To be sure he is!"

"Well, well, don't go for to puzzle yer brains over it. That pictur' has nearly druv all the thinkin' men o' Cove mad, so we'll let it alone just now. Here's a man-o'-war, ye see; an' this is the steps for mountin' into the four-poster. It serves for aasome sort o' man, I forgetTot, you know"

"An ottoman," said Tottie.

"Ay, a ottyman by day, an' steps-an'-stairs at night. Look there!"

Mrs Gaff opened up the steps and said, "What d'ye think o' that?"

Gaff said, "Wonderful!" and Billy exclaimed, "Hallo!"

"Yes, Stephen," resumed Mrs Gaff, going to the cupboard and fetching the tea-caddy, from which she extracted her banker's book, "all them things was bought for you with your own fortin', which is ten thousand pound, (an' more, for I've not lived up to the interest by no manner o' means); an' that there book'll show ye it's all true."

Having reached this point, Mrs Gaff was seized with a fit of laughter, which she stifled on her husband's breast, and then, flinging herself into the four-poster, she burst into a flood of tears.

This was the first time in her life that she had given way to such weakness, and she afterwards said to Tottie, in reference to it, that she couldn't help it, and had made up her mind to have a good cry once for all, and be done with it.

Gaff and his son examined the bank-book, and listened with wonder to Tottie's

account of the manner in which their wealth had come to them. Before the recital was completed, Mrs Gaff had had her cry out, and dried her eyes.

“What think ye of that, Stephen?” she said, pointing to the book.

Gaff shook his head slowly, and looked very grave.

“I don’t much like it, Jess.”

“What, don’t like money?”

“Too much of it is dangerous. I hope it won’t harm us, lass.”

“It’s done no harm to me yet, as I knows of,” said Mrs Gaff firmly.

“What says the Bible, Tot, about that?” asked Gaff. “Money’s the root o’ all evil, an’t it?”

“No, daddy, it’s the love o’ money that’s the root of all evil.”

“Ah, to be sure. Well, there’s a difference there. Hows’ever, we can’t help it, so we must larn to bear it. Come along now, Jess, and let us have supper.”

To supper they sat down, and long they sat over it, and a hearty one they ate. It was not till they began to think of retiring for the night that it was remembered that there was no possibility of putting up Billy in the cottage, for Tottie occupied the closet of the “boodwar.” The Bu’ster relieved his parents from their difficulty, however, by asserting that he had taken a wild desire to see Mad Haco that night; so, declining the offer of a shake-down made up under the four-poster, he started for Wreckumoft, and took up his quarters in the Sailors’ Home.

Chapter Thirty Three.
The Sailors’ Home and the New Secretary.

Great changes had taken place in the Sailors’ Home at Wreckumoft since Billy Gaff last saw it. A new wing had been added to it, and the original building had been altered and repaired, while every convenience in the way of ventilating and heating had been introduced, so that the sailors who frequented this admirable Home found themselves surrounded by comforts and luxuries such as, in former days, they had never dreamed of.

Fortunately for this valuable institution, Sir Richard Doles, Bart, had not been made a director, consequently the business of the Home was not impeded.

Fortunately, also, the secretary who had been recently appointed to the Home

was a man of ability and energy, being none other than our friend Kenneth Stuart.

That incorrigible young man had ventured one day to say to his father that he could not make up his mind to give up the “portionless girl,” Lizzie Gordon; that he considered her anything but portionless, seeing that she possessed an earnest, loving, Christian heart, and a wise thoughtful mind; qualities which wealth could not purchase, and compared with which a fortune was not worth a straw.

Mr Stuart, senior, thereupon dismissed Mr Stuart, junior, from his presence for ever, and told him to go and beg his bread where he chose!

Curiously enough, Mr Stuart, senior, happened to dine that day with Colonel Crusty at the club where the latter put up when in town, and the valiant colonel told him that he had that morning dismissed his daughter from his presence for ever, she having returned to the parental home as Mrs Bowels. The two, therefore, felt a peculiar sort of sympathy, being, as it were, in the same boat, and cracked an additional bottle of claret on the strength of the coincidence. When they had finished the extra bottle, they ordered another, and became exceedingly jocose, insomuch that one vowed he would leave his fortune to the Church, but the other preferred to leave his to a Lunatic Asylum.

On receiving his dismissal, Kenneth left his father’s house with words of regret and good-will on his lips, and then went to tell Lizzie, and seek his fortune.

He had not to seek long or far. Being a director of the Sailors’ Home, I chanced to be in search of a secretary. A better man than Kenneth could not be found, so I proposed him, and he was at once appointed.

The salary being a good one, he was enabled to retain Dan Horsey and Bucephalus. He also obtained permission to remove Emmie to his house, having told his father who the child was, and having been told in return that he, (the father), had become aware of the fact long ago, and that he was welcome to her! Kenneth then set himself earnestly to work to promote the interests of the Sailors’ Home, and to prepare his house for the reception of Lizzie, who had agreed to marry him whenever he felt himself in a position to ask her.

Lizzie was a peculiar girl. She had, indeed, permitted Kenneth to visit her as a lover; but she resolutely refused to accept him as long as his father continued adverse to the union. The moment, however, that she heard of his being cast off and disinherited, she agreed, with tears in her eyes, to marry him whenever he pleased.

But to return from this digression: the new secretary of the Sailors' Home of Wreckumoft became the guardian spirit of the place. He advised all the arrangements which the Board made. He drew up all the rules that the Board fixed.

An "Address" which he issued to officers and seamen frequenting the port of Wreckumoft, wound up with the following words:

"The Directors of the Sailors' Home are anxious that seamen should clearly understand that the institution was designed for their sole benefit, and established with the view of protecting them from the systematic extortion of crimps and other snares, to which their circumstances and calling render them peculiarly liable; and, above all, to promote their moral elevation, social improvement, and religious instruction. The rules by which the institution is governed are, as far as practicable, adapted to meet the habits of all who participate in its benefits, and to further their best interests. It is conducted on principles of order, comfort, and liberality; and no restraint is exercised beyond that which common prudence and mutual interest require. In the 'Home' thus provided; which embraces security, freedom of action, and social enjoyment, the Directors desire to create and sustain mutual sympathy, trust, and good-will, and to employ those agencies which tend most to mature habits of frugality, self-respect, and the love of God."

Immediately after the appearance of this address, seamen flocked to the "Home" for lodgings, and those who did so found the place so uncommonly pleasant that they brought their messmates, so that for months afterwards not only was every bed taken, but the very stairs and landings of the building were occupied by men who preferred to sleep there, and enjoy the advantages of the Institution, rather than go back to the dens which they had frequented in former days.

On the night when Billy went to the Home it was very full, and he stumbled over more than one recumbent seaman on the landings before he reached the hall, where, late though it was, a number of men were playing chess, draughts, and bagatelle, or reading books and papers. Here he found Haco Barepoles, as rugged as ever, seated by the fire and deeply engaged in a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress."

"Wonderful book; wonderful book!" exclaimed Haco, laying the volume on the table and scratching his head, as if to stir up the brain inside. Just then Billy came up.

"Hallo, Haco!"

“Hallo, stranger! You’ve the advantage of me, lad, for I don’t know ye.”

“Yes, ye do.”

“Eh! do I? Let me see.”

Here the mad skipper scrutinised the lad’s face earnestly.

“Well, I have seen ye afore now, but you’ve ’scaped from me, youngster.”

“I’m Billy, alias the Bu’ster, alias the Cork, alias Gaff”

“What, Billy Gaff? Dead and come alive again!” cried Haco, springing up and seizing the youngster’s hand.

Having wrung Billy’s arm almost off his shoulder, Haco took him up to his berth, where he made him sit down on the bed and recount all his and his father’s adventures from beginning to end.

When Billy had concluded the narrative, which of course he gave only in brief outline, Haco said

“Now, lad, you and I shall go have a pipe outside, and then we’ll turn in.”

“Very good; but I have not yet asked you about your daughter Susan. Is she still with Captain Bingley?”

“Ay, still with him, and well,” replied Haco, with a look that did not convey the idea of satisfaction.

“Not goin’ to get married?” inquired Billy with caution.

Haco snorted, then he grunted, and then he said

“Yes, she was goin’ to get married, and he wished she wasn’t, that was all.”

“Who to?” inquired the other.

“Why, to that Irish scoundrel Dan Horsey, to be sure,” said Haco with a huge sigh of resignation, which, coming from any other man, would have been regarded as a groan. “The fact is, lad, that poor Susan’s heart is set upon that fellow, an’ so it’s no use resistin’ them no longer. Besides, the blackguard is well spoken of by his master, who’s a trump. Moreover, I made a kind o’ half promise long ago that I’d not oppose them, to that scapegrace young Lieutenant Bingley, who’s on his way home from China just now. An’ so it’s a-goin’ to be; an’ they’ve set their hearts on havin’ the weddin’ same week as the weddin’ o’ Master Kenneth and Lizzie Gordon; so the fact is they may all

marry each other, through other, down the middle and up again, for all I care, ’cause I’m a-goin’ on a whalin’ voyage to Novy Zembly or Kumskatchkieanywheres to git peace o’ mindthere!”

Saying this Haco dashed the ashes out of his big German pipe into his left palm, and scattered them to the winds.

“Now, lad,” he said, in conclusion, “we’ll go turn in, and you’ll sleep with me to-night, for ye couldn’t get a bed in the Home for love or money, seein’ that it’s choke full already. Come along.”

Chapter Thirty Four.
Failures and Hopes Deferred, and Consequences.

Now, it chanced that, about the time of which I write, a noted bank failed, and a considerable sum of money which had been temporarily deposited in it by the committee of the Sailors’ Home at Wreckumoft was lost.

This necessitated retrenchment. All the salaries of officials were loweredamong them Kenneth’s, although the directors assured him that it would be again raised as soon as the Institution recovered from the shock of this loss.

Meanwhile, however, the secretary was compelled to postpone his marriage indefinitely.

Perhaps the shortest way to convey a correct idea of the dire effects of this failure to my reader will be to detail several conversations that took place in regard to it by various parties.

Conversation first was held between the head cook and head waiter of the Sailors’ Home. These worthies were seated on one of the dressers in the kitchen of the establishment;and a wonderful kitchen it was, with culinary implements so huge as to suggest the idea of giant operators. There was a grate that might have roasted an ox whole. There were pots big enough to have boiled entire sheep, caldrons of soup that a little boy might have swum in, rolls and loaves that would, apparently, have made sandwiches for an army, and cups and saucers, plates and dishes that might have set up any reasonable man for life in the crockery line. But the most astounding vessels in that amazing place were the tea-pot and coffee-pot of the establishment. They stood side by side like giant twins; each being five feet high by a yard in diameter, and the pounds of tea and gallons of water put into these pots night and morning for tea and breakfast seemed almost fabulous. (See note 1.)

“It’s werry unfortinet, werry,” said the presiding spirit of this region.

“So ’tis,” observed the head waiter.

“Werry hard, too,” said the cook, “on a man like me, with a wife and six childer, to have his wages docked.”

“So ’tiseven for a man with a wife and four child’n like me,” said the head waiter; “but it comes hardest on the secretary, poor feller. He was just a-goin’ to get spliced, an’ there he’s ’bliged to put it off. He’s such a good feller too.”

“Ahit’s werry hard,” said the cook.

“Werry,” said the head waiter.

Having shaken their heads in concert, these worthies dropped the subject as being an unpleasant one.

In Mr Stuart’s drawing-room, referring to the same subject, Miss Penelope Stuart said to Mr George Stuart

“Well, I’m sure, George, it seems to me that it would be only right and proper to forgive poor Kenneth, not that he’s done anything exactly wrong, but forgiveness is a Christian duty, whether it’s an enemy you’ve hurt, or a friend who has hurt you, thatthat, how could he help it, you know, brother, now do be reasonable, and only think of the poor boy having to part with that great cart-horsethough it’ll be the death of him some day whether he parts with it or not, for it’s a dreadful creature, and Dan tooI’m sure the perplexities people are put to by banks failing. Why don’t people prevent them from failing? But the worst is his marriage being put off, and it so near. I do think, brother, you might take him back and”

“Pray hold your tongue, Peppy,” said Mr Stuart, who was attempting to read the Times, “I’m not listening to you, and if you are pleading for my son Kenneth, let me say to you, once for all, that I have done with him for ever. I would not give him a sixpence if he were starving.”

“Well, but,” persevered the earnest Miss Peppy, “if he were to repent, you know, and come and ask pardon, (dear me, where are those scissors? ah, here they are), surely you would not refuse, (the thimble nextwhat a world of worries!) toto give him”

“Peppy, I have stated my sentiments, pray do not trouble me further in regard to this matter. Nothing can move me.”

Miss Peppy sighed, and retired to pour her regrets into the sympathetic ear of

Mrs Niven.

Gaff sat in the chimney-corner of the “Boodwar” smoking his pipe and staring at Shrieky, which, having survived the voyage home, had been hung up in a cage in the little window, and was at that time engaged in calling loudly for Squeaky, who, having also survived the voyage, was grubbing up stones and mud at the front door. Mrs Gaff was seated opposite to him, with Tottie’s head in her lap; for she still solaced herself by smoothing her hair. Billy was sitting on one of the six chairs whittling a piece of wood.

“It’s a bad business,” said Gaff; “bad for everybody consarned; but wust for Mr Stuart.”

“An’ his man,” said Billy.

“And Susan,” said Tottie.

“Gaff,” said Mrs Gaff, “it’s my advice to you to go up to the bank, ask them for a thousand pounds, (if they have as much in the shop at the time, if not, ye can take what they have, and call again for the rest), give it all to Miss Lizzie Gordon, and tell her to go and get married right off. We won’t miss it, Gaff. In fact it seems to me that the more we give away the more we have to give. It’s an awful big fortin’ we’ve comed into. But that’s what I advise.”

“I doubt she wouldn’t take it,” said Gaff.

“Oh yes, she would,” cried his better half.

Billy and Tottie being of the same opinion, Gaff laid aside his pipe, got out the tea-caddy, from which he took his cheque-book, and made Tottie write out a cheque for 1000 pounds, payable to Miss Lizzie Gordon.

“She deserves it well o’ me,” observed Gaff, as he slowly printed his signature on the cheque, “for she gave me the Noo Testament, that’s bin o’ more valley to me than thousands o’ gold an’ silverGod bless her.”

The cheque was taken up and presented by Gaff on the following morning, but to the honest man’s dismay, Lizzie declined it positively, though she accompanied her refusal with many earnest expressions of gratitude, and kissed the seaman’s hard hand at parting.

Gaff returned to the “Boodwar,” lit his German pipe with the cheque, and said, “I knowed she wouldn’t tak’ itdear girl.”

Kenneth was standing in the bower at the foot of my garden, looking pensively on the distant landscape, which was bathed in the rich glow of the setting sun.

His right arm embraced the slender waist of Lizziehis left encircled the shoulder of Emmie Graham.

“We must have patience, darling,” said Kenneth, with an effort at cheerfulness.

“Our hopes were as bright as that lovely sky some days ago,” said Lizzie.

While she was speaking the sun descended behind a bank of heavy clouds.

“And thus have our hopes gone down,” murmured Kenneth sadly.

“But, uncle,” observed Emmie, “the sun is still shining behind the clouds.”

“Thank you, Emmie, for the comforting word,” said Lizzie, “and our sun is indeed shining still.”

The trio left off contemplating the sky, and returned in improved spirits to Bingley Hall, where my strong-minded wife had just delivered herself of the following oration:

“It’s of no use talking to me,” (she was right; I never found it to be of the least use to talk to her.) “Old Stuart is a monsternobody will convince me to the contrary. I only wish I had the making of the laws, and I would have powerful cures got up for such as he. And his brother-in-law is no betterCrusty indeed, bad though it is, the name is too good for him. Don’t interrupt me. He is not like many of his neighbours, for he has had no provocation. The captain of dragoons has turned out a very good husband, and poor Bella is as happy with him as such a flirt could expect to be.”

I ventured to remark at this point that my wife was wandering from the subject from which she started, but she became extremely angry, and finally put me down and snuffed me out by assuring me that I had been born at least a generation before my time.

Dan Horsey sat on the dresser of my kitchen, switching his boot with a riding-whip, and looking at Susan with an extremely melancholy expression of countenance. Susan was cleaning a silver tea-pother usual occupation when Dan was present. Cooknow resigned to her fatewas sighing and peeling potatoes in the scullery.

“Och! darlint, me heart’s heavier than a cart o’ coals,” said Dan. “Bucephalus is to be sowld next week, and I’m to quit in a month!”

Susan sighed.

“To be sure, I’d aisy git another place, but in the meantime that’ll put off our

weddin', jewel, till I don' know when."

Susan sighed again, and Dan hit his boot somewhat smartly, as if he were indignant with Fate.

"But it's wus," continued Dan, "for masther an' Miss Gordon than for us, darlintthere, now, don't toss yer head, mavourneen, ye know we can git spliced av we like whenever I git a noo sitiwation; but masther can't well throw up the wan he's got, an' yit it won't kape him an' his wife. Och! worse luck! Av we could only diskiver a goold mine now, or somethin' o' that sort."

"Well, I am sorry for them," said Susan, with another sigh; "an' I'm sure I hope that we'll get over our troubles, all of us, though I don't see very well how."

"Arrah! now, don't look so blue, me angel," said Dan, rising and putting his arm round Susan. "Me heart is lighter since I comed here and saw yer sweet face. Sure there's midcine in the glance o' yer purty blue eye. Come now, cheer up, an' I'll ventur a prophecy."

"What may that be?" asked Susan with a smile.

"That you and I shall be spliced before two months is out. See if we won't."

Susan laughed; but Dan stoutly asserted that his prophecies always came true, and then, saying that he was the bearer of a letter to Miss Peppy, he bade Susan adieu, and took himself off.

I turn now to Miss Puff, who happened about this time to be on a visit to us. She was seated one forenoon alone in the dining-room of Bingley Hall, when a loud ring came to the door-bell; a quick step was heard on the stair, and next moment the dining-room door burst open, and my son Gildart rushed into the room.

Gildart was wonderfully changed since the day he had sailed for China. He had grown tall and stout. Moreover he had whiskersnot very bushy, perhaps, but, undeniable whiskers.

"Hallo! Puff!" he exclaimed, rushing towards his old friend with the intention of kissing her; but when Miss Puff rose to receive him, he felt constrained to check himself.

"Why, how you are grown, and so changed!" he said, shaking her hand warmly.

Miss Puff was indeed changed, so much so that her old friends who had not

seen her for some time could scarcely have known her. She was no longer fat and inane. Her figure had become slim and graceful; her face had become expressive and remarkably pretty, and her manners were those of a well-bred and self-possessed lady. Gildart felt that he could no more have taken the liberties he had ventured on in former years than he could have flown.

He soon became very chatty, however, and speedily began to question her in regard to his father and mother, (who, she told him, were not at home), and old friends.

“And what of my friend Kenneth Stuart?” said he.

“He is well, poor fellow,” replied Miss Puff; “but he is in unhappy circumstances just now.”

Here she related the circumstances of the bank failure, and the evil consequences that followed, and were still pending over Kenneth and many of their other friends in Wreckumoft.

“That’s a sad business,” said Gildart; “but I don’t see how it can be mended. I fear me it is a case of ‘grin and bear it.’ And your aunt, Miss Puff, what of the adorable Miss Flouncer?”

“She is now Lady Doles.”

“You don’t say so! Well, I had given Sir Richard credit for more sense. How long is it since they married?”

“About two years.”

“Is Sir Richard dead?”

“No, why should you think so?”

“Because if it had been me, I should have succumbed in three months. It’s an awful thing to think of being married to a she-griffin.”

“She is my aunt, Mr Bingley,” said Miss Puff.

“Ah, to be sure, forgive me. But now I must go and search for my father. Adieu. Miss Puffau revoir.”

Gildart left the room with a strange sensation of emptiness in his breast.

“Why, surelyit cannot be that IIam in love with that girl, that stupid, fatbut she’s not stupid and not fat now. She’s graceful and intelligent and prettyabsolutely beautiful; why, botheration, I am in love or insane, perhaps

both!”

Thus soliloquising my son entered my study.

The last conversation that I shall record, took place between Mr Stuart senior and Colonel Crusty. It occurred about two weeks after those conversations that have just been narrated. The colonel had been suddenly summoned to see his brother-in-law, “on his death-bed,”so the epistle that summoned him had been worded by Miss Peppy.

That dinner at which these two friends had enjoyed themselves so much happened to disagree with Mr George Stuart, insomuch that he was thrown into a bilious feverturned as yellow as a guinea and as thin as a skeleton. He grew worse and worse. Wealth was at his commandso was everything that wealth can purchase; but although wealth procured the best of doctors in any number that the patient chose to order them, it could not purchase health. So Mr Stuart pined away. The doctors shook their heads and gave him up, recommending him to send for his clergyman.

Mr Stuart scorned the recommendation at first; but as he grew worse he became filled with an undefinable dread, and at last did send for his pastor. As a big cowardly boy at school tyrannises over little boys and scoffs at fear until a bigger than he comes and causes his cheek to blanch, so Mr Stuart bullied and scorned the small troubles of life, and scoffed at the anxieties of religious folk until death came and shook his fist in his face; then he succumbed and trembled, and confessed himself, (to himself), to be a coward. One result of the clergyman’s visit was that Mr Stuart sent for Colonel Crusty.

“My dear Stuart,” said the colonel, entering the sick man’s room and gently taking his wasted hand which lay outside the counterpane, “I am distressed to find you so ill; bless me, how thin you are! But don’t lose heart. I am quite sure you have no reason to despond. A man with a constitution like yours can pull through a worse illness than this. Come, cheer up and look at the bright side of things. I have seen men in hospital ten times worse than you are, and get better.”

Mr Stuart shook, or rather rolled, his head slowly on the pillow, and said in a weak voice

“No, colonel, I am dyingat least the doctors say so, and I think they are right.”

“Nonsense, my dear fellow,” returned the colonel kindly, “doctors are often mistaken, and many a man recovers after they have given him up.”

“Well, that may be or it may not be,” said Mr Stuart with a sudden access of

energy, “nevertheless I believe that I am a dying man, and I have sent for you on purpose to tell you that I am an assa consummate ass.”

“My dear Stuart,” remonstrated the colonel, “really, you are taking a very warped view of”

“Iamanass,” repeated the sick man, interrupting his friend; “more than that, you are an ass too, colonel.”

The colonel was a very pompous and stately man. He had not been honoured with his true title since he left school, and was therefore a good deal taken aback by the plain-speaking of his friend. He attributed the words, however, to the weak condition of Mr Stuart’s mind, and attempted to quiet him, but he would not be quieted.

“No, no, colonel; it’s of no use trying to shut our eyes to the fact. You and I have set our hearts on the things of this world, and I have now come to see that the man who does that is a fool.”

“My dear fellow,” said the colonel soothingly, “it is bodily weakness that induces you to think so. Most people speak thus when they are seriously ill; but they invariably change their opinion when they get well again.”

“You are wrong, colonel. I am now convinced that they do not change their opinions. They may change their wills, but their opinions must remain the same. The conclusion which I have now come to has been forced upon me by cool, logical reasoning; and, moreover, it has more than once flashed upon me in the course of my life, but I shut my eyes to it. The approach of death has only opened them to see very clearly what I was more than half aware of before. Do not suppose that I make this confession of my folly to you in order to propitiate the Deity. I do not for a moment expect that the God whom I have neglected all my life can be humbugged in this way. No, I have deliberately cast Him off in time past, and I recognise it as my due that He should cast me off now. It is too late to repent, so I suppose that there is no hope for me.”

Mr Stuart paused here a few minutes. The shade of doubt expressed in his last words was occasioned by the recollection of the clergyman’s assurance that it was never too late to repent; that the finished work of Jesus Christ, (which leaves nothing for a man to do but to “believe and live”), would avail the sinner at the latest hour.

The colonel sat gazing at his friend in silence. Presently the sick man resumed as though he had not paused:

“Therefore what I say to you now is not intended as a propitiatory offering,

but is the result of clear and calm conviction. Now listen to me, for I feel getting weak. Let me entreat you to forgive your daughter. Will you take that entreaty into earnest consideration? I do not ask you to promise. It is folly to make men promise what they don't want to do. The chances are that they'll break the promise. I only ask you to take this subject into your serious consideration. It is the request of a dying man. Will you grant it?"

The colonel coughed, and looked troubled.

"Colonel," said Mr Stuart, "I have forgiven Kennethat is to say, we are reconciled; for I can scarcely be said to forgive one who never offended me. The gladness that has ensued on that reconciliation is worth more to me than all the gold I ever made."

"Stuart," said the colonel, somewhat suddenly, "I'll do what you ask."

"Thank you; you're a good fellow. Squeeze my handthere now, go away; I'll sleep for a little. Stay, perhaps, I may never waken; if so, farewell. You'll find a fire in the library if you choose to wait till it's over. God bless you."

The sick man turned on his side with a sigh, and fell into a sleep so deep and quiet that the colonel left the room with some uncertainty as to whether his friend were still in the land of the living.

Chapter Thirty Five.
Conclusion.

Gladness is a source of life. It is probable that the joy which filled Mr Stuart's heart, in consequence of being reconciled to Kenneth, and having induced his brother-in-law to promise to consider the possibility of forgiving Bella, was the cause of a favourable turn in his malady. At all events he did recover, to the surprise of every one, and the utter discomfiture of the doctors who had given him up!

The sentiments which Mr Stuart had expressed when, as was supposed, in a dying state, did not forsake him when he was restored to health, for, whereas in former days all his time, health, and wealth, were dedicated to himself, now they were all devoted to God. Mr Stuart's face, so to speak, had been turned south before his illness; after his illness it was turned north. There was no other change than this. He did not change his nature, nor did he change his pursuits. Even those of them which were sinful were not changedthey were given up. He did not cease to be an irascible man, but he fought against his temper, (which he had never done before), and so became less irascible. He

did not give up his profession, but he gave up the evils which he had before permitted to cling to it. He did not cease to make money, but he ceased to hoard it, and devoted the money made to higher ends than heretofore. He did not think of the world and its affairs less, but he thought of his Maker more, and in so doing became a better man of the world than ever! Gloom and asceticism began to forsake him, because the Bible told him to “rejoice evermore.” Philanthropy began to grow, because the Bible told him to “look not upon his own things, but upon the things of others.” He had always been an energetic man, but he became more so now, because the Bible told him that “whatever his hand found to do, he ought to do it with his might.”

In short, Mr Stuart became a converted man, and there was no mystery whatever in his conversion. Great though its effects were, it was simply this,that the Holy Spirit had enabled him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many results followed from this change in the old man. One of the first was that Kenneth and Lizzie Gordon were married, Bucephalus was not sold, and Dan Horsey was retained in the service of his young master.

Miss Peppy came out very strong on that occasion of Kenneth’s marriage. She laughed, and then she wept, and then, by way of variety, she did both at once. She kissed everybody that came within arm’s-length of her, partly because her heart was very full, partly because her tears blinded her, so that she could not easily distinguish who was who. She made an effort once or twice to skip, and really, considering her age and infirmities, the efforts were wonderfully successful. She also sang a little; attempted to whistle, but failed, and talked straight on for several days without cessation, (except when asleep and at meals), the most extraordinary amount of nonsense that ever came from the lips of woman.

True to their resolve, Dan Horsey and Susan Barepoles were married at the end of the same week. And it is worthy of remark that mad Haco danced at their wedding, and by so doing, shook to its foundation the building in which it occurred.

Strange to say, my son, Lieutenant Bingley, arrived from China on the morning of the wedding, so that he had the unexpected pleasure of dancing at it too, and of chaffing Haco on being “done out of his daughter!”

The “Boodwar” was the scene of the festivities at Dan’s wedding. It was more; it was also the locality in which the honeymoon was spent. Mrs Gaff had insisted on taking a little jaunt to Ramsgate, with her husband, son, and daughter, in order that she might give up her abode to Dan and Susan, who were favourites with her.

Thus it came to pass that when the festivities of the wedding drew to a close, the bride and bridegroom, instead of leaving their friends, were left by their friends in possession of the “Boodwar.”

It now remains for me, reader, to draw this veracious narrative to a close.

My son Gildart married Miss Puff, and ultimately became a commander in the navy. My wife’s strength of mind gave way before increasing years, and she finally became as gentle as she was when I first paid my addresses to her!

Emmie Graham became a permanent inmate of Kenneth’s home. The shock that she had sustained when Gaff saved her life told upon her constitution so severely that she fell into bad health, but there was a sunny cheerfulness of disposition about her which induced those with whom she came in contact to regard her as a sunbeam. Lady Doles became stronger-minded day by day, and finally reduced Sir Richard to the condition of a mere human machine, with just enough spirit left to enable him to live and do her bidding.

Colonel Crusty forgave Bella, and, as is not infrequently the case in similar circumstances, he and his son-in-law the major, (for he rose to that rank), became bosom friends. When the latter retired on half-pay they all took up their abode in Wreckumoft.

Kenneth retained his old post, for, although independent of its salary, he would not eat the bread of idleness. As Secretary to the Sailors’ Home he frequently met me while I was going about in my capacity of honorary agent of the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society.

Billy Gaff went to sea, and ultimately became captain of an East Indiaman, to his mother’s unspeakable delight.

Gaff and his wife and Tottie remained in the “Boodwar” for many years. They did not find their fortune too much for them, being guided in the use thereof by the Bible.

In regard to the state of things that had come about, Miss Peppy used to say confidentially, to Mrs Niven, that she never knew anything like it. It beat all the novels she had ever read, not that she had read novels much, although some of them were good as well as bad, but she felt that too many of them were hurtful; of course, she meant if taken immoderately, but people were always taking things so immoderately. How could it be otherwise in a world where surprise was the chronic condition of the mind, and events were always happening in a way that led one to expect that everything would likely turn out in a manner that was most improbable, if not impossible, which she wouldn’t

wonder at, for it was enough to fill the lower animals themselves with amazement to see the way in which scissors and thimbles and keys worried people whose whole beings ought to be bent on far higher mattersnot to mention people being left at other people's doors by people whom one didn't know at the time, but came to know afterwards, as well asdear! dear! it was of no use talking; for things had gone on so, no doubt, ever since Adam and Eve walked about in Eden, and doubtless things would continue to go on so, more or less, to the end of time.