

IN ONE TOWN.

VOL. II.

a

IN ONE TOWN.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ANCHOR-WATCH YARNS," ETC.

"Many ways meet in one town."—*King Henry V.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS.

Part the Second—(Continued).

CHAPTER XI.		PAGE
MANXMAN <i>VERSUS</i> BLUENOSE,		1
CHAPTER XII.		
IN WHICH CAPTAIN NIXON HAS SOME PLEASANT AND SOME UNPLEASANT QUARTERS OF AN HOUR,		10
CHAPTER XIII.		
IN WHICH SUSAN MAKES A CONFESSION,		30

Part the Third.

IN DOUBT.

CHAPTER I.		
BY THE SEA,		39
CHAPTER II.		
IN WHICH HELEN UNPACKS HER HEART,		48
CHAPTER III.		
IN WHICH THE BISHOP APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER,		57
CHAPTER IV.		
IN WHICH MISS WALSH LANDS HER FISH,		68
CHAPTER V.		
IN WHICH CAPTAIN NIXON FALLS INTO A TRAP,		77

	CHAPTER VI.	PAGE
BITER BIT,		88
	CHAPTER VII.	
<i>FIAT JUSTITIA</i> ,		101
	CHAPTER VIII.	
"HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?"		110
	CHAPTER IX.	
MOSTLY RETROSPECTIVE,		116
	CHAPTER X.	
IN WHICH SOME OLD ACQUAINTANCES MEET,		128
	CHAPTER XI.	
A WEDDING AND A PROPOSAL,		140
	CHAPTER XII.	
HOME SICKNESS,		155
	CHAPTER XIII.	
IN WHICH A FLIGHT IS INTERRUPTED,		164
	CHAPTER XIV.	
AN ESSAY IN POLYSYLLABLES,		178
	CHAPTER XV.	
NEWS OF THE <i>WATER NYMPH</i> ,		197
	CHAPTER XVI.	
MORE UNPLEASANT NEWS,		206
	CHAPTER XVII.	
SKIPPERS AND SCANDAL,		211
	CHAPTER XVIII.	
AN AVENGER,		223
<i>CONCLUSION</i> ,		229

Part the Second

(Continued).



IN ONE TOWN.

Part the Second

(CONTINUED).

CHAPTER XI.

MANXMAN *VERSUS* BLUE-NOSE.

NEXT forenoon Nixon stood on the poop of his ship. He was quite satisfied with the result of his first interview with the landlady of the "Bold Dragoon." He had decidedly created a favourable impression.

Altogether, the skipper felt in very good humour. He had given the master of the tug-boat a false return of his registered tonnage, upon which the

tonnage rates were chargeable. He was under the impression the master of the hard-working little paddle-boat would not trouble to inquire what the *Greenback's* tonnage really was, and he felt a thrill of pride and pleasure at having outwitted at least one of the inhabitants of Sloughford.

After taking a short constitutional up and down the poop, he approached the wheel, and leaning against it, cigar in mouth, he began to think how he ought to deal with the merchant's tallyman, for the purpose of tampering with the tallyboard. He had almost made up his mind to bribe the tallyman boldly, and was about to walk to the main hatchway, when he observed the tug which had helped his ship up the river paddling swiftly towards him.

"Hallo!" he cried. "I wonder is this chap making for me. Yes. Blowed if he ain't. What is he up to, I wonder?"

The tug-boat was now alongside, and her rope was thrown aboard the *Greenback* and made fast.

The master of the tug, a ruddy-cheeked, red-haired, jolly-looking Manxman, measuring six feet two in height, and forty-four inches round the chest, jumped aboard Captain Nixon's vessel, and

walked aft to Angus, who was now leaning with one elbow on a spoke of the wheel.

"Good morning, skipper," cried the Manxman, in a loud, hearty manner.

"Good morning, tug-boat," drawled Nixon. "Have a weed?"

"Don't smoke—thank you all the same, captain. I just gave you a look up, as I happened to have business in this direction. I want to ask you not to forget me when you are going down the river. You may as well give me the job of towing you down, as we got on so well together coming up."

"Cert'nly, tug-boat; cert'nly," replied Nixon, delighted to find that his false return of tonnage had not been discovered by the burly Manxman, and still more delighted at the prospect of perpetrating another little fraud on the outward journey. "Have a drink, tug-boat? Got some rare old rum in the cabin."

"Thank you very much again, captain; but I'm not inclined for drinking just now."

"Won't drink! don't smoke! Have a chaw then. Be sociable, man! Put a plug of this into your jaw."

"The fact is, when I'm on business, captain, I'm

not much given to enjoying myself. I suppose you know it's the rule of the port to square the outward towage bill when you engage the tug. You see if you pay me now, it will save you all further trouble; and you'll be busy enough getting things to rights when you're going to sea, without having the bother of settling a trifling account with me. Sometimes it isn't easy to get hold of a tug when you want one, but if you hire me now and square up with me, I'll guarantee to be ready for you at two hours' notice."

The master and owner of the *Greenback* bit a section off his cigar, and, after chewing it to his satisfaction, spat it in instalments on the deck. He was ruminating.

"If," pondered Nixon, "this big, soft-looking coon by any possibility smells a rat, and if I pays him aforehand, he may play some trick on me."

Then the other side of the matter presented itself to him. "If he does not smell a rat, which I takes it is the right conclusion, I'll have the satisfaction of bamboozling him the second time. I can't reasonably expect to find two different tug-boat skippers that will swallow my hundred and twenty-two tons for a hundred and fifty-two, so I'd best stick to the

old love and chance it." Could he be sure of his man? A careful inspection of this son of the Isle of Man ought to satisfy him, for if Angus R. Nixon wasn't a judge of character, he'd like to know who was.

Therefore, with half-closed eyes, he surveyed the Manxman from the top of his cloth cap to the soles of his huge sea-boots. Then Angus fastened his gaze somewhat about the waistband of his *vis-à-vis*, and, opening his eyes, slowly lifted them until they stared full into those of the tug-boat skipper.

"Waal," said Captain Nixon, "I guess, stranger, I rather like the cut of your jib. You're a neat man, you are—seventeen stone, if you're an ounce. There aint no sharp corners about you nowhere, I calculate. You can have the job. But, look here, won't it be quite time enough to net your dollars when your work is done?—that's ship-shape and Boston fashion, aint it?"

"It would be right enough, of course, only you see, captain, it's the custom of the port to pay your outward towage when you hire the boat, and I would only get into trouble all round if I broke rules. I can call another day before your cargo is discharged, and perhaps you'll have time to inquire then if I'm

telling you a lie, as you seem to think, about the rules of the port. Good day, captain."

"Stop!" cried Captain Nixon. "Jee-hosophat, do you think I'd believe my own mother if she swore you was a liar? No, sir. Have your money—make out your bill!"

The Manxman took a dirty-looking book from his breast-pocket. Laying the book on the top of the companion, he sharpened a stumpy pencil with his clasp-knife. Then, closing his knife, he began to make out his account.

"How many tons do you register, captain? I ought to know, of course, but my memory is none of the best."

"One hundred and twenty-two."

"One hundred and twenty-two," echoed the Manxman, entering that figure in his book. "A hundred and twenty-two at sixpence is three pounds one shilling."

"Three pounds one shilling. Right you are. That's it, aint it?" said Nixon, handing the money to the skipper of the tug-boat.

"Now, you infernal thief!" cried the Manxman, pocketing the coin, "pay me thirty shillings more at

once—fifteen shillings for the up-towage, and fifteen for the down. If you don't, as sure as my name is Bill King, I'll chuck you over the stern. One hundred and fifty-two is your figure, my son."

Nixon's cigar fell from his fingers, and for a moment he looked as if he had been stricken with paralysis. However, he pulled himself together quickly, and placed his right hand on the handle of his sheath-knife.

"You impudent, ignorant, whisky-drinking skunk, how dare you try to come the bully over me? Leave my ship this instant, or, so help me, I'll make a 'spread-eagle' of you! Now, you just do a hop-along there in double quick time, or I'll whistle for my crew."

"Oh, don't think I'm in the least alarmed about yourself or your sailors! My own crew, and a few others along with them, are just waiting for the word from me to jump aboard and give you about as good a licking as you deserve. I know I ought to have you locked up for trying to come that trick over me; but it will hurt you a sight more to fork out that thirty shillings. Best be quick about it, Blue Nose, for I haven't much time to throw away on you."

Captain William King held out his enormous hand, and Captain Angus R. Nixon, with a demoniacal scowl, placed three half-sovereigns in the extended palm.

"Well, I'm obliged to you, Blue Nose, for having got to wind'ard of you about engaging me for the outward towage," chuckled Captain King, who had been acting on information received privately from Foxy Ned; "but mind how you steer your craft when I'm helping you down the river. Put two men on the wheel, Blue Nose, and if I see any tricks about your manner of steering, you may take my word for it I'll cut your tow-rope without a word of warning. Bye-bye, Blue Nose!"

And, laughing so heartily that he could scarcely get on board the tug, Captain King bade a temporary good-bye to the *Greenback*.

The New Brunswicker went below and threw himself on the bed in his state-room. After groaning and swearing for about a quarter of an hour, he sat up in bed and muttered,—

"Such a cussed run of ill-luck! Did anyone ever hear of such a cussed run of ill-luck? I feels, I do, as if someone had just ripped the backbone

clean out of me. To be bested by a tarnation fresh-water son of a gun! Did anyone ever hear of the like? If I weren't a man of strong principles I'd dash my brains out with a marlinspike, I would. Brains! It seems as if mine had got adrift, it does. I'm too conscientious, I am. That's what it is. I lets 'em play on me, I do. But I'll have my revenge. I'll take it out agen my con-sign-ee, I will, with interest and assurance added. I'll have no more soft-sawdering with the cusses I meets here. I'll just twist that old mummy who tallies cargo for my con-sign-ee round my fingers. There won't be much trouble over that job, for he's about the most doddering old idiot that ever made his mark with a lump of chalk. If I can't twist him body and soul like a piece of catgut, I'll go and drive a donkey-ngine for the remainder of my natural life."





CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN NIXON HAS SOME PLEASANT AND
SOME UNPLEASANT QUARTERS OF AN HOUR.

WHEN Nixon came on deck the morning after his unpleasant interview with the master of the tug-boat, he was both astonished and alarmed to find that the tallyman, with whom he had the previous day entered into a little private arrangement, was not at his usual post. In his place stood a keen-looking youngster of about eighteen, with whom the master of the *Greenback* at once decided it would be unwise to tamper.

As the skipper approached the main hatchway, the new tallyman observed,—

“Poor old Jim, captain! He was taken bad last night, and there’s no knowin’ when he’ll come

round again. He was talking a dale in his wanderin's about the softness of your heart, captain; so I hopes you won't forget himself and his family if you've a trifle to spare."

"You just hold your jaw, youngster, and don't speak to your betters until they ask you. That's what you'll do, youngster."

Then the captain turned angrily away and sought the neighbourhood of the wheel.

"There's something in the air of this cussed place that's dead agen' me," he groaned. "There, I had the chance of doing a neat bit of brainwork, and a tarnation half-starved idiot should go and get drunk—for I guess that's near about the size of it. 'Tis enough to make a man go and risk his salvation by cussing and swearing all the days of his life; but Angus R. Nixon never yet said die! It might have been worse, too, when I thinks on it. The old fool might have gone and blabbed, and got me into trouble. Wonder will I have a try with the new tallyman? He's a knowing shaver, he is, that youngster—just the sort of chap I'd like to have a fair stand up fight with, brain agen' brain."

Ere he had time to screw up his courage for the brain struggle, he was startled by a loud, sharp voice from the wharf alongside which the *Greenback* lay,—

“Is Captain Nixon aboard?”

“Ay, ay, sir. Here he is, at your service, as large as life,” taking off his wide-awake and bowing profoundly.

“I suppose you know who I am, captain?”

“Yes, *sir*; that I do. You’re the gentleman that owns this cargo. That’s about the size of it, aint it? I’ve seed you only twice afore, but Angus R. Nixon—that’s me, Mr Mahon—never forgets a face. Won’t you step on board, sir?”

“No, captain. I will *not* step on board!”

“You seems a kind of out o’ sorts this morning, you do, merchant. Hope you ain’t got no fault to find with me for bringing your fish here so smart?” this with an ironical smile.

“No, captain. I have no fault to find with the sailing powers of your vessel, but I want to tell you here, in the presence of your crew and my own men, that I consider you an unmitigated black-guard; and further, that—”

“By Jupiter!” yelled Captain Nixon, producing a long sheath-knife from his waistband, and flourishing it in the air, “if you’ll just step on board and repeat your choice observations, I’ll slit your tongue for you like I’d slit—”

“Oh, keep your bluster for the high seas. We don’t understand it here, I can assure you. I was about to remark, when you so rudely interrupted me, that if I hear you make any further attempts to tamper with my men, I will do my best to introduce you to the notice of a police officer.”

Captain Nixon put the knife into its leather sheath. The mention of the word “police” had always a peculiar effect on his nervous organisation.

“Remember, my fine fellow,” continued the fish-monger, “that I shall make no allowance to you for short delivery. I have always been in the habit of allowing a little licence in such matters; but if you deliver to me one quintal of fish or one barrel of oil less than the quantity specified in your bills of lading, I shall charge you with the deficiency. And in the shape of advice—if advice is any good to you, which I am rather inclined to doubt—I would say, don’t offer a post of confidence

to a stranger until you are perfectly certain you know your man inside out."

With this parting thrust, which went straight through the chinks of Nixon's armour, Mr Mahon retired from the wharf, and the master of the *Greenback* went to his cabin, and was not seen on deck again until dusk. Then, with well-washed face and carefully-oiled locks, and clothed in the most clumsily-cut suit of shiny black that ever came from the hands of a tailor, he stepped ashore, bent on making a complete conquest of Miss Julia Walsh.

When he walked into the "Bold Dragoon," he was informed that the landlady was in the Nest, tidying up the room for the evening. Nixon at once determined to make the most of his opportunity, and he lounged jauntily into the skippers' sanctum.

The landlady smiled pleasantly at her visitor, and treated him to a warm hand-shake. After some stereotyped remarks about the weather, she said,—

"I may tell you, Captain Nixon, I look upon you already as an old friend. I expect," with a gentle cough, "I connect you in some way with the sad news about the loss of my poor dear brother. As a friend, I want to ask your advice now."

"Glad to hear you say so. I look upon your good self, Miss Julia, as something even nearer than a friend, if you will pardon the observation."

"The fact is, I have been badly, very badly treated lately."

"Show me the man or woman," interrupted Nixon gallantly, "as would treat you badly, and I'll make short work of 'em."

"Thank you, captain; but it's more with the intention of asking your advice than your assistance that I am going to trouble you with my little grievances. You see," she sighed, "I am, I may say, alone in the world; and there is nothing so helpless as an unprotected female."

"You needn't be long unprotected, if your mind runs that way," smiled the skipper—"but business is business. What's your trouble? You can reckon on me. I am as true as steel, I am!"

"Thank you again, captain. This is my trouble now. My poor brother left his will in charge of Butler, your agent here. I know I am handsomely provided for; but Butler won't give up the will."

"Won't give it up!"

"Well, to-day he tells me it was stolen when his

place was broken into: but what would a burglar want with such a document? There is some trickery going on between himself and my brother's widow—that's the secret of it. He says he will consult her, and she says she will consult him. Oh, it's all a game, I know. They want to gain time to puzzle out some plan for cheating me out of my rights. Now, if there is any more humbugging about it, what would you commend me to do, Captain Nixon?"

"Go to a smart, wide-awake lawyer right straight away. That's what you'll do. How much, if it's a fair question, might you be expecting—I mean," he added quickly, fearing his real intention in putting the question might be too easily guessed, "is it worth while going to law over it?"

"I should think it was. I am sure it is a matter of a couple of thousand, at the very least."

"A couple of thousand!" exclaimed the skipper. It would be absurd to act any longer the part of a calm, cold misogynist. With a grin that would cause a Cheshire cat pangs of envy, he suddenly developed into an ardent lover. He soon discovered that the landlady made no attempt to repulse him. The lovemaking, it may be stated, consisted mainly

of horseplay on the part of Nixon and giggling on the part of Miss Walsh.

In the midst of the billing and cooing, Captain Carmody's shrill voice was heard, and then came the noisy tramp of feet. Miss Walsh quickly seized a duster, and was busy rubbing the convex glass face of the barometer when Carmody, Bendall, Arkwright, and the Bishop entered the Nest.

The four Sloughford skippers were somewhat surprised at finding the stranger settled comfortably in the Nest. They had taken an instinctive dislike to Nixon, and looked upon his presence in their favourite haunt as an intrusion. They bade him good evening coldly, and each man drew his chair close to the fireplace, almost shutting out the view of the fire from the master of the *Greenback*, who was now seated alongside the table, his hand supporting his head.

Nixon felt a trifle ill at ease, but he was determined that "those ignorant coasting captains, who had no more manners than a Chicago hog," should be shown the inferiority of their position, intellectually, and socially. That they should.

For a few minutes there was dead silence in the

Nest. Then the Bishop was seized with a pang of remorse, and, turning round, he addressed the New Brunswicker,—

“I am going to order a round, Captain Nixon. What will you drink, sir?” standing up and pulling the bell-rope which dangled near the mantelpiece.

“Nothing, thank you,” replied Nixon, in a gruff voice.

“Be sociable, man!” said the Bishop.

“Sociable? You’re a nice lot of sociable chaps, you are. You come in here and plant yourself right in front of the fire, without as much as begging a man’s pardon. That’s manners, aint it?—but what can you expect from a parcel of coasting skippers?” he added, with a sneer.

The entry of Miss Walsh prevented an explosion, and, making a strong effort to control his anger, the Bishop gave the order for the drinks.

Carmody had started violently at Nixon’s speech, and, turning round, stared fiercely at the New Brunswicker. Arkwright had also been galvanised into action, and was now rubbing his nose as if he had determined to establish a polish on its surface. Bendall, who had been concocting a plan for getting

hold of the Bishop's umbrella, was now chuckling violently, and was no doubt giving vent to his emotions by unuttered, "Oh dear, oh dears."

When Miss Walsh returned with the liquor and laid the tray on the table, she observed that something unpleasant had happened. Treating Nixon to a warning frown, she returned silently to the shop.

"Here's bad luck to all the blue noses in Christendom!" cried Carmody, lifting his glass and holding it high in the air.

The toast was drunk in silence, but with evident gusto, and for a moment Nixon was so taken aback that he found himself powerless to utter a word. Then, with a gasp, he hissed through his teeth,—

"Did you mean that observation for me, stranger?"

"Cap fit, cap wear," replied Carmody, taking another sip from his glass.

"Look here, you half-drunken, whole-ignorant baboon, for two pins I'd shake you like a terrier shakes a rat."

"No doubt, no doubt," rejoined Carmody. "I knew there was a good deal of the cur about you."

"Wha-at!" screamed Nixon, jumping to his feet, and stretching his long arm over the head of the

Bishop, who was seated between Carmody and his would-be aggressor. The peace-loving Bishop, seeing that mischief was imminent, caught Nixon's arm gently, but firmly, and said,—

“Don't, captain. Don't be so easily excited. No doubt there's an apology due to you. I feel now that we were a trifle rude to monopolise the fire, but we meant no harm. Sit down now like a good man, and let us forget our little squabbles, as all good Christians should.”

There was something in the Bishop's voice which seemed to soothe Nixon almost instantaneously. Muttering a string of semi-audible oaths, he sat down and folded his arms.

Then the Bishop turned to Carmody.

“Fie! fie! Pat,” he said, shaking his forefinger at the offender. “You were very wrong, indeed, to speak in that light and frivolous manner. People have feelings, Pat. You ought to bear that in mind; and do unto others as you would be done by. That's the golden medium, Pat. I'll allow that our neighbour Captain Nixon's manners aren't very nice and agreeable, any more than your own, Pat; but in this world a man should be always prepared to back his

opinions, and there's no denying, on the face of it at any rate, that your fighting weight is a long way behind that of our neighbour, Captain Nixon."

"A very eloquent and a very noble harangue, indeed!" cried Arkwright, diving his hands into his trousers pockets and stretching his legs out at full length.

The Bishop's reference to his fighting weight flattered and soothed Nixon. He held his hand out, and cried,—

"Shake hands, Captain Flynn. I rather likes you, I do. You're a straight man—a fine man. You're almost a scholard, you are."

The Bishop was visibly affected. He grasped Nixon's ungainly fist warmly with his right hand, and brushed away a tear with his left.

"What a tarnation hard fin you have got," winced Nixon, shaking his finger in the air. "It was like a vice, it was; and it ain't no bigger than a woman's," gazing in wonderment at the Bishop's small and shapely hand.

"You'd soon learn how like a woman's it was," laughed Carmody, who had determined to profit by the Bishop's advice and avoid quarrelling with

people with physique superior to his own, "if you got a box of it. It would be better for you to have a kedge anchor hove at you than to try and stop a blow from Captain Augy's fist, I can tell you."

"You don't say so, mister," sneered Nixon. "I wonder you have the cheek to address any further observations to me. That I do."

The Bishop coughed loudly, and, fearing another outbreak, he addressed himself again to the master of the *Greenback*.

"How do you like our port, captain?" he asked.

"Your port's right enough. It's the people in it I don't fancy much. They thinks they're too tarnation smart, they do—present company, of course, excepted," he added, with a loud laugh.

"I don't know how you come to think so, captain. Indeed, as a rule, it's quite the other way. The people I meet here, to my thinking, are modest, very modest, indeed. Now, there's our broker, Mr Butler. Where could you find a finer or a more knowledgeable gentleman? and there isn't a proud or a conceited turn in him."

"Butler!" sneered Nixon, remembering what Miss Walsh had a short time previously told him. "He's a nice sort, he is, and no mistake. I was diddled into giving him my ship's papers, fairly diddled. That burglary job ain't all on the square either, take my word for it. He's about as big a rascal as they makes 'em."

"What!" yelled the four Sloughford skippers, jumping to their feet, a dangerous expression in each man's eyes.

Nixon had unwittingly offered his companions the most dreadful insult he could possibly have thought of. Had he attacked their sweethearts, or wives, or religion, they might have been able to forgive him; but their pet shipbroker, never! Nixon had thrown mud at the idol of their worship. A sacrilege so terrible could only be wiped out in blood or black eyes.

The new Brunswicker was amazed at the storm he had created. He remained seated in his chair' and gazed at the infuriated mariners as if they were a collection of harmless lunatics. He did not experience any sensation of alarm.

"Sit down, gents," he cried. "What ails you all?"

"Ails us!" yelled the skippers, not knowing what course they ought to adopt.

"Sit down, gentlemen, please," cried Bendall, anger rendering him unnaturally polite. "Let me deal with Mr Nixon."

"Captains Flynn, Carmody, and Arkwright obeyed Bendall's request.

Bendall felt that the task of chastising the New Brunswicker devolved upon him. He was the only one of the four who was equal in height to the New Brunswick mariner, and if he did not equal Nixon in weight, he felt that the good cause in which he intended to wage war would lend several stones to his specific gravity.

"Allow me, gentlemen," said Bendall, addressing his friends, "to settle matters with Mr Nixon. I am the only one of you who has a right to tackle this insulting vagabond. Now, Mr Nixon"—Bendall considered the appellation "Mr" to a master-mariner would add injury to insult—"I'm ready to show you fair fight."

"Don't you work yourself into such a white heat, sonny," smiled Nixon, gazing at Butler's champion; "I am too lazy, I am, this evening to trouble about licking you into a cocked hat."

"Coward!" hissed Carmody.

"Fulsome interloper!" sneered Arkwright.

"You won't fight, won't you?" demanded Bendall.

"Certainly not with you. I don't want to be up before a coroner's jury this voyage."

"That's only bounce," said Bendall. "If you won't fight, oblige us by apologising for the language you have used about Mr Butler."

"Apologise! That ain't in the least probable. If you likes it, I'll repeat my observation, and tell you Butler, the shipbroker, is a tarnation swindler. He and another friend of yours, the widow of that man whose wreckage I fell foul of, M'Cormick—are about as keen a pair of sharpers as I have heard of for many a day."

The Bishop rose to his feet at the reference to Mrs M'Cormick. His friends were too much occupied staring in wonderment at the audacious Blue Nose to observe the expression which distorted the Bishop's features as Nixon dragged Mrs M'Cormick's name into the quarrel—an expression in which anger and horror struggled for mastery.

"Sit down, Tom," he cried, seizing Bendall by the

shoulders and pushing him into his chair. "Let this be my quarrel. I demand it as a right, a sacred right."

Nixon burst into laughter at the notion of a man of Flynn's physique daring to think of pitting himself against one who stood little short of six feet in his boots, and weighed about fifteen stone.

"Stand up, sir," said the Bishop calmly, "unless you want me to slap you across the face."

"You slap me across the face! Oh! ho! ho!" laughed Nixon.

"I'll count ten, sir; and then if you do not rise like a man, I shall carry out my threat. One, two—"

Nixon saw that the Bishop was evidently mad enough to mean what he said, so he stood up, and cried, angrily and impatiently,—

"Well, what is it you want?"

"Satisfaction—apologies are now out of the question. Step out into the middle of the room and fight me fair."

Nixon was puzzled. Evidently this fellow, who was at least three inches less in stature than he, meant to fight. Well, he would teach him a lesson. But could he depend upon getting fair play?

Addressing the three skippers who were seated, he said,—

“It’s all moonshine to talk of this man,” pointing contemptuously at the Bishop, “fighting me; but if he wants to be taught a lesson, I have no objections in life to teach it to him, just as a specimen of the sort of treatment I give to chaps who get my dander up, provided I can reckon on you fellows not joining in the row. I aint the sort of chap to tackle four men single-handed without being driven to it.”

“You may take our words,” said Bendall, “that not a man of us three will rise to his feet until the row is over.”

“That’s straight, is it?—between man and man?”

“Our words of honour on it.”

“All right. Now, friend, I’m sorry for you,” addressing the Bishop; “I’m sorry for you, I am, because I rather took a fancy to you; but as you want to be pounded, I’m glad to inform you you couldn’t come to a better man to do the trick. Sing out when you have had your fill of it.”

“Will you help me to place the table against the wall?” said the Bishop, “so that we may have plenty of elbow room.”

“With pleasure, my friend.”

The table was placed against the wall, and Captain Flynn then went to the door and quietly turned the key in the lock, in order that no intruders might disturb the combat.

Bendall could scarcely prevent himself from chuckling as he saw the Bishop divesting himself of his coat, waistcoat, and hat, and flinging all three into a corner of the room. But when the peacemaker of the port commenced to tuck up his sleeves, Captain Tom could contain himself no longer, and burst into a concatenation of chuckles and “Oh dear, oh dears.”

“Fie! fie! Tom,” said Captain Flynn, as he finished the operation of tucking his shirt sleeves above his elbows. “This is too serious a matter for this shocking frivolity. I’m surprised at you, Tom.” Then squaring himself before the tall New Brunswicker, he murmured, “I am at your service now, sir.”

The fight began. Nixon commenced by launching the most furious blows against his antagonist. The Bishop successfully dodged or parried every blow. He danced round and round the now infuriated New Brunswicker with the agility of a monkey.

The three skippers, who were seated, had forgotten

their anger, and were enjoying the fight immensely. They were aware of one fact concerning which the master of the *Greenback* was in blissful ignorance, namely, that the Bishop was an excellent boxer. Arkwright rubbed his nose until it was ruddier than the cherry; Carmody tugged at his black tuft of beard until he had almost torn it out piecemeal; Bendall was rapidly chuckling himself into a fit.

Nixon, whose blood had gradually risen to fever heat, was incensed and astonished beyond measure at the invulnerability of his antagonist—he could not, so blinding was his fury, tell whether or no his frantic efforts were damaging the Bishop—and, like a great ungainly kangaroo, he hopped around the room, launching into mid-air blows that would almost burst in an iron door.

At last the Bishop, who was perfectly cool and collected, saw his opportunity had come. The three skippers observed a quick movement of Captain Flynn's right and left hand, and almost instantaneously Captain Nixon lay doubled up in a corner of the "Nest."





CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH SUSAN MAKES A CONFESSION.

DALTON was disgusted with himself when he reviewed, next morning, his conduct in the garden of Woodbine Cottage. Butler was right after all. He did not know the measure of his own weakness.

When he had gone back to the house with Mrs M'Cormick, he had discovered, much to his relief, that the shipbroker did not suspect anything. He had scarcely the courage to look Butler straight in the face as they stood chatting for a few moments in the porch.

He could not tell to what extent he had outraged Susan's feelings. For one brief moment it had seemed to him that she was unwilling to make any

effort to repulse him ; but he found it impossible to understand Susan. Her mood, as she had declared, was indeed a fickle one. When he bade her good-night, she had never vouchsafed him a glance either angry or tender. She had given him her hand, but she had not uttered even a commonplace "Good-bye."

"She will never speak to me again," he mused, as he walked impatiently up and down the poop of the *Atalanta*. "This afternoon she will leave Sloughford, and I may never see her again. I dare not follow her to Rosspoint and tell her how I hate myself for my conduct. I must write to her ; but will she read a letter of mine ?"

Looking towards Bankside, his eyes rested for a moment on the faint white speck high up the hill. Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized hold of him. He would pay one more visit to Woodbine Cottage before Susan started. Perhaps she would refuse to see him ; most likely she would. No matter, he would make the attempt.

Fearing that if he hesitated he might change his mind, he quickly gave orders to have his punt brought under the quarter. With rapidly-pulsing heart he

descended the ladder which hung over the side of the ship, and pulled across the river.

When he reached the garden-gate he paused and took out his watch. It was a little over ten o'clock. The place seemed so changed in the morning light. The witchery of the night had deserted it. The day was bright and warm, but instead of the clear, invigorating breeze which had swept along the hill as Susan had walked beside him the previous night, there was a depressing stillness in the air. Everything was drowsy-looking. A white cat sat blinking on one of the window-sills, and a terrier lay curled up in the porch.

He almost dreaded to disturb the stillness by walking up the gravelled path which led to the house. He felt he had failed in resolution, that he would not have sufficient nerve to confront Susan. One moment he fancied she would appear with angered looks and flaming cheeks; at another moment he pictured her with a pale, sorrowful face, her lips curled with disdain.

He felt inclined to turn back, and was about to move slowly away from the gate, when the terrier in the porch awoke, and barking loudly, ran down

the path. The noise startled Dalton. He stood still for a moment, and then he stooped and opened the gate. The dog seemed to recognise him—a good omen he thought.

The door was opened by Mrs M'Cormick's maid. Susan was standing in the hall, prepared to start on her journey to Rosspoint. She had been stooping over some boxes in the hall, when the door was opened. As she lifted her head her eyes met Dalton's, and a crimson flush came into her cheeks. She could not deny herself now.

Dalton held out his hand, and Susan coldly gave him hers.

"I am most anxious to see you," he said. "I sha'n't detain you long. May I go inside?" pointing to the open door of the sitting-room.

She hesitated a moment, and then nodded assent. Dalton entered the room, and advanced to the window. Giving some directions to her maid, Susan followed him.

"I am deeply sorry—I cannot tell you how sorry—for my conduct last evening," he began. "I came to implore your forgiveness. I could not bear the thought of parting from you in anger. Will you forgive me?"

"I cannot," she said, a little bitterly, avoiding his earnest gaze. "You have no right to expect that I should ever open my lips to you again. I could not refuse to see you now, without creating a scene, I suppose ; and I hate scenes."

"You are very hard on me. It is not as if we were likely to meet frequently. Try if you cannot feel less bitterly towards me. I did not mean to trouble you this morning, but I could not rest until I had asked your forgiveness."

She made no reply, but stood with her hands clasped in front of her.

"You will never see me again," he went on. "I do not suppose that will be a source of grief to you—but you may sometimes think of me, and perhaps you may regret sending me away like this. We are old friends. I know how badly I have acted, but do not let us part in anger. Will you forget and forgive?"

She put out her hand. He caught it eagerly and raised it to his lips.

"Why don't you speak to me, Susie?" he asked. "I would almost prefer to have an angry word from you than no word at all."

"I am not angry with you now."

"Then let me look into your eyes before I go, that I may know I am entirely forgiven."

Her face was still turned away from him.

"Susie!" he said, quickly and anxiously. "You are crying. What is it? What have I said or done now?"

"Nothing," she sighed, drying her eyes. "I was thinking of many things that made me sad—of long ago."

He shook his head sadly.

"Long ago has bitter memories for me too."

"I don't pity men," she said briskly. "You lead an active life. You don't know what it is to live as I do. The dulness of my life is rapidly making a melancholy old woman of me."

The change in her voice displeased Dalton. He preferred to see her in any mood save one of gaiety, which he knew was affected.

"You should not allow yourself to be dull. Surely you are not without many friends here; and why not let your thoughts dwell more upon the future than the past?"

"I have few friends, and the future possesses little interest for me. I prefer to live in the past."

"Last night you said life was full of changes. I believe it is; so I don't despair about seeing you converted some day into one of the liveliest and happiest of women."

"You are not very complimentary. No doubt I am one of the dullest of women just now."

"You know I did not mean that. You are the brightest and best of women; but you are growing a little morbid, I fear, Susie," bending his head. "Will you ever think of your old sweetheart when he is gone for ever?"

"I will think of you night and day, Dick—my God! what am I saying?" she cried, covering her face with her hands.

For a moment Dalton was dumb stricken. He could scarcely believe he had heard her aright. Then with a low, glad cry he clasped her close to him, and murmured,—

"You do love me, Susie; you do love me, my darling, my darling!"

"No, no," she cried, struggling to release herself. "I did not know what I was saying."

"Why torture me again with doubt and despair?" he said, releasing her.

"How can I answer you? I do not want to torture you; but what can I say to you?"

"That you love me, if you do love me, Susie. Say it only once, darling. My love," he said gently, taking her hand, "the barrier between us is broken down. If time proves it is otherwise, I swear I shall never again cross your path—never again trouble you by my presence." He dropped her hand as he spoke.

"Do not ask me to answer you now," she said, clasping her hands tightly.

"Why not now? I shall not see you again before I leave Sloughford, and if you send me away without some word of hope, I will never come back."

"I don't want to lose you, Dick," she murmured, turning her face towards him. "No, no; forget I have said so!"

"Susie, Susie. What am I to think? I cannot understand you. You seem to take a delight in torturing me. One moment I am lifted high above the earth, only to be dashed down again the next moment. I only ask for one word. Do you love me, my darling?"

She bent her head and murmured some words in

so low a tone that Dalton did not hear her. Then she looked up, her cheeks pale, and an affrighted expression in her eyes. "But," with her arms outstretched as if to ward off something evil, "you must try and forget I have said so—for a long, long time. Promise me you will not see me again until I ask you to come to me."

He caught her hands, and placing them on his shoulders, said,—

"I will promise you anything in the world, dearest; but you forget that you have not said anything to me. At least I have not heard you."

She paused, and then suddenly clasping her arms round his neck, she drew his head towards her and whispered,—

"I love you, my own, own darling Dick."

END OF PART THE SECOND.



Part the Third.

IN DOUBT.



CHAPTER I.

BY THE SEA.

IT was late in April when Mrs M'Cormick went to Rosspoint, a fishing village some fifteen miles distant from Sloughford.

Rosspoint was situated on the sea coast, near the mouth of the Slough. The village was built on the slope rising from one arm of a broad blue bay. A flat, even strand, of considerable breadth when the receding tide left it bare, stretched itself from one arm of the bay to the other, a distance of over two miles. The country inland bordering the strand was bare and swampy. No

tree nor hill broke the monotony of the scene, and the land was unfit either for tillage or for pasturage.

The villagers were composed mainly of fisher-folk, and beyond attending occasionally the market at Sloughford, they held little communication with the seaport. Some Sloughford families visited Rosspoint during the summer months, but the village had not developed into a watering-place in the accepted sense of the term. At any time outside the months of June, July, or August, a visitor was looked upon as a nine days' wonder, and his or her history formed a subject for lengthy discussion among the dwellers of the village. They could not believe that a stranger would settle down in their midst merely for sanatory reasons before the summer season had actually set in; and experience had taught them that those who came to Rosspoint out of season had, as a rule, a history of some kind. Very often that history was simply one of straitened means; but they soon discovered that Mrs M'Cormick was not in straitened circumstances.

For many days the strange lady, whose dark figure stood out conspicuously every morning on

the lonely strand, was a mystery to the villagers, They wondered who or what she could be. She did not seek to enter into conversation with any of them who chanced to cross her path; and there was a sorrowful, wild look in her eyes which repelled those whom it did not alarm.

Then, part of Susan's story crept out somehow, and in a distorted form became public property. She was the widow, it was whispered, of a man who had been driven to despair by her conduct. He had been a seafarer—and this fact caused the fisher-folks to sympathise with him—and he had gone to sea vowing to destroy himself. No wonder his widow should look white and scared. Others had it that the strange lady had been abandoned by her husband for her infidelity.

At all events, the village agreed that she was a woman to be avoided, and Susan often wondered why it was that the little children whom she met now and again always fled at her approach. At first she fancied that it was nothing more than a feeling of shyness with strangers which caused the children to avoid her; but she noticed that time did not wear away the shyness.

During the first fortnight of her stay in Ross-point the weather was exceptionally fine; and every morning after her breakfast Susan walked along the deserted strand, her only companion a book. She seldom ventured farther than half way towards the opposite arm of the bay, and then she would make a seat for herself among the grey boulders which fringed the yellow sand. 'Her book was rarely opened. She would sit and gaze for hours at the waters of the bay, unceasingly curling themselves up as they reached the strand, and breaking with a sigh as if they were relieved at the accomplishment of some strange, sad mission.

She loved to listen to the music of the waves. The thunder of the sea as it burst against the cliffs had died away into a faint, monotonous murmur ere it reached her ears. There was something in the sound of the sea which soothed her, and something melancholy which seemed to sympathise with her own melancholy.

Outside the narrow line of wavelets the waters of the bay were blue and placid. She could not imagine how that quiet, peaceful-looking mass of water could be lashed into fury; how the smooth waves could

break with angry roar. And yet she knew that the dull yellow sands were embedded with wreckage; that every winter lives were lost inside the gaunt arms of the bay. Perhaps even on the very spot where she now sat the body of some poor seafarer had been washed ashore.

Often she would start to her feet, and gaze with horror at the boulders near her, fancying she saw the white, upturned face of a shipwrecked sailor. Then, with a shudder, she would walk swiftly towards the village, memories of her husband crowding out all other thoughts—his silent footstep pursuing her along the strand, his angry face seeking to read her thoughts.

Why was she thus persecuted? she often asked herself. What had she done that the face of the dead should haunt her constantly? But was her husband dead? Might it not be that he would yet return? What should she do—what could she do—if he did come back to her? She dare not face him, the kisses of her lover still burning on her lips. And as she thought of *him*, a smile would pass across her face, and somehow she would experience an unaccountable sense of relief. After all, no guilt attached itself

to her. She was innocent of any crime save that of surrendering her heart to the man she loved. Women had wronged their husbands with a wrong infinitely greater than hers, and had suffered infinitely less than she was suffering. Perhaps she had been too impulsive, too precipitate; but aught else she was guiltless of.

She endeavoured earnestly to banish her lover from her thoughts, and day by day the memory of the morning when she had confessed her heart was his grew more indistinct. She had no right to have allowed him to kiss her lips. She hated herself for having been so weak, so wicked; but the temptation had been strong, and her love was great, and it might be that he and she should never meet again.

She frequently found herself longing for some news—some certainty with regard to M'Cormick's fate. Sometimes she felt he would return. What should she do then? She would confess everything to him. He loved her, she knew; perhaps he might learn to forgive and forget. Then a dull pain would numb her heart, and she would pray for some relief—for anything but this horrible uncertainty. There were times when she fancied that her husband was

nearer and dearer to her than she had ever supposed. She did not love M'Cormick, she never could love him; but she was his and his only while he lived, and she would, she must, learn to drive from her heart the old love which had lived in it for years.

Almost every day, as she sat in her favourite seat above the sands faint, black specks could be seen upon the horizon, and occasionally a vessel had crossed the mouth of the bay—almost a stone's-throw from the land, it seemed. She experienced a strange yearning to cross the waters which lay between her and every craft that came within the sight of Ross-point. Often when a vessel crossed the entrance of the bay Susan found herself wondering if she knew what ship it was. Once, on a clear, bright day, a full-rigged ship with great white sails and white-painted hull had appeared off the eastern headland, and with a glad cry Susan had sprung to her feet, full for a moment of the thought that this was the *Atalanta*, that *he* was near her, that he had come to claim her for his own. Then she had sunk into her seat, sobbing as if her heart would break.

During the third week of her visit to Ross-point the weather changed. A drizzling, unceasing mist

filled the air, and Susan was obliged to remain indoors. She sat for the greater part of the day at the window which faced one arm of the bay. A dull green sea now rolled and roared in the bay, and the opposite headland was a blurred, dark-grey mass, standing out heavily against a leaden sky. When she turned her eyes inland nothing save a weary waste of land met her tired gaze—land which lay almost level with the sea. No prospect could be more gloomy and dispiriting; and she knew that so far from growing physically and mentally stronger, she was fast becoming more weak and more depressed. A listlessness, too, which at times alarmed herself, had seized hold of her; and her maid found it impossible to arouse her or to interest her about any matter.

At length Susan felt that her utter loneliness was no longer bearable, and that she was bound to seek for some change of scene. Should she return to Sloughford, or should she seek for another village near the sea, where life and its surroundings would be more cheerful?

She had, unconsciously at first, developed a strong love for the sea. She could remember the time, not

very far back, when the sea and its associations had no charms for her; but now she could not bear the thought of leaving the great heaving waters behind her and shutting herself up once more inside a house in town—its dulness would kill her. But, after all, she asked herself, was its dulness greater than the dulness she now endured? If she were once more in Sloughford she could visit its busy quays, and in the bustle discover a pleasure hitherto unknown to her. Still, she feared to bid farewell to Rosspoint—if the melancholy sighing of the sea increased her own melancholy, at least it soothed her.

At last it occurred to her that with a companion who could sympathise with her, life might become more enjoyable; and, surprised with herself for not having thought of doing so before, Susan wrote to Helen Cadogan, and asked her to come and spend a few weeks with her in Rosspoint.





CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH HELEN UNPACKS HER HEART.

SUSAN was surprised and grieved to discover that Helen was, like herself, suffering from mental depression. She had fully expected to find her friend full of high spirits; the mere expectation of one whose countenance she had never seen clouded by ill-humour or sorrow had in a great measure chased away the sombre clouds which had darkened her own mental vision during the days she had been alone in Rosspoint.

The evening of Helen's arrival, the two women had been so much taken up with conversation about Sloughford and their common friends in the seaport that neither had noticed how low-spirited the other was. Their own mental troubles had been allowed to slide into the background; but more than once it had

occurred to Susan that some great change had come over her visitor—that her cheeks were white and wan, that her laughter had lost its merry ring.

The weather at Rosspoint was still unchanged. The wind blew in from the sea, and the rain fell unceasingly. Susan thought that possibly the moist, heavy atmosphere was affecting Helen, and was accountable in some way for her depression. However, she decided next day that Helen was not only depressed but melancholy, and that there must be some trouble, either present or impending, which was causing the alteration in her.

The discovery that something ailed her friend had the effect of banishing temporarily Susan's gloom. She wondered what could be the matter. Helen's uncle was quite well: she had no uneasiness with regard to him. Could the girl be in love? If so, she could perhaps account for a good deal of the trouble. She had never heard Helen speak of a lover, but this did not argue that her friend had not lost her heart. Yes; she must be in love. She had an instinctive feeling that a lover was at the bottom of the mischief.

Who could the lover be? She conjured up images

of all the men she knew in Sloughford, but none of them seemed a likely personage. Perhaps it was somebody whom Helen had met during the past few weeks; but then she remembered Helen had mentioned that no one had visited Butler's house since she herself had left Sloughford, except her uncle's clerk. Madden! Could he be the man?

At first the idea seemed absurd. Yet why should it be absurd? Madden was, after a fashion, a good-looking fellow; and certainly he could prove an amusing companion. But he was scarcely the sort of man to touch Helen's heart. There was a certain coarseness and vulgarity about him which would repel a girl of Helen's nature.

For her own part she had always experienced a passive dislike for Butler's clerk; but since his visit to Woodbine Cottage, the morning she had fainted in Dalton's presence, this passive feeling had developed into an active one. She fancied he had guessed her secret, guessed how ardently she was attached to her old lover; and he had deliberately entrapped her into an implied admission of her love—for in no other way, she thought, could her alarm at the mention of the *Water Nymph* in the Slough be construed. She

almost hated him for the trick he had played upon her lover and herself. And, to make matters worse, Madden had taken it upon himself to pose as a near and dear friend ever since the news of the *Water Nymph's* disaster had reached the seaport. Could it be possible that Helen had surrendered her heart to that conceited fellow?

But was it not silly to suppose that everyone was subject to the same influences or emotions as herself? Helen saw him—if he were really the man the girl fancied—in a light quite different from the light in which others viewed him. After all, there was no reason why her friend should not fall in love with him, and perhaps a good many reasons why she should.

What would Butler think of it? Madden was no doubt a favourite with the shipbroker, but it was scarcely likely that Butler would approve of a union between his niece, whom he loved as a father loves his own daughter, and a man of Madden's position and character.

Perhaps there was no foundation for her surmises and her anxiety with regard to Helen. The girl's depression of spirits might arise from causes which she, Susan, did not dream of. She was anxious that

Helen should confide in her—there was no doubt she had some secret trouble—but she did not like to ask questions or to offer advice uninvited.

Observing that Mrs M'Cormick occasionally regarded her with an anxious eye, Helen made a strong effort to regain her lost spirits, but to Susan the effort was apparent. For the greater part of the day both women sat at the window gazing at the seething waters of the bay, little inclined for conversation. Neither seemed inclined to break the barrier of reserve which was gradually building itself up between them; and the hours went by slowly and wearily.

In the evening, after the blinds had been drawn down and the candles lit, it seemed to Susan that the weather had suddenly changed. A feeling possessed her that the change in the weather was a similar one to that which had occurred the evening her lover had kissed her in the garden. She rose from her chair, and drawing back the blind, looked up at the sky. The clouds were ragged and wild-looking. It seemed as if they had been torn asunder in some fierce struggle with the elements, and were now fleeing seawards hurriedly and fearfully.

Susan was sufficiently weatherwise to know that

the wind had veered into the north-west, and that the dull, dispiriting mists were banished for a time. She drew up the lower half of the window, and a cool, refreshing current of air swept into the room, causing the blind to flap against the window panes, like a sail taken suddenly aback. Closing the window hastily, she asked Helen if she would care to venture into the night air, and take a stroll upon the sands. Helen gladly assented.

When they reached the deserted strand, they found the tide had been ebbing but a short while, and there was yet only a narrow belt of sand, wet and speckled with patches of white foam, left bare by the tide. The wind was high, but the sound of the breeze was deadened by the dull roar of the sea. The night was gradually growing brighter as the clouds flew across the bay, and inland in the north-west a pale blue light flooded the sky.

Susan's spirits were more buoyant than they had been for many months. She could not shake off the feeling that the night had something in common with the night Dalton and she had stood together in the garden. Her thoughts were full of her lover. She was tortured with no recollections of her husband ;

it seemed as if his image had faded from her memory.

For some minutes the two women walked silently along the moist, glistening sands. Helen was the first to speak.

"You seem in better spirits to-night than I have seen you for a long time."

There was in her voice a sadness which Susan's quick ear instantly detected.

"Yes," she said. "Sometimes I am as sensitive to changes in the weather as if I were a weather-glass. Evidently it is not so with you. Come, Helen, tell me what it all means. It would be stupid to pretend any longer that I have not observed how low-spirited you are. Tell me," she went on, turning her head and looking swiftly into Helen's eyes, "are you in love?"

"I am."

There was a long awkward pause. Susan was sorry she had forced from her friend the admission that she was in love. So far she had been correct in her surmise. Probably she would now learn that Madden was her sweetheart.

"Susan," said Helen abruptly, "I am very unhappy."

"I know you are, dear. And now you are going to be a good girl, and tell me all about your trouble. What is the matter?"

"He—you must not ask me yet who he is—is treating me very badly; I don't know why. I did not think I cared so much for him until I found that he was growing cool. Lately I have noticed a sudden change in his manner towards me, but he has said nothing. He asked me to speak to uncle—"

"Before or after the coolness?"

"Before it. I did speak to uncle, although I found it a harder task than I had imagined it would be to summon up sufficient courage."

"I should fancy it was the man's business, not the woman's, to find the courage for approaching your uncle."

"Yes; but he explained to me that it was much more likely uncle would listen to me than to him. There were reasons which made it very awkward for him to speak to my uncle."

"What did Mr Butler say to you?"

"Nothing for a long time—I mean for many minutes—but I never before saw him look so strange."

"I suppose he was surprised—just as I was when it first occurred to me that you were in love."

"No. He looked more alarmed than surprised. He told me I should give him time to think over the matter, and he seems to wear an anxious, worried look ever since I spoke to him."

"Most likely he has had a talk with your friend, and this may account for the coolness. You ought not to be fretting yourself, without, at least, seeking for an explanation."

"But how can I ask for an explanation? I don't know what to do. There is something wrong, something I cannot understand; and I fancy my uncle has not yet made up his mind, and has therefore not mentioned the matter to anyone yet—not even to my—my friend."

"Tell me, Helen. Is Mr Madden your friend?"

"Yes—how have you guessed it?"





CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE BISHOP APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER.

NEXT day the weather was fine and bright. The breeze still blew seaward, but the strength of the wind had died away during the night, and white, fleecy clouds sailed slowly across the sky.

The two women left the house soon after breakfast and walked down to the beach. The heavy sea which for many days had been rolling into the bay had altered considerably the appearance of the strand. It was no longer smooth and even. Here and there large patches of rock, covered with a green, slimy seaweed, were imbedded firmly in the sands; and in many places it seemed as if the boulders had been torn from the beach, and had

been scattered over the surface of the strand by some mighty and wrathful hands.

Susan had the previous night inspired in her friend a feeling of hopefulness and cheerfulness. She did not consider it would be either prudent or just to say anything in condemnation of Helen's lover. She suggested that Madden was fearful of offending Butler, and in that way his seeming coolness could be accounted for.

Helen did not seem inclined to refer to the previous night's conversation, and judging that she was still shy about her first love affair, Susan made no allusion to it. She was content to see that her friend had regained a good deal of her old spirits.

It was late in the afternoon when they left the strand and returned homeward. As they approached the house Susan fancied she saw the figure of a man standing in one of the windows of the sitting-room. Her heart bounded at the notion that it might be her lover who had come to claim her. She stood still for a moment, almost dreading to approach the house. She was on the point of saying something to Helen, who was now gazing

curiously at her, wondering what had caused Susan's cheeks to grow scarlet, but quickening her steps she walked on, in advance of her companion.

When the door was opened Susan's maid said,—
“There is a strange gentleman wants to see you, ma'am.”

Then it was not her lover, she reflected. Who could it be? Perhaps someone who was the bearer of tidings of her husband. How wicked of her to have allowed herself to indulge in dreams of Dalton while perhaps her husband still lived!

When she entered the room with Helen, the strange gentleman, who had been for some time sitting uneasily in the chair, nursing his hat on his knee, stood up and bowed profoundly.

“I suppose you scarcely remember me, ladies,” he said, bowing again.

“Captain Flynn!” cried both women in astonishment.

“Of course, I remember you, Captain Flynn,” said Mrs M'Cormick, offering her hand. “You have been at Woodbine Cottage more than once.”

“And if I never met you before,” smiled Helen, “I have often heard my uncle speak in high terms of you.”

The Bishop seemed overwhelmed by the cordiality of the reception.

"I'm proud, ladies," said he, "to have the pleasure of shaking hands with both of you; and I hope we may be better acquainted in the future."

"I hope so, indeed," said Mrs M'Cormick. "Won't you be seated?"

"Thank you, ma'am," said the Bishop, sitting nervously on a chair, and placing his hat under it.

"Have you been long in Rosspoint?" asked Mrs M'Cormick.

"Only about an hour, ma'am," replied the Bishop.

"It was very good of you to call upon us so quickly. I have been so lonely here that I assure you the face of a visitor from Sloughford is indeed a welcome sight. Miss Cadogan has already laid me under a load of obligations to her."

The Bishop coughed, and actually blushed.

"Did you see my uncle before you left Sloughford?" asked Helen.

"I did, Miss Cadogan. I saw the good man last evening, but, as he was not aware that I intended coming to Rosspoint, he did not send any message by me."

"He was quite well, I hope?"

"Quite well, Miss Cadogan. You ought to be proud of him, miss; for, indeed, it isn't easy to meet the likes of Mr Butler in this weak, frivolous world."

"I am proud of him," said Helen, smiling at the Bishop's earnest manner.

For a moment there was a pause, broken by Mrs M'Cormick.

"How long do you intend remaining in Rosspoint, Captain Flynn?" she asked.

"Only an hour or two, ma'am. The car that brought me down is waiting in the village to take me back."

"It was scarcely worth your while to make such a tiresome journey, if you intend to return so rapidly; but, I suppose," she added, smiling, "you get quite enough sea air without troubling to come and seek for it?"

"I do, ma'am. The fact is, I came here to-day in order to have a private conversation with yourself, Mrs M'Cormick."

"A private conversation with me!" exclaimed Susan, frowning.

"Yes," sighed the Bishop, "with you, ma'am."

Helen rose, and laying her hand on Susan's shoulder, said,—

"I shall run up to my room." Then, looking towards the Bishop,—“I suppose I shall see you again before you go, Captain Flynn?”

"You will, Miss Cadogan, if such is your pleasure. And if you have any message for your good uncle, I'll be proud to be the bearer of it."

"Thank you very much. I shall write a note to him while you are busy," she nodded, glancing at Susan, and quitting the room.

When the Bishop found himself alone with Mrs McCormick he seemed quite ill at ease. He blew his nose violently, and coughed two or three times, and then blew his nose once more.

Susan was puzzled. What business could this man have with her? He and her husband had been very friendly. Could it be that he was the bearer of news about McCormick? Why didn't the man speak? She was about to ask the Bishop his business when that gentleman found his voice.

"I came to speak to you on a very delicate point," he began, with a smile.

It was a queer smile. Susan could not understand it. She bit her lip, and looked out of the corners of her eyes at her *vis-à-vis*. She had met Flynn two or three times, and she had often heard of him, and had often laughed at stories about his sanctimoniousness. This smile, it seemed to her, was sadly out of keeping either with sanctity or sanctimoniousness. There was a suspicion of a leer in it, and there was an implication that Mrs M'Cormick understood the nature and the cause of the smile. It could not be that this man had come to tell her any news of her husband, be it good or bad, with a grin—yes, grin was a better word—such as had curled his mouth and dilated his nostrils a moment since. What could he mean? Could it be that he had developed some religious mania, and hearing of her attachment to Dalton, had come to lecture her on the error of her ways?

“I came to ask your advice, ma'am,” said the Bishop, seeing that Mrs M'Cormick did not offer to help him out of his difficulty, “on a very delicate point.”

“My advice,” she said, somewhat sharply. “About what, pray?”

"Well, ma'am," said the Bishop, drawing a long face and sighing profoundly, "I was offered a very nice charter this week—a round in the foreign trade—which would keep me and my little ship away for over a twelvemonth. Now, ought I to accept it, I ask you?"

The man was certainly deranged. She felt inclined to ring the bell for the servant; but perhaps it would be as well to humour this poor fellow.

"Would it not be better to consult Mr Butler? What good could my advice be? I suppose it is only a question whether it will put money in your way or not? I assure you I know nothing about shipping business."

"You are wrong, ma'am," smiled the Bishop—again that peculiar smile which had puzzled Susan so much,—“money is not a consideration with me, I am very comfortable as it is; so far,” he added, in a deep, hollow voice, “as one can expect comfort in this vale of tears. I own my own ship. I have a very tidy lump of money in the bank—more than anyone thinks, maybe. I could afford to give up the sea, with all its trials and tribulations, at any moment.”

"I am very glad to hear it."

"Then you don't like the sea, ma'am?"

"Oh, yes. I have grown quite in love with it."

"Happy sea!" sighed the Bishop, lifting both hands to the level of his cheeks and tilting his head slightly to one side.

Could the man be intoxicated? Susan asked herself. No. He seemed perfectly sober.

"There is no doubt, mind you," continued the Bishop, "that this same treacherous sea holds the remains of the dear departed—I allude respectfully to your late husband, ma'am," he added, bowing low.

"You must pardon me," said Susan rising; "but I must bid you good-day. You will excuse me, I hope."

"A moment, Mrs M'Cormick. One moment, my dear good lady!" cried the Bishop, stooping and fishing for his hat. "You don't perhaps understand me quite, although my sentiments ought to be as plain as my language."

"No. Most decidedly, I do not understand you."

"Then I must be more plain and more candid, ma'am, though I thought you had my bearings

from the beginning. I came, ma'am, to offer you my hand, heart, and fortune. I can make you comfortable, ma'am, as comfort goes in this weak, frivolous world. I have long admired you, ma'am—but necessarily from afar, owing partly to the fact that your dear, departed husband was still to the fore—but now that he is gone—rest his soul!—I took the earliest opportunity of making a proposal to you. Don't refuse to hearken to me because I am no longer young and gay. Youth must pass away, and gaiety has its drawbacks as the years roll by; but," waving his hand excitedly, and raising his voice to its highest pitch, "the honest love of an honest man abideth for ever."

The suddenness of the proposal and the excited demeanour of the Bishop, had completely bewildered Mrs M'Cormick. She stood in the centre of the room transfixed by the strange, wild earnestness of the Bishop's words and looks. She was even unconscious until he had moved backwards, in order to wave his hand the more impressively, that he had been holding her fingers clasped in his hard, small hand.

She drew herself up with a shiver, and then she

felt inclined to burst into laughter. The situation seemed altogether funny.

Her eyes suddenly met the wild, sad, expectant gaze of Captain Flynn, and she was no longer inclined to laugh. This man was terribly in earnest. What should she say to him? How should she dismiss him for ever without letting him see how absurd she deemed his proposal?

A tap was heard at the door.

"Miss Cadogan!" exclaimed the Bishop. "I'll ask you for your answer another day, Mrs M'Cormick."

"No! no!" cried Susan, approaching the door. "You must take my answer now. I am very sorry, but I cannot think of accepting you—or anyone else."

"Stay, ma'am!" he cried, placing his hand over hers on the door handle. "Perhaps you have a doubt about the fate of poor John. I can set your mind at rest on that point—"

"How dare you?" cried Susan angrily, throwing off his hand and opening the door. "You have got my answer. You must understand that I cannot even meet you again. I did not wish to offend you, but you have offended me past forgiveness. Please understand that."



CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MISS WALSH LANDS HER FISH.

THE week which followed the quarrel in the "Bold Dragoon" brought about many changes, more or less important. No trace of the perpetrators of the burglary at Butler's office had been discovered, and it was still a mystery why M'Cormick's will was the only document which the thieves had taken away.

When Miss Walsh, acting upon Nixon's advice, consulted a solicitor, she learned with delight and surprise that in the event of no will being forthcoming her brother's estate would be divided equally between herself and the widow. Then she began to feel that she had not played her cards well in connection with Mrs M'Cormick and Butler. No matter what Butler might say to the contrary, she was con-

vinced that he knew the contents of her brother's will. John had often told her that he consulted the shipbroker on almost every matter connected with business, and on such an important matter as the division of his property he was certain to have asked the advice, or at all events the opinion, of Butler.

When she came to think over everything coolly and reasonably, Miss Walsh could not but decide that she would be much better off if no will were in existence. Her brother, she was sure, was wealthy; they had never been on very friendly terms; he was straightforward, and he had always warned her not to expect too much from him. Although he had not got on well with his wife, he was, after a fashion, in love with her; and though he might have quarrelled with her, he was much more likely to leave the bulk of his money to a woman he loved than to a woman he did not love.

Looking at the matter from every point of view, there was no doubt, Miss Walsh decided, that the absence of a will would leave her in a better position than the existence of one. Now, what ought she do? Mrs M'Cornick and herself were the only people likely to be benefited by the will—her brother had

no other relatives living—and his best friend, Butler, was wealthy, and it would not occur to her brother to leave money to one who did not require it. The best thing, therefore, was to try and come to some arrangement with Mrs M'Cormick. If she could induce her to agree that in the event of the will turning up by-and-by, she would ignore it, and let matters stand at half and half, no matter which of them would be the loser by such an arrangement (Miss Walsh had no doubt she would not be the loser), it would prevent any vigorous search being made for the missing will. Butler had already offered a large reward for it, and he would not have done so did he not know that Mrs M'Cormick would be the most benefited by it. Moreover, if she had only the prospect of getting half of her brother's money, she would have no difficulty in finding a husband in the master of the *Greenback*, and in a vague sort of way she was in love with Nixon.

She decided finally, after a restless, anxious night, to wait upon the shipbroker. She felt that it would be best to approach Mrs M'Cormick through him.

Butler received her coldly, and after listening patiently, first to her apologies for her rudeness on

a former occasion, and then to her proposals concerning the disposition of M'Cormick's money, he told her that he could not consent to lay any proposition so absurd before Mrs M'Cormick.

"In the first place, Miss Walsh," said he, "there is no certainty that your brother is lost. Then, there may be many people mentioned in his will, and I have very strong hopes the document will be found some day. Wills are seldom destroyed. Whoever took this one took it for a purpose, I am certain; and it is not likely that purpose was to do away with it. Besides, I have reason to know that Captain M'Cormick did not intend to leave you half his property."

"Then you know how he disposed of his money?"

"No, I have told you over and over again that I do not."

"But how can you inform me now that my poor dear brother did not mean me to have half of everything if you didn't see or hear what was in his will?"

"That is my business," said Butler sharply.

"Oh, I see, it's all humbug!" cried Miss Walsh, rising. She had completely lost her temper.

"Yourself and Mrs M'Cormick want to frighten me by pretending you have some trump card up your sleeve! but I'll show you that I'll win the game yet. You think you have a fool to deal with, and you want to beat me down; but I'm going to have half the money, and I'll show you that you can't be playing battledore and shuttlecock with me any longer. I have no doubt now you did away with the will yourself, because your pet, Mrs M'Cormick, didn't benefit by it as much as would please you and her; and maybe I'll put both of you in a fix before you're many weeks older."

Butler did not offer to speak. He held open the door of the office for his visitor, and with a glance of anger and scorn Miss Walsh swept past him.

The landlady, instead of returning to the "Bold Dragoon," went on board the *Greenback* and asked Nixon what she ought to do.

The New Brunswicker was somewhat startled when he saw Miss Walsh coming towards his ship, especially with her countenance pointing at "very stormy." For some days Madden and he had seen a good deal of each other. Every moment Madden

could spare from his business he spent on board the *Greenback*. Each man was a revelation to the other. Nixon's sublime conceit and sublime gullibility delighted the shipbroker's clerk; and Madden's unfailing fund of high spirits, and his evident belief in the mental superiority of Angus R. Nixon, delighted the master of the *Greenback*. Moreover, the skipper was flattered that a man of Madden's "parts," as he would term it, should single him out for special marks of friendship.

Madden spun yarns by the yard to Nixon, and to every yarn one moral was attached, to wit—there is on the face of the globe no man more clever than Arthur Madden: no man more trustworthy as a friend, more dangerous as an enemy.

The pair had frequently discussed the burglary at Butler's. Nixon's interest in the matter was confined to the loss of the will. He had made up his mind to propose for Miss Walsh, provided the landlady was likely to come in for a good slice of money by her brother's death, and in a roundabout way he endeavoured to elicit from Madden what Butler's opinion of the case was. On this point, however, he failed to obtain any definite information

Madden told him to make his mind easy about one thing, namely, that if the will had not been utterly destroyed he would unearth it. He assured Nixon he was making inquiries secretly, and though his inquiries had, up to the present, resulted in nothing, he was confident he would be successful eventually.

"However, you must not breathe a word of what I tell you to anyone," said Madden. "If I were in Miss Walsh's place, I would make no move of any kind for a little time. If the will is destroyed she will be all right, and if it is discovered, depend upon it, the discoverer will be myself, and then we can talk business."

Nixon firmly believed in Madden. Therefore, when the landlady of the "Bold Dragoon" asked the astute New Brunswicker what course she ought to adopt, he recommended a policy of inaction. "You depend upon me. I'm telling you straight the correct thing to do. I know just a trifle; but I must keep my jaws fast for a bit," he said, with a cunning leer. "I takes a deep interest in you, I do; and when I says a thing, I says it."

Miss Walsh burst into a flood of tears, and declared that this profession of sympathy for her in

her hour of trouble had quite overcome her. Nixon was, naturally enough, obliged to comfort her with further expressions of his esteem and sympathy, and before Miss Julia Walsh left the *Greenback's* cabin it was decided that she should take the earliest opportunity of changing her name. It would, they agreed, show a want of respect to the memory of the landlady's brother if the date of the wedding were not postponed for a few months.

When the engaged couple came on deck a large ship, which had been lying at anchor in the stream when Miss Walsh went on board the *Greenback*, was now under weigh with a tug-boat ahead.

"The *Atalanta*!" said Nixon, pointing. "Bully ship!"

"Young Dalton's vessel. I think he and my dear sister-in-law are playing a nice quiet game—with all Mistress Susan's innocent looks. It would almost serve her right if my brother were to turn up again."

"Not much fear of that, Julia. Guess he'd be rather a wet sort of soul if he were to pay you a visit now," laughed Nixon. Then feeling that it was highly irreverent to indulge in merriment at the expense of a dead relative, even if he were

only a dead relative prospectively, he added, with a solemn face,—“Poor fellow! He’s sailing in another craft now, he is, where there are no more shoals or shipwrecks, no more fog-horns nor port charges, and,” after a momentary pause, “no icebergs.”

Miss Walsh was deeply affected by Nixon’s pathos. She wiped a tear from her eyes, and sighed.

“Ay, indeed, Angus!”

“By the way, Julia,” said Angus, “I hear they’ve caught that long, solemn-looking gent as the *Atalanta* was consigned to—what’s his name?”

“Sutcliffe. Is that so?”

“Ay. So I heard this morning; and Mr Madden tells me Captain Dalton will come in for a tidy bit of money over the job. Seems as how Sutcliffe robbed his governor—Dalton’s governor—long ago. You all appear a pretty tidy lot of people here,” he chuckled. “But it ain’t the straight thing in the long run, thieving ain’t,” added Angus, fearful lest his lady-love might think he approved of speculation.





CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN NIXON FALLS INTO A TRAP.

A FEW days after Nixon had been accepted by Miss Walsh, the *Greenback* was discharged, and the ballast barges were alongside. The skipper had decided upon proceeding in ballast to Greenock, where he was offered a cargo back for Sloughford.

“There ought to be some smart folk around there,” reflected Nixon, as he sat at his cabin-table, smoking a good cigar and sipping weak rum and water; “not like those smooth-faced long-shore skunks in this blessed shop. I’ll be more in my element there, and it will be a pleasure, it will, to meet with men of my own mettle, and have some stand-up fights with them—brain agen brain. That’s how I like it—brain agen brain. I feels limp all over, I do, at the notion of

leaving this port without having got right to wind-'ard of a solitary soul. I'd give about half an eye to show the folks here what a *man* is who knows his way right along when he meets a man—not a thing like that tug-boat captain; nor an old resurrected mummy like that tallyman; nor a red-hot jackass like that con-sign-ee of mine, who has gone and charged me seven pounds fourteen shillings for short delivery. I don't take no account of that sea pilot who took the wind out of my sails before I was well inside the harbour, for I don't reckon the simple old coon was trying on a game with Angus R. Nixon. Anyhow, I forgive him; but as for the others, I just wish I could ship 'em right afore the mast in the *Greenback*, that's all. I'd make it pretty comfortable for 'em, I would. Dang 'em!"

And standing up, the skipper struck the cabin-table such a heavy blow that one of the leaves of the table, a rum decanter, a water jug, and an empty tumbler came with a crash to the floor. Hissing out a good triangular oath, Captain Nixon picked up the broken piece of table, laid it in a locker, and kicked the glass ware under the broken table. Then he ascended the cabin stairs.

It was dusk. All the crew having obtained leave from the skipper, had gone ashore as soon as they had washed down the decks. After taking a few turns up and down the poop, Nixon thought he heard a slight noise in the fore part of the ship.

"Who's there?" he shouted.

"It's only me, captain. It's only me," was the whining reply, as a sharp-visaged little man, about fifty years of age, advanced towards the break of the poop with a shambling gait.

"And who the deuce are you? What business have you here at this time of day? Why don't you answer me?" shouted Captain Nixon, jumping off the poop and seizing the little man roughly by the shoulder.

"Aisy, captain. I can explain, if you'll stop shakin' the breath out of me. Sure I'm only waitin' aboard to see one of your sailors, Jake Macharney."

"See Macharney! What about? What's your name, and what's your game?"

"Mr Michael Halligan, captain, is my name; but they mostly calls me plain Mike."

"Come now, plain Mike, what have you been stealing here?"

"Stealing here! Is it for a born fool you take me, to come aboard the *Greenback* with yourself in charge of her thryin' for to make a haul? Ah, captain, captain! I have more sense than that, I can tell you."

Nixon was not quite satisfied with Halligan's declaration of innocence, so he searched him carefully, but found the little man had nothing concealed about him.

"Waal, what's your business with Jake Macharney?"

"Oh, my fine man! maybe 'tis to get the decent boy into trouble I would if I made a clane breast of it; for 'tis the terror of the sea I'm towld you are—the terror of the sea!"

Captain Nixon felt flattered. He released Halligan, and stared at him.

"You bet I'm just that, Mike. And now, your business here? Quick, for time is money, I guess with Angus R. Nixon—that's me, Michael."

"Begor, you needn't be guessin' that at all; you may be sartin sure of it—and more power to your elbow, captain. I've heard a dale about you, captain, ashore, from some of your crew; and I'm towld you're the most knowledgable seafaring man that ever broke hard bread."

"Right, Mike! I ain't particular smart; but I know my way about, just a trifle."

"It's only your modesty says that, if you'll pardon me for being so free with you. Ah, captain, 'tis a grand thing to have the brains, an' no mistake."

"You bet it is, Mike. There ain't much of that article knocking around in your port, outside the shambles, I reckon."

"Brains, is it? Ah, my dear man, 'tis saying that you may."

"But come, Mr Mike, what's your little game with Macharney?"

"Well, captain, 'tis naither more nor less than this—for I know there's no use in thryin' to make you believe anything but the plain honest truth—but, captain, promise me you won't get me into trouble, a poor owld sinner like me that never did you hurt or harm."

"I'll con-sider that, when I know your business exactly."

"Well, it's just this, captain; the poor boy wants some clothes and other curiosities of the port, and he can't afford to throw away much money, so when he towld me his trouble, I tuk compassion on him,

and I promised to get him the things dirt chape, and that's what brings me aboard now."

"And what special qual-i-fi-cations have you got for selling things dirt cheap?"

"Ah, that's the grand saycret, captain; and that's where I'm throwin' meself on your honour's mercy; but I feels sure a man of your parts wouldn't injure a poor chap that's down on his luck. No," continued Halligan, apparently communing with himself, "'tis too big a heart he has for that."

"You can trust me, Mike, as if I was your own mother's son; for Angus R. Nixon—that's me, Michael—was never known to break trust with no man that threw himself on his mercy. Come, spell it out, Mike."

"Begor, there isn't much occasion for me to do that same; anyhow, I'm not book-larned like yourself, captain, but I'm towld they spells it in a hundred different ways. The facts is, I gets things now and again purty chape. There isn't much money changes hands, but there's a dale of anxiety of mind."

"Waal," grinned Nixon. "You're about the coolest card in the form of a long-shore professional

thief that ever I've comed across, and I've met some pretty tidy chaps in your line of business, Michael. I make no doubt you was just a-trying your hand there for'ard when I shouted. Sorry I disturbed you in the discharge of your professional duties."

"Well now, captain, do you think I'd be likely to be such an out-and-out *omadhawn* as to tell you what my profession, as you calls it, was, if I meant hurt or harm to anything in your beautiful little ship. Now, ax yourself that question; and if you're the knowledgable man I takes you to be, you can aisy find an answer."

"Waal, I don't mind con-fessing to you that I know you don't come aboard a-purpose to steal things out of this ship; but you might be tempted too much. I can read a man like a book, I can, Mike. And I rather likes a feller who ain't ashamed to own his line of business, whatever it may be. 'Tis a good thing to see about a man, Mike. But, all the same, it strikes me you ought to be handed over right away to the authorities," said Captain Nixon, with an ugly grin.

"Ah, captain, darlin', sure you wouldn't do a turn like that on a poor old man?" whined Halligan,

lifting both hands in supplication, and almost going on his knees.

"Yes, Mike, I think that's about my dooty to the State."

"Ah, be merciful, captain! and if you stands by me, I can put up a rale good thing in your way; and as you're going to sail in a few days, the dickens a one can ever trace the property, if you only keeps a close tongue in your head, and sure that 'ud be no trouble to you."

"Just let me hear all about this good thing, then; come, stand up, man!"

"Would you like a beautiful bran' new foresail—just your own fit—for a song? Regular dirt cheap," whispered Halligan.

The skipper paused, and throwing away a cigar butt, put a plug of cavendish tobacco into his left cheek. After about two minutes' reflection he said,—

"What's the figure? Where can I see the sail; and when can you put it aboard?"

"Ten pound; at my own house—I can give you the bearings of it now—and to-morrow night," answered Halligan, in an excited, breathless manner.

“Now don’t you have me fooling about the streets of your blessed town to look at a lot of stolen goods unless you are cocksure them same goods will fit my foreyard to a nicety. Ten pounds is, of course, all moonshine, considering that I’ll be doing you a service to get the canvas clear out of the road. Two or three pounds is a deal more likely to be the outside bid you’ll get from Angus R. Nixon—that’s me Michael—perviding he takes a fancy to the article.”

“That ’ud be wholesale ruination, captain. The sail ’ud be worth a ten pound note, almost, if you were to sell it to a rag man. I’ll guarantee it will fit your foreyard to a nicety, for it came out of a ship the same build and tonnage as your own, and there never was such a bargain offered since Adam was a boy. There isn’t a hair turned on it, and you’ll be buying it with tarpaulin’ coverin’s and all complete, just as if it came out of a sail-maker’s loft. ’Tis the grandest bargain you ever heard tell of, and ’twas your luck to meet me this night, for I have that very sail lying on my hands now for nearly a twelvemonth.”

“And how comes it that you haven’t got a buyer long ago for such a bargain, Michael. Eh?”

"Oh, that's aisily explained, captain, darlin'; and for the same raison it ought to be worth all the more to yourself, my dacent man. 'Tis first-class cotton convas, you see; and you can't induce our counthry ships to wear that cotton canvas, and of coorse all ye American vessels is partial to it. Now I makes no doubt your own sails, every stitch of 'em, captain, is cotton."

"You're about right there, you are. And now, plain Mike, you'd best leave me your private address, and tell me when and how to get to that same address. We'll talk about the price when I sees the sail; not afore, Michael."

"To-morrow night, then, at nine o'clock. I lives in Yellow Hill—the exact address is Angel Alley, No. 14. 'Tisn't a very illigant or fashionable place, but anyone along the quays will be able to tell you the way—and, for the love of Heaven, captain, darlin', keep it dark!"

"Do you take me for a cursed idiot?" snarled Nixon.

"Indeed, then, I don't, captain, but you can't be hard on me for being so aiger for peace and quietness."

"To business, though! How do you propose getting the sail aboard, if I buy it?"

"That's aisy managed, skipper. If we agrees about it, I'll get it carted down in the dark to another part of the quay; then if you'll have the ship's boat waiting at the place I'll tell you, we can tumble the sail aboard of the boat, meself and me son. Scull the boat down to the fourth wharf below—you'll aisy know it, for there's no ship lyin' alongside it—and then you can make the boat fast there and come up to my house and see the sail, and if you likes it, why we can rowl it down to the boat, and there's an end of the job—and 'tis a raal beautiful bargain you'll be getting, I promise you."

"All right! I'll do what you say. Now get ashore quick, for I aint going to let any one of the crew hear a blessed word about this until the trick is done."

"You're goin' to tow down the day after to-morrow, aren't you, captain?"

"Yes; on the morning tide. Curse that tug-boat skipper!" he hissed. "Now git, Michael!"





CHAPTER VI.

B I T E R B I T.

THE following evening, shortly before nine o'clock, Captain Nixon called one of the sailors, who had been desired by him earlier in the evening not to go ashore, and said,—

“You keep an eye on deck, Coggin, while I go away. I have a bit of business to do. Mind you don't leave the ship on no account, for I guess there are some pretty tidy long-shore thieves skulking about. The mate may be back before I return; if he is, tell him not to turn in until he sees me. Now, you son of a gun, haul the boat alongside, and slip an oar into her.”

Captain Nixon sculled the *Greenback's* boat leisurely down to the wharf indicated by Halligan. There he made her fast to the wharf with a small

chain and padlock, and with the aid of a smaller piece of chain and a smaller padlock he secured the oar to the thwarts, so that a chance visitor to the wharf might be saved the temptation of sculling himself about the river in the brigantine's boat.

"Now for Mr Mike," said Captain Nixon, jumping on the wharf. He had during the day made inquiries about the locality of Angel Alley; so, once he had accomplished the ascent to Yellow Hill, he did not experience much difficulty in finding out Halligan's dwelling-place.

He knocked with his knuckles at the knockerless door of No. 14, and after a short delay a middle-aged woman opened the door.

"Is Michael Halligan here, missus?" inquired Captain Nixon.

"I suppose you're the captain of the *Greenback*, sir?"

"That's about it. And I reckon you're Mrs Halligan, ain't you?"

"Why, then, I am, sir, more power to your reckonin'! Won't you step inside, captain?"

"And where's the worthy Michael, missus?" asked Nixon, as he entered the little room—part kitchen part sitting-room—and threw himself into a chair.

"Ah, then, sir," replied Mrs Halligan, "I'm in dhread there's something wrong this night, for," lowering her voice and looking around the room, "Mike towld me to tell you not to stir outside the door until he called for you."

"Why, what's up?" asked Nixon, a trifle alarmed.

"I'm afeared, sir, somebody got wind of the bargain he struck with you; there were a couple of peelers on the lookout for him all day."

"Peelers!—policemen you mean, I suppose? My good woman, don't you think you're going to come the bounce over me. If there is to be any trouble over this job, you bet Angus R. Nixon—that's me, missus—will wash his hands of it pretty quick."

Nixon had started from his seat at the mention of police, and he was about to make his exit, when Mrs Halligan stopped him, and said, with a smile,—

"Arrah, me darlint captain, 'tis aisy to alarm you. There's no cause for bein' in a fright about yourself; only Mike was in dhread he might have to break his word to you, and 'tis he that respects his word, I can tell you. Ah! you don't know Mike, captain. He'd go through fire and water to keep his word, for 'tis the fine honest man he is, though 'tis myself that says it."

"I have no manner of doubt of that," chuckled Captain Nixon. "But what's the little game to-night, missus? My time is a trifle valuable, it is."

"There's no game at all, captain. 'Tis just this way. 'Johanna,' says Mike to me, when he sees the peelers in the alley, 'there's something wrong in the wind. Now, if them chaps gets a sight of the sail I promised that fine dacent man'—meaning yourself, of course, captain—'they'll be seizing on it, and then what would the captain think of me?' So Mike and the son goes up to the loft overhead, and they hauls down the sail—a regular beauty, sir, it is too, I can tell you—and they brings it out by the backyard, and the two of 'em, Mike and the son, are all day thryin' to get it down on the quiet to the quays. That's what they're at now, captain. Not a sup or a bite ever entered poor Mike's lips all day, he was so aiger to be up to time with your honour. 'And tell him, Johanna,' says he, 'to wait until I calls for him, and then the sail will be at the wharf where I told him, and he can examine it there fair and honest.' And there's the whole thruth now, captain."

"There's some cussed trick, there is, about the whole job."

"Trick! Arrah, what trick could there be? Sure, as Mike himself says, 'If he thinks the sail won't suit him he needn't buy it, and I'll make no complaint, even after the hard day's work I'll be after puttin' over me; for sure there's no doubt I didn't keep my word exactly to the fine, elegant man—and that's what's breaking my heart, Johanna!' Ah, if you only knew poor Mike, your honour," sighed Mrs Halligan. "'Tis the simple craychur he is!"

"I'll give him one half-hour from this," said Captain Nixon, holding a massive gold watch in the palm of his hand, "and if he plays any tricks on Angus R. Nixon—that's me, missus—I guess I'll just keel-haul him for diversion before we starts the *Greenback* from her moorings in the morning."

"Indeed, then you may, captain, if you have raison ever to find fault with Mike. There isn't a thrick nor a turn in the honest man's body. But won't you be havin' a smoke while you're waitin', to keep you company? for I must go and look after some of my washin' in the next room."

And tucking her sleeves well above her elbows, Mrs Halligan retired to a small wash-house situated

off the kitchen. Then Captain Nixon crossed his legs, lit a cigar, and puffed away in silence.

It was fully an hour from the time Nixon had entered No. 14 Angel Alley, before Mike Halligan appeared, and it was with the greatest difficulty Mrs Halligan could prevail upon the New Brunswicker to await the return of her husband.

The master of the *Greenback* was somewhat startled at the manner of Mike Halligan's entrance. The little man almost burst the door open; then, with eyes which sparkled joyously through a framework of tar, he approached Nixon and slapped him vigorously on the back, crying,—

"I've done the thrick, captain—the sail is safe at the wharf. Come along quick!"

On the way to the wharf, Halligan (whose face, hands, and clothes were veneered with tar and dirt) and Nixon, who now began to fear he was being decoyed into some trap, had a hot argument.

"So help me, plain Mike," said Nixon, "if you're up to any dodge, I'll twist your darned neck."

"Well, well," cried Halligan, shaking his head solemnly, "you're the mast unraisonably suspicious man 'twas ever my luck to meet with. What dodge

could I be up to? I ax you. Sure if the sail don't suit you there needn't be another word about it—only you must allow, captain, it would be hard on me now, after the terrible day's work I'm after putting over me, if you went back of your word."

"And how do you think I'm going to examine a sail on a dark night like this? I aint the ship's cat, I aint. How's the thing to be done, fair and square?"

"Aisy as kissin' your hand. That son of mine—poor boy, 'tis fairly wore out he is by this time—has a dark lantern on the wharf; and sure, a knowledgeable man like yourself can tell in a jiffey whether the canvas is a dead bargain or not."

"Look here, Michael. I guess I'm growing rather shy of my dead bargain. It don't somehow seem all on the square to me; but as Angus R. Nixon—that's me, Michael—never broke his word to no man, I'll give you three sovereigns for the sail, perviding, of course, it's a brand new article, and will be about my fit, there or thereabout."

"Three sovereigns! Do you want to squeeze the life-blood out of me? May I never do an honest day's work again if I'd go through the same anxiety of mind as I've gone through this blessed day for three

pound—let alone the value of the article itself! It's making you a present of it, I am, if I say five pound, and that's the lowest sum I can take, captain. Best lave it alone altogether!"

"Waal, let us see it first, at any rate, before we come to any conclusion. It all depends on how I likes the article when I gets a fair look at it. I'm in the market; you needn't fret if I'm getting a straight bargain."

The pair had by this time reached the quay, which was deserted, as Sloughford was an early-to-bed town, and in they walked silently to the wharf. There they found a young man in charge of the sail, which lay along the wharf, coiled up, and covered with a tarpaulin covering. Nixon fancied the figure of the young man—Halligan's son—was familiar to him; but it was so dark, and Nixon was so excited and so fearful of the existence of some plot, that he did not trouble to examine young Halligan closely—nor, indeed, did he see any reason why he should do so.

"Now, Johnnie," cried Mike Halligan, "off with the tarpaulins! Look alive, boy—this is the captain himself—and there's no time to lose! There now, captain, isn't it a beauty?" as the covering was

rapidly taken off, "an' you can see with your eyes shut almost that it's just the length of the brigantine's fore-yard. Open the sail out, Johnnie—look alive, boy—and show the skipper there isn't a patch on it. Flash the lantern along it, Johnnie!"

"I can't see the cursed thing," said Nixon, as the two Halligans began to roll out the sail. "It seems right enough, but I'd like a more prolonged examination, strangers, I would—not that I doubts you, but you know 'tis only fair business between man and man to see that all's straight up and down. Here, hand me the lantern, youngster!"

"Johnnie, give the captain the lantern," said the elder Halligan—"look alive, boy."

As Nixon was about to flash the light along the sail, plain Mike uttered a loud cry of alarm.

"Shut the lantern up at once! Quick, skipper! Here, give it to me. There's a quay watchman bearin' down on the wharf. If we're caught here, 'tis in chokey we'll all find ourselves this blessed night. Rowl the sail up, Johnnie—quick, boy!"

Captain Nixon, in a fever of terror, was by this time busy unmooring his boat. He had bounded off the wharf at the mention of the watchman.

“Will you have it for the five pound, skipper? You’ll never be offered such a bargain again, take my word for it.”

“As I’ve said the word, shove it into the boat for the three pounds -- perviding the watchman ain’t spotted us yet. Be quick about it, if you mean business!”

Captain Nixon, frightened as he was at the prospect of getting into trouble, could not resist the temptation of securing the canvas for a few pounds. Even the slight examination he had been able to make, satisfied him the sail was about the fit for the fore-yard of his vessel, and that the stuff in it appeared to be really good and new.

“Say four ten, then, and over it goes!” cried Halligan.

“Come, I’ll spring another pound. Pass it along for four pounds.”

“Oh murdher!” cried Halligan. “’Tis a hard man you are. Though it’s like a partin’ with my heart’s blood, I wouldn’t break my word. Come, Johnnie; look alive, boy, before the ould cripple of a watchman is down atop of us. Tumble the sail over.”

Nixon handed four sovereigns to the elder Halli-

gan, and, still fearing treachery, grasped Michael's hand tightly until the sail had been rolled over the wharf into the boat. Then the skipper sculled swiftly into the centre of the stream, and was soon under the quarter of the *Greenback*.

"Make fast!" he cried, throwing the boat's painter over the bulwarks.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the mate.

The skipper quickly clambered up the brigantine's side and stood on the poop. The crew, he noticed, were on the deck forward. "Why don't the men go below, mate?" he asked. And before the mate had time to reply, his chief slapped him roughly on the back and then gripped him by the shoulder.

"Waal, Mr Mate," he guffawed. "Oh! I guess, I do, I've had those cursed old Sloughford folk at last. There's a brand-new foresail just our fit in the boat, and I got it straight away for four pound. That's business, ain't it, Mr Mate? Oh! ho! ho! ho!"

"I'm glad to hear it, skipper," said the mate, as soon as Captain Nixon had done laughing; "for while we was ashore to-night, I'm sorry to report that some of those long-shore swabs came aboard and stole our foresail—clean and clear away."

"Jee-rusalem!" yelled Captain Nixon, slapping his thigh violently. "And where was Coggin? What did that red-hot jackass Coggin mean by leaving the ship? Oh, wait till I gets my grip fastened on that all-fired idiot."

"It appears, skipper, that young Halligan—"

"Young what?" yelled Captain Nixon.

"Young Halligan—that's the name of the second tallyman our merchant sent here—told Coggin you sent for him, and that you wanted him most particular, at the "Jolly Sailors," which, as you know, skipper, is at the other end of the town—"

"Waal, go on!"

"Waal, Coggin, like the softy he is, took young Halligan's word for it, and as he and Halligan were pretty thick for the past week or so, he left the ship in charge of that late tallyman of ours. Coggin only came back just as we all tumbled aboard to-night, and he's down in the fo'e'stle now, about three part sprung, and in a mortal funk."

"I'll spring him! Get that sail out of the boat, quick, mate! Sing out to the men."

The sail was hoisted on deck.

"There aint no mistake about this," said the mate,

as, with the aid of a lamp, he carefully examined the canvas and tarpaulin. "That's our own foresail, sure enough."

"It is, is it?" groaned the skipper, throwing up his arms. "Oh, Jee-hosophat! Oh, plain Mike!"





CHAPTER VII.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

WHEN Nixon had sculled away from the wharf, the man whom Halligan had pointed out as a quay watchman advanced rapidly towards the two conspirators.

Well," he cried, "have you done the trick?"

"Clean! Four yellow boys!" replied young Halligan, dancing a breakdown on the wharf.

"Be quiet, Johnnie. It's no laughing matther, I can tell you," said the elder Halligan, holding the four sovereigns in the open palm of his hand.

"That's where I differ with you, Mike," said the newcomer.

"Well, you see, Ned, it's the first piece of open

daylight robbery I've ever been guilty of, and only you pressed me so hard, I'd never had the pluck to go through with it. I feel quite unaisy."

"Robbery, be hanged!" cried Foxy Ned. "Don't you know there isn't a man in the port that has a more tendher conscience than my own self?"

"But when the Blue Nose finds out how he has been done, he's sure to get me into trouble."

"Make your mind aisy about that, Mike. The dickens a word of it he'll ever tell. His only anxiety will be to get you to close your mouth over it, for he wouldn't wish for worlds that the people here would know how soft he is."

"Do you ralely think so? Stop that larkin', Johnnie."

"Do I ralely think so?" said Foxy Ned. "Why, man, 'tis offer you another four pound he will not to let it be known how clever you done him."

"But what am I do with the money?"

"Well," answered Ned, rubbing his ill-shaven chin, "that's what puzzles meself."

"I'll put it in the poor box this very night."

"Not a bad idaya at all—but the matter wants a little considerin'. Come over to the 'Blue Anchor,'

an' we'll see what's the best an' the honestest way to settle matthers."

Foxy Ned and the two Halligans then crossed the quay hurriedly, and entered the "Blue Anchor"—a public-house frequented chiefly by long-shore men and coasting sailors. They found that the small taproom was deserted, and ordering a bottle of whisky to be sent in to them, the three men seated themselves in a quiet corner of the room.

"Now, gentlemen," said Foxy Ned, "without braggin', there's no manner of doubt I'm the most knowledgeable of us three, so, before we enter into a discussion, will ye agree to make me umpire, and to be said by whatever I decide is the best course to adopt?"

"We will," answered the Halligans, almost in the same breath.

"It's a heavy responsibility," sighed Foxy Ned, "and it requires a power of careful considherin'."

"Whatever you do, be honest, Ned," said the elder Halligan, shaking his head solemnly.

"That goes without sayin', Mike. Now as ye have agreed to be said by me, the first thing to do is to hand over the four yellow boys to the umpire."

After a little hesitation Halligan handed the sovereigns to his companion. Then Foxy Ned fished a wooden spectacle-case from one of his pockets, and placed the spectacles slowly and carefully over the bridge of his nose.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "I must put some sayrious questions to you. In the first place, what will it cost to wash the pair of ye?"

Young Halligan burst into laughter.

"Be quiet, Johnnie," said his father angrily. "One would think 'twas a matter for jokin' an' grinnin'."

"Be quiet, John," added Foxy Ned. "I'm talkin' very solemn now. Aren't you prepared to be sayrious?"

"All right, Uncle Ned," answered young Halligan, endeavouring to control his risible muscles.

"Come, answer me, gentlemen. What will it cost to wash the pair of ye?"

"Well, to begin with, Ned," replied the elder Halligan, "there will be at least a shilling's worth of grease to rub the tar out, and then—"

"Cut the matter short, gentlemen," interrupted Ned. "It will take all five shillings to make ye

both presentable in decent society. Now, what will it cost for a suit of clothes for both of ye—for your present garments are completely ruined? Come, what's the figure?"

"Say two pound," answered the elder Halligan.

"Very well, gentlemen, that's two pound five. It's all plain sailin' up to this. Now comes the difficult part, so we'd best have a long pull at the bottle before we enthers into a further argument."

After fortifying themselves with the whisky, the three men smacked their lips, and then Foxy Ned carefully adjusted the spectacles over his nose, and coughed.

"The question now, gentlemen," he said, "as I towld ye, is a very difficult one to settle. It's a question of wear and tear."

"I don't quite follow you, Ned," interrupted Mike; "wear and tear of what? I thought we had settled that point."

"Anxiety of mind is what I mean. What's a fair price to put on the anxiety of mind the pair of ye have been throubled with?"

"You're right," said the elder Halligan, in a tone that implied he had been meditating over the point for a considerable time. "That's a puzzlin' question."

"Consider well before you give me your answer," said Foxy Ned, grasping the bottle, and helping himself to a jorum. "Be honest, of course, Mike; but be just to yerself and the boy."

"It's a puzzlin' point," muttered Mike.

"Don't be hasty. The night is young yet. And while you're about it, you may as well answer for Johnnie along with yourself, for the boy is too inexperienced to know the value of the wear and tear on his mind."

"Well, Ned," sighed Mike, "I think if you wor to say a pound, you'd be purty near the mark—fifteen shillings for me own anxiety, and five shillings for Johnnie's."

"Too much, too much!" said the umpire, waving his hand.

"Then put the price on it yourself, Ned, in the name of goodness; for I'm fairly nonplussed."

"Seven-and-six for you, Mike, and half-a-crown for the boy, is what I considers fair an' honest between man an' man."

"That's cuttin' it very fine, Ned. Couldn't you stretch it a bit?"

"I couldn't, and be conscientious."

"Well, make it the half sovereign then; for I wouldn't take a penny that wasn't due to me fair an' honest."

"Let me see," said Ned, rubbing his chin. "Where are we now? Five shillings for the washing, a pound a-piece for the clothes, and ten shillings for anxiety of mind. That comes to two pounds fifteen shillings. And as the bottle is running dhry, we must ordher in a fresh supply. There's a dale to be settled yet."

"Johnnie, me boy, run out to the counther and fetch us another bottle of whisky; an' mind, me boy, not to put your lips to it on the return voyage, for that wouldn't be manners."

"All right, father."

"You'd best bring it back with the cork in it, Johnnie," said Foxy Ned.

"All right, umpire," cried Johnnie.

When the three had consumed a goodly portion of the second bottle, Foxy Ned cleared his throat and said,—

"Now, gentlemen, the undherstandin' is that this money which I hold goes into the poor-box—of course after deductin' all necessary expenses."

"Certainly," cried Mike; "let everything be done fair an' honest."

'Well, after paying for refreshments," continued Foxy Ned, "we have—let me see—we have one pound and fourpence left. Now, I put it to ye, gentlemen, could I myself—taking all things into consideration—accept less than a pound for me professional advice?"

"A pound, Ned!" exclaimed Mike, "that's a dale of money."

"My dear man," said Ned. "I'd gladly take less, but a professional man never accepts less than a guinea for his services. However, not to be hard on ye, I'm knockin' off the odd shillin'."

"But, Uncle Ned," put in young Halligan, "there isn't a guinea left now, so small blame to you to cut down your price."

"My boy," said Ned severely, "you're spakein' in a very ignorant way. If I stuck up for my rights you'd both have to pay me back the shillin' that's wantin'. I think, Johnnie, I over-estimated your washing account—four shillings would have been handsome; but what's the use," he sighed, "of bein' niggardly about thrifles?"

‘A pound is a dale of money,’ sighed the elder Halligan.

“I’m surprised at you, Michael!” exclaimed Ned sharply. “Only for me you’d never have got a penny for anxiety of mind—and this is the way you thrate me now. It’s very painful indeed, Mike,” he added, taking off his spectacles and wiping a tear from his eye.

“All right, all right, Ned,” cried Mike. “Settle it your own way. But how much is there left for the poor-box now?”

“Not a great dale, I must admit,” answered Ned, a suspicion of a smile curling the corners of his lips.

“How much exactly,” demanded Mike. “For I’m not a good scholar, you know.”

“Fourpence is the exact sum, gentlemen.”

“Begor, I’d be ashamed to put fourpence in the poor-box. I think we might as well ordher fourpennorth of whisky, an’ make a finish of it that way.’

“For shame!” exclaimed Foxy Ned indignantly. “I’d never rest aisy if the full balance wasn’t put in the proper place. I’ll take charge of the fourpence meself, and see that justice is done.”



CHAPTER VIII.

“HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?”

A FEW days after the *Greenback* had sailed from Sloughford, business kept Madden and Ryan in the office late. In order that they might not be disturbed, they had closed the front door, and for upwards of an hour they sat writing at the opposite sides of the desk in Ryan's office.

When they had finished their work Madden lit a cigar, and wishing to avoid a conversation with his fellow-clerk, he declared he had promised to visit Butler's house the moment he could get away from the office. Ryan, in a tone which sounded almost like a command, and which sounded strangely in Madden's ears, said he must insist upon having a few words with him; he had something to say, and the sooner it was said the better.

Madden knew the "something" concerned his fellow-clerk's sister, and thinking that it would perhaps be better to brazen the matter out and have done with it for ever, he consented to remain. He had now definitely decided to abandon Maggie, and was only waiting until he could screw his courage up to tell her that all should be at an end between them.

Since the night of the burglary at the shipbroker's office, Madden seemed to have lost a good deal of his high spirits, and Butler had frequently twitted him about his listless, pre-occupied manner.

Ryan, too, had observed with pain the alteration in his fellow-clerk. An uneasy suspicion, which he endeavoured to dismiss, occasionally floated through his mind. Then he fancied Madden's depression might have something to do with the condition of affairs between him and his sister. Perhaps Madden was experiencing a sense of remorse. Ryan knew that Madden was paying attention to Miss Cadogan, but he did not think matters had gone very far, and he felt very sure that Butler would not assent to his niece's accepting a penniless clerk. Miss Cadogan was looked upon as Butler's heiress, and everyone credited the

shipbroker with the possession of a considerable fortune. In the meantime, however, his sister was in a sad state at Madden's open though undeclared desertion of her, and her brother thought it would be only his duty to make one final effort to discover if Madden could be prevailed upon to marry the girl he had promised to marry.

"I suppose you guess what I am about to say to you," began Ryan nervously.

"I do. There is no use in pretending ignorance," replied Madden. "But again I must say that I don't see what right you have to interfere with my affairs."

"What right!"

"Yes; I know what you will say. You are her brother, and all that. You were good enough on a former occasion to threaten me. I suppose you now intend to repeat that style of argument?"

"You know I did not mean what I said; I was carried away by my feelings. But, Arthur, you don't know how my sister's grief pains me."

"It pains me, too, I give you my word. But it was all a mistake; I was too hasty. I cannot afford to marry. I have neither money nor prospects."

"If I could believe the only drawback was want of

means, it would not pain me—nor her—half so much, but I think there is something else.”

“Whatever you may think—I grant you I am a bad lot, mind you—my principal reason for my back-sliding is want of coin. Look at it in the proper light, old man. It would be only misery for the pair of us.”

“Why didn’t you think of that before?”

“You can’t expect everyone to be as wise and as full of forethought as yourself, Ryan. I was carried away by my feelings, just as you were when you threatened to make an example of me.”

“You are jesting now. It is not a laughing matter—at least not for me, or for her. It is disgusting to see you treating matters in such a fashion.”

“You’re in a temper now, old man. Don’t scowl at me like that. Believe me, it will be all the better for your sister to get rid of me. I’m a bad lot altogether. Look here, Ryan. Do you think I don’t know what a queer, reckless sort of fellow I am? Latterly I have been thinking a good deal about myself, and wondering whether I am destined to turn out a complete scoundrel or not; and, ’pon my soul I fancy it would be better for me to sever my con-

nection with Sloughford and all belonging to it, and get away to some new country and begin life afresh. If I remain here I am a lost man."

There was something in Madden's voice which touched Ryan. Looking anxiously at his fellow-clerk, Ryan said,—

"I can't make you out at all, Arthur."

"Don't trouble yourself to do so. The game wouldn't be worth the candle."

"The way you spoke a moment ago, one would fancy you had been guilty of a crime."

"And the way you spoke a few moments ago one would fancy you considered I was guilty of a very great crime."

"I don't mean crime in the sense you mean it, although—" He stopped abruptly, as if he were afraid to say something which he had intended to say. Then, after a brief pause, he sighed, and continued,—“It is bad enough, in all conscience, to break a poor girl's heart.”

"Better for a girl to break her heart—in the conventional sense of the term, of course—than to lead a life of unhappiness with a good-for-nothing fellow like myself."

"But—be truthful, now—isn't there another lady in the case? Aren't you in love with somebody else?"

"Really, I don't think I ever knew what it was to be in love—I mean the way some men fall in love—with any girl living, except, perhaps, with Maggie."

"Then, if you are not in love with Miss Cado-gan, you have no right to pay your addresses to her any more than you have a right to break your promise to my sister. I suppose," added Ryan, standing up, "your object is money. I am thoroughly disgusted with you."

"Don't run off like that. Sit down again a minute. You jump to conclusions too quickly. Sit down, man. That's right. Now, Ryan, if I was as mercenary as you want to make me out, why should I neglect your sister? She will fall in for a tidy little sum of money if M'Cormick's will is ever—"

He stopped suddenly, a bright crimson flush suffusing his cheeks.

Ryan leant across the desk, his eyes almost starting from their sockets, and in a whisper, said slowly,—

"How, in God's name, do you know that?"





CHAPTER IX.

MOSTLY RETROSPECTIVE.

WHEN Madden was about to leave his office the evening he had gone over to Bank-side to bid Mrs M'Cormick good-bye, it occurred to him again that the safe, in which he had locked up the gold, contained, in all probability, M'Cormick's will. From Helen he had been able to ascertain only that she suspected the will had been left in her uncle's care, but Butler had never referred to the matter in her presence. Of the contents of the will, or of any particulars concerning it, she was wholly ignorant. However, Miss Walsh seemed confident that Butler held the will, and she had some good reason for so believing.

Madden opened the heavy door of the safe. No doubt he was now staring at the iron drawer which

contained the will. He knew that a few documents of importance were locked up in the drawer, of which only Butler possessed the key.

One cause of his anxiety to see the will—apart from the desire to prove to Miss Walsh how clever he was—was that he fully expected his own name was mentioned in it. Ryan and he had frequently performed services for M'Cormick outside the ordinary course of business, and on one occasion Madden, half in joke, had declared to the master of the *Water Nymph* that he would be grievously disappointed if he should forget to leave him a legacy. He had been slightly chagrined to observe that M'Cormick seemed to place more confidence in Ryan than in himself, and he had a jealous suspicion that, in case Butler's clerks were to benefit by the will, the advantage would be largely on Ryan's side.

He was, moreover, curious to discover how Mrs M'Cormick and Miss Walsh were situated, and he was anxious, naturally enough, to know if anything had been left to Helen Cadogan. M'Cormick had often protested loudly his indebtedness to the shipbroker, and he might probably resolve that the best way of showing his gratitude would be to leave

Butler's niece something to remember him by. M'Cormick had, Madden knew, frequently met Helen, both at Woodbine Cottage and at her uncle's house, and he had seemed to take a special interest in her.

"At all events," reflected Madden, "it will relieve my mind—and Miss Walsh's," he added, as if it eased his conscience to take into consideration the anxiety of the landlady of the "Bold Dragoon"—"of a burden of curiosity, if I can only see for myself how the skipper of the *Water Nymph* has devised his worldly goods."

But what had he to do in order to learn the secret? The drawer of the safe was locked, and forcing a lock was rather an ugly offence. It was known that he had been left alone in the office, and if the lock were tampered with, suspicion would naturally fall upon him. The safe was an old one; probably the lock, which seldom knew the companionship of a key, had been injured by rust, and would yield with a little pressure. Still he dared not apply that pressure.

He was alone in the office. The street door was closed, the blinds were carefully drawn down. No

one could be a witness of his proceedings. He hesitated for a moment, and then slowly closed the door of the safe.

Although he was in the habit of regarding with complacence acts which were tricky, if not absolutely dishonest, he felt appalled at the notion of tampering with a lock, especially a lock belonging to Butler. He knew the shipbroker placed implicit confidence in him, and he did not like the notion of breaking trust with him. For no other man in Sloughford had he any real regard or respect, but Butler inspired in him a vague feeling which was not wholly one of awe or affection, but which had in it a little of both qualities.

For a few minutes he stood staring at the closed door of the safe, hesitating whether or no he should abandon his design of opening the drawer. He had almost made up his mind to go home.

But the path to Avernus is easy. Perhaps one of his own keys would fit the lock. It could be no harm to try at anyrate. What was M'Cormick's will more than any other document left for security in the office? Yes, he would try one of his own keys. If he could open the drawer with a key, he could

close it again, and if he replaced the will no one would ever be the wiser that he had taken a peep at it. Besides, no one would be injured by his action.

He turned the gas slightly down and pulled back the heavy door of the safe. From his pocket he took a bunch of keys and tried four of them, but none fitted the lock. Again he felt inclined to give up the task.

There was luck in odd numbers. He tried another key, and his heart throbbed violently as he found the key turning slowly in the keyhole. He looked around the office as if in dread he was observed. Then smiling at his fearfulness he pulled out the drawer.

There were several papers in it—mostly, it seemed to him, old letters. On the top of a bundle of letters was a tin case, to which was attached a small parchment label.

He brought the case to the gas jet, and read on the label, in Butler's writing, "John M'Cormick's will, etc." This, then, was what he was in search of. How stupid of him to have been so nervous!

Should he take the case away with him, or should he merely abstract the will? It would be better to

leave the case in the safe. It was such an awkward thing to carry, and he might possibly meet Butler. He could easily manage to open the padlock. He had no key that would fit so small a lock, but he had once seen a padlock prized open on the deck of a ship when the key had been lost: by hitting the elbow of the lock a sharp, heavy stroke, the bolt would be forced open, apparently without damaging the padlock in any way. It would seem simply as if Butler had forgotten to shoot the bolt. He went to the fireplace, and got the bottom of the padlock to rest on the hearthstone. Then with a swift blow of the poker the lock was opened, and rising from the ground, he drew a bulky parchment from the case.

It was scarcely half-an-hour from the time it first occurred to him to tamper with the drawer of the safe until M'Cormick's will was in his hands; but it seemed to him as if a couple of hours had elapsed. He took out his watch, and, surprised to find it was so early, he turned up the gas and sat down at the office desk. Should he read the will here, or should he take it away and read it at his leisure? He decided upon adopting the latter course, and, leaving the desk, he

replaced the tin case in the drawer, locked the drawer, and closed the safe.

Then he thought he would take one peep into the will before he left the office. He opened out the parchment, and as he did so it seemed to him that the handwriting was familiar to him. The words were written with a slant from right to left. There was no one he was acquainted with who adopted that style of writing. Perhaps the handwriting was disguised. But why should there be any disguise about it? and yet he could not but think there was something familiar to him in the character of the writing. It might be that he had seen a legal document somewhere drawn up by the same hand.

He read the first few lines of the will, and then he heard a sudden noise which caused his heart almost to stand still. Placing the will inside his coat, he quickly turned off the gas, and felt his way to the door. In a fever of terror, he ran down the dark, narrow passage, dreading every moment he should come across somebody. He scarcely knew how he turned the key in the lock inside.

When he found himself outside the door he felt suddenly relieved. There was no one in sight.

He took the key from the lock inside and closed the door. Then he noticed that the window of his office was slightly open at the top, and he knew what the sound was. How stupid of him not to have thought of it before! It was merely the flapping of the window blind. Cursing Foxy Ned's negligence, he shoved up the window, and then he walked hurriedly to his lodgings.

After his return from Bankside the same night he read the will carefully, and having made a note of a few items in it, he went to bed determined to restore the parchment to its proper place next day. When he heard the news of the burglary in the morning he was astounded, and after a short deliberation with himself he decided that it would be impossible now to produce the will without attracting towards him a suspicion that he had also taken the gold from the safe. If he held his peace no one would suspect him of having taken the will; even if the burglars were caught, no light could be thrown upon the matter.

For a few days he felt quite miserable and restless, and hourly stormed at his ill-luck. Only for the burglary, all would have been right.

Then another view of the case came before him. Perhaps it was all the better for him that the burglary had occurred the same night that he had stolen the will. Stolen! He shuddered as the word found its way into his musings. He saw a prospect now of making something out of the will, and he would retain the precious document until he could formulate a plan. M'Cormick had sadly disappointed him. He had heard the story of the *Greenback's* fore-sail from Foxy Ned; and, with an inward chuckle, he decided that he too deserved compensation for "anxiety of mind."

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When it slipped from him during his conversation with Ryan that he was actually aware of at least a portion of the contents of M'Cormick's will, he endeavoured to pull himself together, and invent some explanation which would satisfy his fellow-clerk.

Judging from the manner in which Ryan spoke, he, too, must have possessed himself somehow of a knowledge of the contents of the will. Perhaps the smooth-faced hypocrite had been guilty of tampering with the lock of the drawer. Or it might have been that M'Cormick himself had told Ryan he had left

something to his sister. Yes, this was the more reasonable conclusion.

Finding Madden was silent, and seeing confusion in his face, Ryan again startled him by saying,—

“How do you know that my sister’s name is mentioned in M’Cormick’s will?”

“The fact is—if you must know—M’Cormick told me; but I promised to keep the information a secret.”

“I am afraid—in fact, I know, you are not telling the truth.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Well, to be candid with you, I don’t believe M’Cormick told you anything about this will.”

“How dare you insult me? What do you know about the will, if it comes to that?”

“A good deal.”

“So it seems. How, pray?”

“That is my business, for the present.”

Madden paused, and drew the ends of his moustache inside his lips. What did this mean—what did he know? Fancy this weak-kneed creature developing all at once into a bullying cross-examiner! It was absurd. He felt inclined to laugh.

"We have been making quite a row about nothing, it seems to me. I suppose the fact is that M'Cormick told you about as much as he told me. Why make a mystery of it?"

"M'Cormick never told you about his will, for you never saw him after it was drawn up. That much I do know for a certainty."

Madden was completely puzzled. Could it be possible that Ryan suspected the truth? Would it not be best, after all, to confide in Ryan, and placed himself at his mercy? He could depend on him. It would be useless to entangle himself in a network of lies. He could not now declare that he had obtained his information from Mrs M'Cormick or from Butler, for he had already declared he had his information direct from M'Cormick. Ryan had guessed or knew something. There could be no doubt on that point. What did he really know?

"You have grown too deep altogether for me," smiled Madden. "Come, let us be straight with each other, and have the mystery made plain."

"Agreed. But, remember, if you are going to tell me anything, I shall expect the truth—"

"The whole truth, and nothing but the truth,"

interrupted Madden, with a short, unpleasant laugh.

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t treat everything so flippantly. If you only knew how uneasy I have felt lately on your account! For some time I have had a horrible suspicion with regard to you: but I am willing to do anything to save you—for Maggie’s sake.”





CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH SOME OLD ACQUAINTANCES MEET.

“**T**HIS is extraordinary news about the Bishop, isn’t it, skippers ?” grunted Captain Broaders, the evening of the day after Captain Flynn had visited Rosspoint.

“Extraordinary indeed !” exclaimed Captain Bendall, shaking his head and knocking the ashes from his pipe.

“So far as I am personally concerned,” said Captain Arkwright, diving his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and stretching his legs out at full length, “your conversation is of an eminently ambiguous nature. What is this novel account of events with regard to our friend and fellow-seaman Augustine Flynn ?”

"Well, well, well," cried Captain Carmody, in a half-scornful, half-amused tone; "I'd sooner try and work out a square yard of logarithms, than bother my brains trying to understand the drift of your remarks. I wonder you wouldn't have sense, man!"

"I did not address myself to you, sir; for your nebulosity about matters of grammar and politeness is positively fulsome. Perhaps you, John Broaders, will be good enough to enlighten me as to our friend Augustine Flynn. I merely ask for information, and not from motives of ignorant curiosity."

Broaders was about to speak, when Carmody interrupted.

"I suppose you have been studying the dictionary very hard while we have been away," he said, with a sinister smile. "'Pon my song, 'tis better than a play to be listening to you."

"Let the man alone, Pat;" said Captain Sullivan. "If Augy Flynn was here, you'd be catching it hot for your talk."

"Oh, is that you, James?" sneered Carmody, taking off his cap, and bowing. "I suppose you are going to take the Bishop's place now, and do all the sermonising."

"Take the Bishop's place!" cried Arkwright, for getting in his anxiety that he was not indulging in polysyllables. "Why, what has gone wrong with him?"

"Well, as you ask in a natural way, like any Christian man, I'll tell you myself," said Carmody. "He has signed a foreign charter to-day, and we sha'n't see him here again, he says, for years maybe."

"I wonder what has come over him?" asked Captain Bendall. "Fancy a man of his time of life taking it into his head to go knocking about the world again!"

"Ay, and in such a craft too. She is too small to make money going foreign," grunted Broaders.

"But Captain Augy doesn't want money," said Carmody. "He has neither chick nor child, and by all accounts he's fairly well off as it is."

"The man is drinking, no doubt," grunted Broaders.

"For shame!" cried Arkwright. "A more temperate individual than Augustine Flynn does not navigate the adjacent waters."

"It puzzles me clean," said Bendall. "Perhaps 'tis going out as a missionary he is. If a Hottentot couldn't be converted with a sweep of his crozier or a glimpse of his top hat, I don't think anything on earth would convert him."

"I wonder," said Carmody, "where was the old boy driving to yesterday. I saw him mounted on a jaunting-car, with a brand new hat and umbrella."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" chuckled Bendall, visions of fresh pranks with the new hat and umbrella floating before him.

"There's something mystic at the bottom of this," said Arkwright, who had been lost in thought since he heard of the Bishop's foreign charter. "Why, Augustine Flynn assured me last voyage that it was his intention to institute a sale of his vessel and retire, like myself, into private life."

"It's well to be you, Arkwright—living ashore like a gentleman," grinned Carmody.

"I do not live, sir," said Arkwright, gripping his trousers at the knee, and giving them a violent jerk, "I merely vegetate on a pittance."

The skippers were seated round the long table at the "Nest." Broaders, Carmody, Sullivan, and the Bishop had arrived in Sloughford a few days previously, towards the end of the southerly gale. Cummins had fallen in love with the landlady of a public house in Cardiff, and in his anxiety to bring matters to a crisis he had lost his passage. Ben-

dall's ship was not yet out of the hands of the carpenters.

"The wind has gone round right into the north," said Bendall, finding the conversation was lagging; "so I suppose we may expect skipper Nixon and his schooner here in a day or two."

"I quite coincide with you, Captain Bendall," said Arkwright. "As I entered this house of entertainment I judged the wind to be tantamount to north-east and by north, which would be an equable wind from Scotland."

"What a drubbing the poor Bishop gave him last voyage! I am sorry you missed the fun, Captain Broaders," laughed Carmody.

"I heard all about it from Tom Bendall," grunted Broaders; "and is it true what he tells me, too—that there is going to be a match between the New Brunswick and the missus?" pointing with his thumb towards the shop.

"I believe there's no mistake about it," answered Carmody.

"Such statements should be received with a grain of salt," said Arkwright, again stretching his legs out at full length, and throwing his head back.

"For the love of goodness," cried Sullivan, lifting both hands, "avoid salt in large or small doses! It's after playing the mischief with me."

"What!" cried Carmody.

"Yes," said Sullivan solemnly; "but," his face lighting up, "I have discovered something new—"

"That the moon is made of green cheese, I suppose," interrupted Carmody, with a fierce laugh.

"No; it's something better than that. This!" he cried, drawing from his pocket a piece of sulphur. "Brimstone—cane brimstone! A man would live for ever, in a manner of speaking, if he could only swallow enough of it, and accustom himself to smelling the fumes of it."

"You'll have plenty of the fumes in the other world, anyhow," chuckled Bendall.

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Bendall's conjecture that the *Greenback* would arrive in Sloughford in a day or two proved correct.

Captain Nixon was not in high spirits as he entered the harbour for the second time, nor did he indulge in the hope that he was about to prove his superiority, mental or physical, over the people whom he might come into contact with in the seaport. His inten-

tions were to conduct himself quietly and unostentatiously, and to marry the landlady of the "Bold Dragoon."

He felt that there was some risk incurred in taking Miss Walsh to wife; but so far as he could learn, she would at least be left in possession of the public-house, and she had saved some money too, she had assured him. He had received a few letters from his lady-love while his ship was loading at Greenock. The gist of the information they contained was that the will stolen from Butler's office had not been recovered; and that the *Water Nymph* had been posted at Lloyd's as a missing ship.

The skipper went ashore as soon as the *Greenback's* anchor was down. Adopting the motto, "Business first, pleasure afterwards," he walked straight to Butler's office. Foxy Ned had boarded the *Greenback* some distance down the river, and had informed Nixon that he would in all probability find "Mr Arthur" in possession of the office, as "Mr Michael" was laid up with a heavy cold, and the governor himself had gone out of town for a few days.

This information pleased Nixon. He always felt uncomfortable in Butler's presence. He would be

able to have a long chat with Madden, and learn what were his opinions now with regard to the partition of Captain M'Cormick's fortune. From the very beginning Nixon had never entertained any doubt as to the fate of the *Water Nymph* and her crew.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when the skipper of the *Greenback* entered the shipbroker's office. The gas, he saw from the outside, was burning in both offices, so he knew that business was not over for the day. When he reached the end of the passage, he found the door of Madden's office closed. The door of Ryan's office stood wide open, so he turned to the right.

Captain Arkwright was seated at one side of the fireplace, Captain Bendall at the other side. There was no one else in Ryan's office. The fire-grate was empty, but from force of habit the two skippers had drawn their chairs to the fireplace. Both were fast asleep. Captain Arkwright was snoring loudly, his head resting on one shoulder, his arms folded on his breast. His hat had fallen off, and lay on the ground near his chair. Bendall was sitting bold upright, his hands clasped in front. Occasionally his thumbs

twitched, as if he were about to twirl them. His hat was on his head, and the leaf of it rested on the bridge of his nose.

"This looks like business, it do," said Nixon, with a chuckle, as he gazed at the sleepers.

He crossed the passage-way and tapped at the door of Madden's office. A loud "Come in—come in," satisfied him that his friend was still at his post.

Madden jumped off his stool as the New Brunswicker entered the office, and shaking hands warmly with Nixon, cried,—

"Welcome back! You're the very man I was anxious to see. And how are you?"

"Among the middlings. How are you?"

"Worried out of my wits. The governor had to leave town about some private business, and we do not know yet when we are to expect him back. Then my colleague must take it into his head to catch cold; and he looks as if he meant to go on sneezing and coughing for months. It's an infernal nuisance altogether. Only that business has been slack latterly, you would have found me, as our friend Captain Arkwright would put it, incarcerated within the precincts of a lunatic asylum."

"What a jaw that same Arkwright has," grinned Nixon, who now hated everyone connected in any way with his ignominious struggle with the Bishop.

"Yes," laughed Madden. "Pity Samson didn't get hold of him. He might have slain twenty thousand Philistines with Arkwright's jaw-bone, for he's a double-dyed ass. But," he added, "it is not fair to laugh at the poor old chap behind his back. He's not a bad sort in his way. But to business, captain. We have got your orders here about discharging."

When they had talked about and arranged all matters connected with the ship's business, Madden said,—

"And now, skipper, I want to have a chat with you privately."

"Fire ahead, sonny! Any news about this will? I'm interested in it a little now," he grinned.

"I know. Now, tell me, are you going to marry the 'Bold Dragoon'?—I mean Miss Walsh."

"I think so. I don't mind telling you things, as I believe you're a friend of mine, and knows how to keep yourself to yourself. D'ye mind?"

"I understand; and I hope you, too, know how

to keep your mouth shut. Will you promise me now, on your sacred word of honour, not to let slip from you anything I tell you in confidence ? ”

“ Depend your life on me, my son,” said Nixon, stretching out his large hand and gripping Madden’s hand tightly.

“ Well, I heard that the police are at last on the scent of the fellows who broke into the office.”

“ They are, are they ? ”

“ Yes. So there is a strong probability of their getting hold of the lost will. At least they think so ; but I am on a scent of my own—a better one than theirs, I think.”

“ And what then ? How do you think it will affect Miss Julia if the will is recovered ? ”

“ The general opinion amongst those who ought to know is that M‘Cormick left the bulk of his money and property to his sister.”

“ And how much do you think the brother was worth ? ”

“ About six thousand, they say.”

“ Phew ! ” whistled Nixon. “ So your advice to me is—”

“ To lead the landlady to the altar before she

fancies she is worth five or six thousand. She'll fly for higher game even than yourself if she once gets that notion in her head."

"You ain't very complimentary, you ain't," grinned Nixon.

"I have not suggested that I think you are not too good for Miss Walsh ; but if people find out she is worth so much money, they will be putting notions into her head."

"Don't you fret, my son. I was only joking a moment ago. You may calculate on my taking your advice, and I feel, I do, that you have been a stunning good friend to me. I don't mean to forget it neither ; for Angus R. Nixon—that's me, Mr Madden—was never known to forget the man as done him a good turn."

Again the skipper and Madden shook hands.

"I must be off now," smiled the New Brunswicker, "or she'll be getting it into her head, she will, that I've got on the loose, or gone astray."

And Nixon laughed so loudly at the notion of his going astray that the sleepers in Ryan's office were rudely awakened.



CHAPTER XI.

A WEDDING AND A PROPOSAL.

THE master of the *Greenback* lost no time in acting upon Madden's advice, and one day during the week after his arrival from Greenock, Angus R. Nixon and Julia Walsh were made man and wife.

There was some difficulty in arranging about the marriage ceremony, as the pair professed different creeds; but the difficulty, which promised in the beginning to be a formidable one, was eventually surmounted.

No honeymoon trip was undertaken. The skipper of the *Greenback* and his spouse returned to the "Bold Dragoon" immediately after the ceremony. A dance was got up towards the evening in the "Nest," the largest room in the house, at which

dance Captain Carmody carried off the honours, his powers of endurance and his agility being reckoned trully marvellous.

Beyond the festivities, there was nothing to show that the ordinary course of business at the "Bold Dragoon" had been in any way disturbed. The *Greenback* exhibited a gaudy display of bunting; but, much to the annoyance and disgust of the newly-married couple, no other ship in the harbour flew a flag in honour of the wedding.

Mrs Nixon rated Carmody roundly for his want of courtesy and friendly feeling, and the irascible skipper's somewhat ambiguous explanation prevented the landlady from attacking the other master mariners who patronised her house.

"I haven't yet put the ensign half-mast for your brother John, ma'am," said Carmody; "not out of want of respect for his memory, ma'am, but because maybe his head is still above water; and, do you see, if we were to fly flags in honour of yourself, it would—meaning no offence—be a case of putting the cart before the horse. I hope you understand me, ma'am."

The Bishop had respectfully declined to be a

wedding-guest. He had seldom left his ship since his return from Rosspoint, and his friends found it was useless to attempt to entice him ashore. They were completely puzzled at the sudden change in Captain Flynn's manner. Captain Broaders charitably insinuated that the Bishop was drinking secretly and heavily; on one occasion he even went so far as to express his opinion that the pious mariner was on the verge of *delirium tremens*; but the other skippers indignantly scouted such a suggestion. They were saddened, as well as puzzled, by the alteration in their friend. Even Bendall had not the heart to play tricks with the new mitre and crozier, although more than once, as he gazed at the abnormal gloominess of the Bishop's hat, he was terribly tempted to brush the nap the wrong way.

Sloughford, generally, took little or no interest in the marriage of Miss Walsh. That portion of the population which found a living at sea, or which was connected with the seafaring element, was indignant at the idea of a sister paying so little respect to the memory of a brother, and augured badly for the future prospects of the "Bold Dragoon." Of Nixon nothing was known, except

that those who had met him had, as a rule, taken an instinctive dislike to him.

But there was one man in the seaport who was well pleased at the rapidity with which the skipper of the *Greenback* had completed his matrimonial arrangements, for he now saw a prospect of obtaining in the near future a considerable money advantage. Madden had learned from his fellow-clerk that it was he, Ryan, who had privately drawn up M'Cormick's will, and he had promised Ryan two things as the price of secrecy, namely, that he would, at the earliest opportunity, confess his wrong-doing to Butler, and restore the will to him, and that he would marry Ryan's sister within a twelvemonth.

Madden had no intention of keeping either of these promises. In looking through some correspondence of Butler's he came across a letter from Mrs M'Cormick, and, much to his surprise, he learned that the will drawn up by Ryan was legally worthless.

Before M'Cormick had sailed out of Sloughford harbour he had made a new division of his worldly goods. How he had devised them Madden could not discover, but the new will had been delivered into Mrs M'Cormick's hands by the captain of the *Atalanta*.

Mrs M'Cormick's letter, which he had found in Butler's private desk, referred chiefly to the question of the validity of the document which had come into her possession.

Turning the matter over in his mind carefully, he made up his mind how he would act with regard to Nixon, and he chuckled violently at the notion of diddling the New Brunswicker so cleverly. He had no doubt he could twist him round his finger. He had completely lost his small stock of conscience since the night he had abstracted the will; and it was his intention now to quit the country, and take Helen with him, if he could induce her to accompany him. She had, he learned from her own lips, four hundred pounds settled on her, and this sum, together with five hundred which he intended to get hold of, would start him comfortably in a new hemisphere. He was sick of Sloughford, tired of the dull round of work which fell to his share in Butler's office; and Helen was very fond of him. He would grow very fond of her in time, no doubt.

For Ryan's sister he had not only ceased to care, but he had even developed an actual dislike. The notion that she was being seriously forced upon him

created a sudden revulsion of feeling with respect to her.

With all his disregard for rectitude, he felt a qualm as he thought of Butler. How he would despise him! So far did his feelings carry him away in this direction, that he decided to take no steps about any of his plans until he heard that the shipbroker was on his way home.

"If I leave the office suddenly," he reflected, "things will be in a pretty mess—the governor away, and Ryan laid up. The governor is gone nearly a fortnight now. I wonder where he is, or what he is doing. He is sure to be back soon. I'll rest on my oars, at any rate, until I hear from him. Poor man! It will quite knock him over to discover that I am such a scoundrel, and that I have stolen his treasure from him. Hang it! I have half a mind to leave the girl behind, and trouble my head no further about her."

The day after Nixon was married Madden met the happy mariner in the shipbroker's office, and, after he had offered the usual congratulations, he asked Nixon to pay him a visit at his lodgings during the evening. He had something of the greatest importance to communicate, he whispered.

Nixon arrived at Madden's lodgings about eight o'clock. The shipbroker's clerk met him in the hall, and conducted him to a sitting-room on the first floor.

"We shall be quite alone here," he said, placing a chair near one of the windows for the skipper. I shall probably have something to read to you a little later on; but there will be plenty of light for a good half-hour yet."

Nixon felt there was something peculiar in his host's manner, some change which he did not altogether like. However, he determined to appear quite at his ease.

"You seem to have a pretty tidy sort of place here, you do—if this is your own room," began Nixon, looking round him. "Do you read all those books I see hanging around, if it's a fair question; or are they intended," he chuckled, "for ornament more than use?"

"I don't know whether I have read them all or not; but, as a matter of fact, I do read a good deal. But my business with you is of such an important nature that it admits of no delay—only, before I go on you must give me your solemn word that you will

make no mention of what I intend to say to you now—not even to your better half.”

“I promise, as a man,” said Nixon emphatically.

“Mind you, it is a very serious matter, and in confiding in you I shall be more or less placing myself in your power—not,” he added quickly, with a short laugh, “that I have been guilty of any wrong-doing but appearances would be for a moment strongly against me if you broke faith with me.”

“You can trust me as if I were your own mother, young man. Angus R. Nixon—that’s me, Mr Madden—was never known to break trust with no man born.”

“Well—be prepared for a surprise now—John M’Cormick’s will came into my hands last night—strangely enough,” he smiled, “the night of your marriage.”

“What! the stolen will? Have they caught the burglary chaps?”

“Now don’t puzzle your brains how I got it. You have a hazy notion, I can see, that there is something wrong,—that I have not got hold of the will all on the square. Now, do you seriously think I would have been foolish enough to have told you about the matter

at all if anything were wrong so far as I am concerned?"

After a brief pause, Nixon, extending his hand and grasping Madden's, exclaimed,—

"No, my son; I guess you're a bit too cute, you are, for that."

"Very well; and now that your mind is easy, I want to tell you that I have carefully read the will, and I thought the fairest thing to do was to tell you about it at the earliest opportunity, and then make a proposition to you."

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Nixon, a shade of alarm crossing his face.

"A good deal. I was thunderstruck last night when I mastered the contents of the parchment. Thunderstruck, I can tell you."

"Come, what is it?" asked the New Brunswicker excitedly. "Do you mean to hint to me that my missus is left out in the cold. I'll not believe that yarn, anyhow!" he cried, standing up, and pacing up and down the room, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Sit down, skipper," said Madden, who was sitting on his chair, his elbows resting on the back of it.

"Sit down; and I'll read a bit of the will for you."

"What! Have you got it about you?"

"Yes," drawing it slowly from the breast-pocket of his coat and tapping it lightly with his finger tips.

"Let me see it," cried Nixon, almost pouncing upon the parchment. "Let me read it for myself. How does it run? Let me have a squint at it with my own two eyes."

"With pleasure. You can stand behind me and read it with me over my shoulder," opening out the parchment and holding it out of the skipper's reach.

Madden, in a rapid, indistinct voice, read the earlier portion of the will.

"Now," he said, "here comes your part of it that interests you! You see, M'Cormick left the 'Bold Dragoon,' valued at fifteen hundred pounds, and one thousand in cash, to your good wife."

"Yes, I see," cried Nixon, lifting his head and sighing heavily. "Two thousand five hundred pounds! 'Tis a durned side better than nothing anyhow. It's a tidy lump of money, it is, after all." Then slapping Madden on the back, "Why, you almost frightened my wits out, you did, my son."

"Wait a bit," said Madden, "there is something else. Read on. You see the money and the house are left to her in case she remains single—if she marries, she forfeits every penny and ever stick. It was a kind of craze of M'Cormick's—"

"Je-rusalem!" interrupted Nixon, with a fiendish yell. "I'm fairly wiped out, I am. Fairly wiped out. Fairly chawed up. Oh, if I had only known or guessed this, I'd have chucked the tarnation woman to blue ——, I would, before I'd have tied myself to her! Married a pauper I have, have I?" he laughed, tearing his hair and continuing his quarter-deck walk up and down the room.

"You were in too great a hurry," said Madden, who was intensely amused by this exhibition of Nixon's temper, and thought it would be good fun to aggravate the skipper's angry temper.

"In too great a hurry!" snarled Nixon. "Who the —— urged me on but you? Who stuck my head in the noose but you?"

"Nonsense, man. I acted entirely in your interest. You must remember I knew nothing of this will until last night. It was a bitter blow for myself when I read it."

"A blow for you! What injury could it be to you? You haven't gone and jumped into matrimony with a tarnation sister of this *Water Nymph* fellow?"

"No: but if you will look through the cursed thing, you can see that I am left a paltry fifty pounds; and I assure you it was understood between M'Cormick and myself that he would remember me to the tune of five hundred."

Nixon stopped abruptly in his walk. He felt relieved that he was not the only one disappointed by this villain, M'Cormick.

"That's right," said Madden soothingly. "Sit down again, man; or I'll have to charge you for wearing out my carpet. There's a way out of all the trouble, if—"

"A way out of it? How? I begin to doubt everything and everybody. I think the cussed world has been wheeling round the wrong way since first I had the ill luck to enter this tarnation harbour. What's your notion, though? I know you're a smart man."

"Sit down quietly, and I'll tell you," standing up and good-humouredly pushing the big New Brunswicker into his chair. "You said a moment ago," he con-

tinued, "that you have married a pauper. Now, that was a bit of an exaggeration, wasn't it?"

"Well, yes—a trifle," answered Nixon doggedly.

"You needn't hesitate. It is well known in Sloughford that your wife has saved a bit of money out of the business—her brother interfered very little with the receipts of late years. Now, tell the truth, hasn't she somewhere about a thousand pounds put aside somewhere?"

"Not quite a thousand," smiled Nixon; "say five or six hundred, and you'll be nearer to the mark. But, hang it!" he cried, slapping his thigh violently, "to lose three thousand more as I had calculated on!—it's enough to make a howling lunatic of one."

"You needn't lose three thousand."

"What do you mean, man? I can't unmarry her now: and if I could, it wouldn't bring grist to my mill, which is the chief consideration."

"Listen to me," said Madden, reseating himself, and holding the will in his right hand. "McCormick will cut up for something over six thousand. If no will can be found, your wife gets half the property. Do you follow me?"

"I do, my son, I do," cried Nixon, a vivid gleam in

his eyes. "You are a whole man, you are. I see how the land lies now, I do. You're a wonderful man, you are—a whole scholard. What do you propose?" he whispered. "Who knows you have this will, if it's a fair question?"

"Nobody knows whose mouth can't be closed. And if everyone in Sloughford knew of it, what could it matter to you so long as the will was lost?—if I am game to run the risk of losing it."

"And you are, are you?"

"On certain conditions."

"Name 'em, my son. Let us hear the conditions."

"You see I am disappointed to the extent of five hundred pounds. M'Cormick was an extraordinary man, as, no doubt, his sister has informed you—an ill-tempered brute; and, during a fit of ill-temper he got this stupid will drawn up. Now, if you hand me over five hundred pounds, I'll burn this will in your presence."

"That's a lump of money," muttered Nixon, biting his thumb, and frowning. "A lump of money! Couldn't you make it two fifty?"

"Oh! I am not going to haggle about prices, as if I were a marine store-dealer," replied Madden

testily. "Five hundred is the sum I require. If I produce the will, you lose more than three thousand. Besides, I am really asking a mere trifle for the risk I run."

"How long will you give me to consider the matter?"

"Twenty-four hours. If you hand me five hundred pounds at nine o'clock to-morrow night, I'll burn the will here before your eyes. If you don't bring the coin, I'll forward the document to Mrs M'Cormick at once. If you mention the matter to anybody, you will spoil everything."

"Don't you fret about that. There ain't a man afloat who knows how to keep his jaws fast better nor me. And nothing less than five hundred will satisfy you, Mr Madden?"

"Not a penny less."





CHAPTER XII.

HOME SICKNESS.

WHEN Helen had been a week in Rosspoint she received a letter from her uncle, stating that he was obliged to leave home suddenly. She need not hurry back to town, he said, on his account; he did not know how long he would remain away, but he would be sure to write again a few days before his return. He added that he would speak to her when he came home with reference to a subject which was nearest her heart, and that in the meantime she might be quite satisfied he would do anything in his power to ensure her happiness.

The morning after the arrival of her uncle's note Helen had a long letter from Madden. The tone of

this letter did not altogether please her ; it was carelessly, hurriedly written, it seemed to her, and the writer made no allusion to his recent coolness. At first she felt inclined to tear the letter to pieces and to write to Madden in a manner which would show him she would not tamely submit to be treated so cavalierly. However, after a little reflection, she came to the conclusion that Susan's judgment had been correct, and that Madden was acting under the impression that her uncle did not favour his suit, and was deterred from writing as his heart would dictate, through fear of offending or annoying Butler. But why did neither her lover nor her uncle let her know that they had spoken to each other about herself? Why leave her in doubt about the matter? She would write and ask Arthur.

Susan had at first been angered by Captain Flynn's absurd proposal, but after sufficient time had elapsed to let her anger cool, she remembered the sad, despairing cry of the Bishop when he saw that she did not mean to treat his proposal seriously. He had been undoubtedly in earnest. How strange it was that for the second time a man with whom she could possibly have no sympathy, whose rough tastes

and manners were so repugnant to her, should have singled her out as a likely helpmate !

This thought again caused her to forget the pain she had been obliged to inflict upon Captain Flynn, and to feel a sensation of anger and bitterness which she found it difficult to master. Helen saw that something was fretting Susan, and she concluded that the visit of the Bishop had disturbed her friend's mind. He had probably been the bearer of some unpleasant news. She determined she would speak to Susan, and she was both surprised and pleased to discover that Mrs M'Cormick was not averse from confiding in her the cause of her newly-made trouble. When Helen heard what had really been the object of the Bishop's visit, she could not refrain from laughter, and Susan soon found herself joining in the laughter. In a few days the matter had ceased to be a cause either for amusement or displeasure.

The doubts and fears which had distracted her during the first fortnight of her stay at Rosspoint had now almost ceased to trouble Mrs M'Cormick. Sometimes her thoughts would fix themselves upon her lover, and she would wonder where he was, what he was doing, had his love for her undergone any

change. Though she had made him promise not to hold any communication with her so long as she did not deem herself what others deemed her—a widow—still she was surprised and vexed that he had not written. If his love had been as strong for her as her love for him he would have broken his promise long ago, even at the risk of displeasing her. He might have sent a message to her somehow. Perhaps he was at sea and could not write: but why had he not written even a few words to her before he had sailed? The next moment she would feel glad he had not written. He had always been so truthful, so trustful; and how badly she had treated him long ago, how badly she had repaid him for his trust in her! He would not break his word—he was faithful to his slightest promise. Such a man would be faithful, too, to his vows of love. Nothing could alienate his heart from her. How intensely happy this belief made her!

Of her husband she seldom thought,—never spoke. She had almost made up her mind that she should never see him again, that the sea had claimed him for its own. Every one believed he had been lost. She had suffered almost as much from anxiety, from

the uncertainty with regard to his fate, as if she had been mourning for the loss of a husband dearly loved.

Whenever memories of M'Cormick came to her, they were now associated with recollections and fears of her husband's half-sister. Since the Bishop's unexpected visit, she had lived in daily dread of being favoured by a visit from the landlady of the "Bold Dragoon." She often thought that after a little time had elapsed she would, if no further news of her husband reached her, sell her home in Sloughford. The house at least was her own. It had been a wedding present—the price of years of unhappiness. She would then quit the seaport and leave no trace behind. She could earn a livelihood somewhere, somehow. It was not right she should enjoy the worldly goods of a husband to whom she had never surrendered her heart. She would never touch his money.

Since the morning the news had been public of the barque's supposed loss, Helen had never spoken to Mrs M'Cormick about the *Water Nymph*, or about anything concerning the missing ship. Like the majority of those who had any interest in Susan

or her husband, or who ever took the trouble to think over the facts of the case, Helen had no doubt that the *Water Nymph* had foundered. She felt that it would be idle to discuss the matter with her friend. Besides the girl did not know but that it would add to Susan's grief rather than lessen it were anyone to try and dismiss from her mind the belief that her husband would ever again revisit Sloughford. She felt that this belief still clung to Mrs M'Cormick.

Helen was almost certain that her friend was in love with Dalton; but she was aware that Mrs M'Cormick possessed a strong sense of right and wrong, and would endeavour to trample under foot passions which might prompt her to act unfaithfully even to the memory of a husband who had been forced upon her, and whom she had never loved, never professed to love.

When Butler had been absent from Sloughford for a little more than a fortnight, another letter from him reached Helen. This letter came from Liverpool, and in it the shipbroker stated that he hoped to start for home in three or four days. He was evidently in high spirits when he wrote. He told

Helen she would find he had grown several years younger during his absence, and he promised her he had a great surprise in store for her, and that he had just heard some news which would interest at least one of her friends.

"What an odd letter!" exclaimed Helen, after she had read aloud her uncle's note. "Uncle has grown quite mysterious. I must go home at once, Susan," she added quickly, "and get the house in order. I wonder what can be those surprises he has in store for us all."

"Perhaps," suggested Susan, with a faint smile, "he is bringing home a new mistress for the house."

"Nonsense," frowned Helen, who did not like the suggestion that it was possible she could be supplanted in her uncle's affections. "It is scarcely likely, indeed, that he would think of marrying after remaining so many years a bachelor. I'll tell uncle what you have said when he returns," she laughed; "it will amuse him immensely."

"I spoke half in jest—"

"And wholly in earnest, to judge by your serious face. Fancy," she laughed, "uncle getting married in such a hurry, so mysteriously, without letting anyone be the wiser! It is quite funny."

"I know you think it absurd; but really when you were reading the letter, it struck me—I don't know why—that there was a lady at the bottom of Mr Butler's light-heartedness. Of course, I am wrong," she added. "I suppose he has made some lucky speculation in Liverpool, and means to astonish us all with a display of grandeur when he comes back."

"Very likely you are right about its being a lucky speculation," said Helen, slowly and thoughtfully; "and yet I don't think he would write in such a strain if his news were only something connected with money. Uncle is not very fond of money."

"But just now it may have occurred to him that, there being a likelihood of his niece's flying away from him, it would be a good thing if he found he was wealthy enough to retire, and hand over his business to a certain friend of yours."

Helen blushed vividly.

"You want to tease me now, I see," said she. "That is not fair, Susan."

"I do not, indeed. What could be more likely, after all?"

Helen was on the point of saying it was much more likely her uncle had obtained some further news of

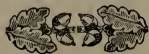
the *Water Nymph*. Or perhaps, it occurred to her next moment, it was something in connection with the missing will. Her uncle knew that Susan would be sure to see his letter. She must be the friend he alluded to. It would be best though, she hastily made up her mind, to adhere to her resolution not to speak to Mrs M'Cormick of her husband, or of anything concerning him. Susan observed her confusion, but fancied it could be easily accounted for. Helen was, doubtless, pondering over the probability of Butler's consenting to her union with Madden.

After a brief pause, Mrs M'Cormick asked,—

“When do you mean to start for Sloughford, Helen.”

“To-morrow, if you have no objection. And when do you intend going back to Woodbine Cottage?”

Susan hesitated a moment, and then she said,—“I don't see why I should remain here any longer. The place would be ever so dull without you; and somehow, strange as it may seem, I am growing a little home-sick.”





CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH A FLIGHT IS INTERRUPTED.

“**F**ORWARD!” said Madden briskly to Foxy Ned, who was standing at the front door of the office the evening of the day before Butler’s expected return. “I am going to take a little country walk.”

“I’m right glad to hear it, sir; for you’re not lookin’ too well at all in your health, if you’ll excuse the remark.”

“I intend to pull myself together now, Ned,” laughed Madden. “I mean to have a good mouthful of fresh air.”

“If you’d pardon me for bein’ so bould, sir, I’d recommend you to thry a little dhrop of whisky every night goin’ to bed, and another mouthful before break-

fast in the mornin'. It has a powerful effect on the constitution, I can tell you."

"I don't doubt it."

"Neither ought you, sir; for I've tried that thratement myself for many a long year, and I'm the picture of health, amn't I?"

"If rosiness is a legible sign, I'd back your nose for health against any in the land."

"Ah, 'tis jokin' with me you are now, Master Arthur! I know the nose is agen me, but it's a family complaint, I assure you, sir. My father's nose, it used to be said, would answer on an emergency for the port-light of a ship, it was that bright. But thry my medicine, if you'll take my advice."

"All right, Ned. And now, if I'm not down early in the morning, you will know that your prescription has had too powerful effect upon me. I want you to tell Ryan—he will be back at his desk to-morrow—not to be surprised if he doesn't see me here for a day or two. I don't feel particularly well, and I may lie up for a bit."

"I'll tell him, sir. When will the governor be home, sir, might I ask?"

"Some time to-morrow—in the morning, I expect—

so I can be easily spared for a day or two. And for goodness' sake, Ned, tell Mr Butler and Mr Ryan not to go knocking me up with messages to-morrow. I'll turn up if I feel well enough, and if I don't I won't."

"I understand, sir. I'll tell 'em both."

"Now, Ned, I'll be off. Mind you don't lock the office up before seven—you can take the keys round to the governor's house."

"Right, sir."

"Good-bye," said Madden, extending his hand and treating Foxy Ned to a handshake, much to Ned's astonishment.

"There's something wrong altogether with Masther Arthur," he muttered, gazing with an anxious eye at the retreating figure of the clerk. "I'll lay my life that thief of a Blue Noser is leadin' the boy into mischief. There's some play-actin' goin' on between the pair of 'em, or I can't see a hole in a ladder."

Madden had succeeded with Nixon beyond his expectations. Not only had he received the five hundred sovereigns, but he could see that Nixon held him in higher estimation than ever.

With Helen he had not been so successful. The day after she had returned with Mrs M'Cormick from

Sloughford, Madden visited her, and with all the passionate eloquence he could command implored her to fly with him. He explained that there were certain family secrets—nothing, of course, to his discredit; but he was bound in honour not to disclose the secrets for the present—which were the cause of his having to cross the Atlantic at once. The time had arrived when she should make her choice between her lover and her uncle. He folded his arms and assumed an attitude of defiance as he put this view of the case before her. Finding that his words had little or no effect upon Helen, he changed his attitude and made ardent protestations of his undying love. Finally, he became quite incoherent, but not before he had made up his mind that the words ought to melt the heart of a stone.

He was surprised and vexed to discover that Helen was not moved by his passionate appeal. She listened to him calmly, and when he had ceased to speak, she simply replied that she could not think of flying from her uncle. Madden could not account for her coldness. She had certainly been madly in love with him before she had gone on that Rosspoint trip. Could it be that Mrs M'Cormick had been setting the girl against him.

He was not aware that Helen had a visit from

Ryan's sister the previous night, and that it was the tearful story told by Madden's former sweetheart which had caused the change in Helen.

At length, finding entreaties and threats of self-destruction were useless, Madden made a theatrical exit from the room—an exit almost the same as he had performed the day he had first ventured to make love to Butler's niece.

He did not attempt to see her again during the next two days. He was convinced he could not move her. He was not altogether sorry he would not be hampered in his flight by a wife; and although he felt he was at last seriously in love, there were many considerations which would make it necessary that his flight from the seaport should be a quiet and a swift flight; and whatever promises of secrecy Helen might make, she would be certain to leave some trace behind her.

After parting from Foxy Ned he walked to his lodgings, and for nearly an hour occupied himself in tearing up letters. He had made up his mind to hamper himself with no baggage, beyond the bulky pocket-book which contained Nixon's money, now converted mostly into bank-notes. His intention was

to walk to the railway station at Stonehill, a village distant some four or five miles from Sloughford. If he started from the terminus at the seaport, there would probably be many people on the platform who would know him, and who would be asking him where he was going; and he was in no mood for conversation. He would join the train at the station next to Sloughford. No one there would know him or trouble him. It was not that he wished to avoid observation, but he was in no humour for being bored by inquisitive friends.

Summoning his landlady, he told her he was obliged to go out of town on business for a day or two, and then he set out for the station at which he intended to join the train. A brisk hour's walk would refresh him. He felt unusually dull, and utterly dissatisfied with himself and the whole world. He had been truthful when he had informed the master of the *Greenback* that the police were on the track of the burglars who had broken into Butler's office. Confound the burglars! if it had not been for them the safe would now contain the will which he had abstracted. There would have been no temptation to practise the fraud on Nixon if he had been able to

carry out his original intention and replace the will. The fates evidently had been dead against him.

Would Ryan, he mused, now that he was again on his legs, and finding that he had been deceived, and that his sister had been deceived—would the poor fellow, in a fit of anger, disclose what he knew about the stealing of the will? Poor Maggie! She would be dreadfully upset when she learned what a scoundrel she had given her heart to. Poor girl! She looked as if she were not likely to live long. Consumption, no doubt. Her white face somehow haunted him as he walked swiftly along the deserted country road which led to the railway station. He fancied he had again changed his mind, and that his heart was not Helen's, but Maggie's.

He arrived at the lonely little station in an unquiet frame of mind. He found he was nearly an hour before his time. He did not think he had walked so rapidly.

A down train would pass the station about half an hour before the up train arrived; and as there was only one set of metals, one platform served for trains going either way.

Madden was strolling up and down the narrow

platform when the down train steamed slowly into the station. He had no desire to avoid observation here. If there happened to be seated in the train anyone who knew him, it would, perhaps, be all the better, for it would not seem as if he were going away under a cloud, as if he were anxious that his movements should not be observed.

The train had now pulled up, and there would be a delay of a few minutes to check the tickets. Madden stood still a moment, and suddenly his heart leaped as he heard a tap at the window of a first-class carriage, and at the same moment saw Butler's face. It was too late to draw back. What should he do or say?

The shipbroker opened the carriage door, and stepping out, helped a lady to alight. Madden heard him say to the lady, "Stand here a moment, dear. We can drive into Sloughford. Our luggage will go on in the train." Then Butler swiftly approached his clerk.

"Well, Arthur," he exclaimed, grasping Madden's hand, "this is a surprise for you. I see it is. And it is a surprise for me to find you here. What is the matter?" he went on anxiously. "You are looking

a bit queerish. Are you not well? Has anything gone wrong? Why don't you speak?"

Madden quickly made up his mind that he would confess everything to Butler. It was useless lying to him. In fact, he could not lie to him. He was tired of duplicity; sick of it.

"Will you come into the waiting-room for a few moments, sir?" he said. "I want to say something to you."

Butler nodded, and quitting Madden's side, approached the lady whom he had helped out of the train, and who was now standing close to the two men. He whispered something in her ear, and then he returned to Madden.

Taking his arm he said,—

"Now, Arthur, let me hear what you have to say. I see there is some trouble, but we'll make it right, depend upon it."

Butler's affectionate and cheerful manner caused his clerk to feel more uneasy than ever. How should he have the courage to tell this good, kind friend what a blackguard he was.

They were now alone in the dingy little waiting-room.

"The fact is, sir," he blurted out, his face averted, "I am going away for good."

"Going away! What for? Where?"

"To America, I think."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense, unfortunately. Look here, sir, you have always treated me so well, so generously, that I feel ashamed—"

"What is it, Arthur? Don't hesitate to tell me anything, everything. You have alarmed me beyond measure. Do not keep me any longer in suspense, like a good fellow."

"There is no use in beating about the bush. "It was I who stole M'Cormick's will."

"You who stole M'Cormick's will!" said Butler, slowly. "Oh, nonsense!" he cried, quickly, shaking his head and breathing hard through his nostrils. "You are jesting—dreaming. Tell me you are only jesting."

"I am neither jesting nor dreaming. Have patience with me, sir, and listen to me calmly, if you can."

"Go on, go on," cried the elder man.

"At first I did not mean to keep the will—"

"No, no. I knew you didn't. It was only curiosity prompted you."

"Yes. It was merely a fit of curiosity; but that cursed burglary compelled me to keep the will. I could not replace it without attracting suspicion towards myself."

"Then you did not touch the gold?"

"No. I hope you will believe me when I say so."

"I do believe you, Arthur. What have you done with the will? It is not too late, perhaps, to patch up an ugly business. We can think over it. My brain is quite in a whirl now."

He seemed slightly relieved.

"It is too late, sir. I have burned the will."

"Burned it! Why? What does it all mean?"

His face was again contorted with painful alarm, and lifting his hands, he cried in tremulous voice,—*"To think that you, you could be guilty of such an act! But,"* he added after a pause, *"the will was useless. You did not know that a later one was in existence."*

"Yes; I knew that."

Madden then briefly told the story of the fraud he had practised upon Nixon, and as he came to a conclusion he took a pocket-book from his breast-pocket, and, offering it to Butler, who had stood staring at him like one in a dream, he said,—

"Take it, sir; give it back to Nixon for me. I have sufficient money of my own to carry me out of the country."

"Keep it," said Butler, slowly. "I shall pay the money back. Take it with you as a gift from me, and try to retrieve your lost honour. My God!" he cried, covering his face with his hands, "how bitterly I have been punished for one hasty act!"

"You seem terribly distressed, sir. But I have one thing to say—it isn't much, I know—I have never wronged or injured *you* wilfully."

The shipbroker took his hands from his face, and lifting his eyes, murmured,—

"I thank God for that, Arthur!" Then, suddenly gazing with tear-blinded eyes at Madden, he cried,—
"You don't know what you have done. For the second time my life is blasted—all hope of peace and happiness is snatched rudely from me."

"How, sir?" interrupted Madden. "I cannot understand you. Why should you be so upset about the misdeeds of a scoundrel like me? Forget me. Forget that I have ever darkened your path."

"I cannot. You do not know. Oh! Arthur," he went on, in a thick, rapid voice, "you do not know

what you have done. Perhaps I have been to blame, but I acted for the best. I was returning home full of hope and joy. I foolishly fancied that my trials were over, that my future would in a measure make up for what I have suffered. It is unmanly of me to whine," he cried, dashing his hand across his eyes, "but I am almost distracted. I am growing old—I have grown old before my time. For years I have tried to bear my troubles like a man, to let no one be unhappy because of my own unhappiness; but I can no longer keep my feelings in check. I had many hopes and plans in connection with you—and now I hear from your own lips that you are a common swindler, flying from justice. My God!" he cried, "give me strength to bear my fresh troubles!"

Madden was awe-stricken at Butler's rapid, earnest, grief-laden speech, and by the look of anguish in his eyes. He could find no words, but stood staring at his companion, his arms hanging limp by his sides, his hands trembling violently.

"You do not understand yet," said the elder man, in a calmer voice. "Look, Arthur," pointing to the strange lady who now passed the window, "I married that lady last week."

"You married, sir! I *am* surprised."

He spoke in a jaunty tone. It was a tremendous relief to watch the smile which for a moment lit up Butler's face.

"Yes. It is a strange story. You have never heard it. No matter; I shall tell it to you now. That lady is your mother."

"My mother!" exclaimed Madden. Suddenly he guessed the truth, and looking up at Butler he panted. "And you—"

"I am your father, God help me!"





CHAPTER XIV.

AN ESSAY IN POLYSYLLABLES.

FINDING that Captain Augustine Flynn could not be moved from his determination to fly to foreign waters, his nautical friends decided that they would not permit the worthy man to bid good-bye to Sloughford without proving to him in some way the measure of their regard for him.

Accordingly a private meeting was held one night in the "Nest," at which were present Broaders, Sullivan, Bendall, Carmody, and Cummins—the latter, having drawn himself out of the toils of the Cardiff landlady, had just succeeded in making a passage home. Nixon was invited to the meeting, but as the New Brunswick had not yet forgotten the hardness of the

Bishop's fists, he firmly but respectfully declined to attend. Fearing, however, that he might damage the popularity of the establishment of which he was now master, he volunteered to supply gratis the liquor which would be consumed on the night of the presentation—for it was hinted to him that a presentation to the Bishop would be made.

At the private meeting a good deal of discussion arose with regard to the nature of the gift which should be offered to Captain Flynn. Bendall suggested an umbrella with a silver-mounted handle, and Broaders a brandy flask; but the majority was in favour of a meerschaum pipe, and it was finally resolved to abide by the decision of the majority. It was also resolved that a valedictory address should be handed to the Bishop with the pipe; and as in their heart of hearts the skippers believed that Arkwright was the most scholarly among them, it was suggested that Arkwright should compose the address. The learned mariner was highly flattered by the proposal, and coquettishly declared that the task was one which he would have to approach in fear and trembling.

"Now, Anthony," said Carmody, "there's a fine

chance for you to use up all the jawbreakers in the dictionary."

Arkwright was galled by the tone in which these words were spoken; but the irascible Carmody's words disclosed a vista of polysyllables; and Captain Arkwright, folding his arms complacently over his bosom, declared he would, despite the sneers of Captain Carmody, undertake the task of drawing up the address.

The night selected for the presentation of the meerschaum was the night that Madden had set out from Sloughford. Nine o'clock was the hour appointed for opening the proceedings, and shortly before the hour about a dozen master-mariners were assembled in the "Nest." Madden had promised to be present, and Foxy Ned had begged so hard for a seat in the corner of the room that the skippers found it was not in their hearts to refuse him. Nixon promised he would look in occasionally during the evening; but as his wife was out on business, he could not, he explained, leave the counter for any lengthened period.

The skippers were all dressed in their best; and every man seemed as if he had spent a considerable portion of the day in scrubbing his face. There was

a strong odour of yellow soap in the room, an odour which vanished quickly when the skippers had lit their pipes.

About ten of the mariners wore silk hats of the most extraordinary and ancient patterns; but Captain Arkwright's was the most remarkable of all the remarkable hats. It was about twice the height of an ordinary silk hat, and it narrowed slightly towards the top; the brim was perfectly straight, there was not the faintest indication of a curve about it; and the surface of the hat shone like the noonday sun, the light of which it had probably not seen ten times in a generation. The skipper also wore a collar which was quite in keeping with the hat. It must have measured at least six inches in height, and the heavily-starched points which approached each other under his chin seemed ever ready to bury themselves in his flesh, and made it impossible for him to bend his head without inflicting torture upon himself. A black frock-coat, covered with wrinkles and creases, was buttoned tightly round his spare frame, and he wore a pair of iron-grey trousers several inches too short. On account of the frock-coat he was unable to bury his

hand in his breeches pockets, as was his wont ; so, with the countenance of a mute at a funeral, the skipper sat near the table in the "Nest," his hands locked in front of him. He did not seek, nor did he desire, conversation with his neighbours ; and silently he sat in his chair, monotonously twirling his thumbs, and brooding, no doubt, over the stupendous importance of the task he was about to perform. As the evening wore on he would occasionally unclasp his hands and express his gloomy anxiety by rubbing his nose viciously.

It may be well to mention here that Arkwright had at first laboured unsuccessfully to compose a farewell address to the Bishop, and in despair he had opened his heart to Madden. The shipbroker's clerk, although he was not in a very cheerful mood at the time, could not, through mere force of habit, resist the opportunity of playing a mild joke upon the unsuspecting Arkwright. He was well acquainted with the absurd style of phraseology which delighted the skipper. Some of the phrases which will be found in the address written by Madden, notably the concluding one, were copied from the old-fashioned Bill of Lading, and others were garbled

quotations from "The Traveller." Madden purposely introduced the "Traveller" and Bill of Lading phrases, as he knew Arkwright would consider the address more genuinely nautical on account of the latter, and more poetical on account of the former. He had once lent the skipper a copy of "The Traveller," and as it was the only piece of verse which Arkwright had ever read, portions of it were constantly floating in a chimerical manner through his mind.

Arkwright was delighted with the address, and he felt convinced that the reputation for learning which he had so often sought to obtain would henceforth be established on a firm basis. Madden had faithfully promised never to divulge the awful secret of the authorship.

A few minutes after nine, the skippers, who had been conversing in subdued tones, heard something which sounded like a scuffle outside the door of the "Nest." They lifted their heads suddenly.

In a moment the Bishop, crying, "For shame, Tom! How dare you! It's the height of ignorance!" was rudely impelled into the "Nest," and behind him, in the doorway, stood the members of the deputation despatched to summon Captain Flynn

from the solitude of his cabin. "Gentlemen," exclaimed the Bishop, "I hope you will respectfully excuse the manner of my entry!"

"The fact is," interrupted Bendall, who had been chuckling violently, "that the Bishop wanted us to go in before him, and we thought the proper thing under the circumstances was to have him go first. The man is shy, and no wonder. Oh dear! oh dear!" relapsing into a fit of chuckling.

"But you had no business to push me into the room in that light and frivolous manner, Tom."

"Oh, sit down, boys, for goodness' sake," cried Carmody, "and don't be making such a row about nothing. Sit down, Augy. Never mind that play-actor," pointing to Bendall.

The Bishop sat down in a chair placed for him by Bendall, who had now assumed suddenly the duties of master of ceremonies, and was busy whispering instructions into the ears of some, and chuckling "Oh dears, oh dears," and lifting his eyes with mock solemnity as he walked past others.

After the Bishop had duly settled himself into his chair, and had drawn up the legs of his trousers to the regulation height, he crossed his legs and yawned.

Then clapping his hand across his mouth, he uttered some strange noise, which sounded like a suppressed cry of pain.

There was an awkward pause after the Bishop's yawn, and Bendall, approaching Arkwright, whispered in his ear.

Instantly Captain Arkwright rose to his feet and walked to the head of the table. He took off his hat and laid it tenderly on a chair behind him. Then he dived his hand into the tail pocket of his frock coat, and drew out a scroll, which he carefully unfolded and smoothed on the table, and then he fished from the breast pocket of his coat a large chart-glass and a red handkerchief, and with the latter he carefully wiped the glass.

"Look out, now, boys!" exclaimed Carmody, his face puckered with a grin. "You're going to have a broadside hove at you."

"No interruptions, gentlemen, if you please," cried Bendall, who was seated next the author-presumptive of the address.

Arkwright was silent, but he directed a glance of withering scorn full tilt against Carmody. Then, having put his handkerchief into his pocket, he took

up the scroll in his left hand, and holding the chart-glass in his right hand, about twelve inches from his right eye, he began,—

“Honoured and dear friend and fellow master-mariner—”

A deafening cheer rang through the “Nest” at the words. Arkwright took the chart-glass from his eye, and gazed around the room triumphantly; the Bishop uncrossed his legs, drew the ends of his trousers up still higher, and crossed his legs again.

When the applause had subsided, Arkwright raised his glass and continued,—

“A rumour having been conveyed to our auricular organs that you, Augustine Flynn, are on the eve of your departure to fresh woods and pastures new—”

“Stop!” exclaimed Carmody. “Do you mean to tell us that the Bishop is going to turn farmer?”

“Can’t you be quiet, Carmody?” said Bendall.

“Pat,” murmured the Bishop, “I must confess that your conduct is very unseemly.”

“It is merely a figure of speech,” explained Arkwright. “Captain Flynn still intends to plough the main. Ha! ha! ha!” And chuckling at his own

joke, he forgot that he had been interrupted or had been angered by Carmody.

"Go on," cried Bendall, nudging the punster.

Arkwright, clutching the handle of the chart-glass nervously, raised it again towards his right eye, and continued,—

"Fresh woods and pastures new, and that mayhap you will not again revisit the scenes of your innocent childhood, the inhabitants familiar to you almost from the hour of your nativity, it has occurred to the undersigned that some fitting token of their exalted estimation of your worth and sanctity as a private individual, and your transcendent qualities as a certified master-mariner should be conveyed to you, so that, whether freezing under the shadow of the icy poles or sweltering beneath the rays of the noonday sun in the scorching tropic zone, whether the north star guides your lonely path or the southern cross beams incandescently over your nocturnal horizon—"

"Oh! be good to me; I'm choked!" interrupted Carmody, making a wry face.

"Sh," chorused the other mariners.

"Nocturnal horizon," continued Arkwright, glaring scornfully for a moment at Carmody, "whether

you stand like the naked negro panting at the line—”

“Oh dear! oh dear!” chuckled Bendall, unable to restrain himself at the picture of the panting Bishop. “Won’t you allow the man even his top hat?”

“Panting at the line,” repeated Arkwright, pretending to ignore Bendall’s interruption, “or like the Tyrolean grazing his flocks on the precipitous but verdant slopes of the snow-capped avalanches; whether suffering from accidents of the seas, rivers, navigation, the Queen’s enemies, fire, and all and every other dangers and accidents whatsoever; whether struggling manfully against sea-pirates, or succumbing to the treacherous wiles of land-pirates; whether in sickness or in health, in freedom or in captivity; whether bounding joyously over the unfathomable ocean, or incarcerated within the precincts of a miserable dungeon—”

Here Arkwright paused for breath, and lowering the chart-glass, coughed a solemn and unnatural cough. The Bishop looked the picture of discomfort as he dwelt upon the dangers which were possibly in store for him; Bendall, with one hand over his mouth, was openly endeavouring to smother the

sound of the chuckling which convulsed him ; Carmody was gazing curiously and earnestly at Arkwright, as if he could find no words to express the state of his feelings. The other skippers were lost in bewilderment ; they did not know whether they ought to laugh with Bendall, or whether they ought to sit in solemn and painful silence with the Bishop. Foxy Ned and Captain Cummins had been so busy with a bottle placed within their reach that they could only smile and look foolish.

Clearing his throat, Arkwright went on,—

“ Miserable dungeon, you may take from its case this silver-mounted meerschaum calumet.—An Indian word for pipe of peace,” he explained, lowering the glass and addressing the company.

Then suddenly remembering that he was at this point to present the meerschaum to Captain Flynn, he dropped the chart-glass and the manuscript hurriedly on the table, and thrusting his hand into his tail pocket, drew forth, amid the cheer of the skippers, the presentation pipe.

In the meantime Bendall had risen from his seat, and, taking the Bishop’s arm, he led him to the head of the table. Arkwright then, with a wide sweep of

his arm, deposited the pipe-case in the hand of the Bishop, who returned silently to his seat.

Again the "Nest" rang with deafening cheers ; and, fearing lest the ceiling might be brought down, Nixon entered the room, and crying "Sh ! sh !" took his seat in a corner near Foxy Ned.

When silence was restored, the mariners, believing the address had been completely delivered, were anxiously waiting for the Bishop's reply. Arkwright, observing that Captain Flynn was about to rise, cried in a loud, affrighted voice,—

"Gentlemen ! gentlemen ! A moment, please. Allow me to proceed with the recital of the address to our worthy friend."

"Good heavens !" exclaimed Carmody, lifting his hands and looking horror-stricken ; "you don't mean to tell us that you haven't finished yet ?"

"Oh, let us hear the end of it, anyhow," said Bendall, "in Heaven's name ! We may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Oh dear, oh dear !"

"Yes, go on—finish it up !" exclaimed a few of the other skippers, eager for peace at any price.

Arkwright with difficulty controlled his rising

anger, and directing another contemptuous glance at Carmody, went on,—

“I left off at silver-mounted calumet—I mean,” he added, raising the chart-glass and consulting the manuscript, “silver-mounted *meerschauum* calumet—an Indian word, gentlemen,” he explained again, “for pipe of peace—calumet, and blowing a fragrant whiff to leeward, blow with it odoriferous exhalations of good-fellowship towards the port and harbour of Sloughford; and thus, while remote, unfriended, melancholy, or becalmed; while suffering from the fearful pangs of thirst, or famished with the gnawing pains of hunger, you at each remove drag a lengthening cable, may the concatenations of the same prove as unlimited as the regard we possess for a comrade who has never sullied the fair name of Flynn, never brought grief to the heart of woman nor shame to the bosom of man—I mean,” he added, quickly, “grief to the bosom of woman nor shame—No, no, no,” he cried, focusing the glass and reading from the manuscript, “grief to the heart of man, I should have said, nor shame to the bosom of woman.”

Then, lowering the chart-glass and lifting his

eyes to the ceiling, he added, in a reverential voice,—

“And may God send the good ship to her desired port in safety!”

A cheer, partly of derision, partly of delight, rent the air as Arkwright sat down upon the chair behind him, from which chair Bendall a few moments previously had removed his hat.

Arkwright had been seated for less than a minute when he remembered that he should have presented the cherished address to the Bishop. He rose, and walking towards Captain Flynn, he bowed, and placed the address in his hands.

The cheering had now ceased, and the Bishop was gazing stupidly at the address, when Carmody recalled the saintly mariner's wandering senses.

“Put that in your calumet,” he cried, pointing to the address, “and smoke it, Augy, my boy.”

“Easy, Pat, easy!” said the Bishop, slowly and solemnly, standing up and glancing round the room.

Again the company gave vent to their emotions in cheers, which Nixon vainly endeavoured to suppress.

“Gentlemen,” began the Bishop. Immediately there was a dead silence. Waving his hand, he repeated

in a hollow voice, "Gentlemen—and Captain Arkwright," he added suddenly. "Captain Arkwright and Gentlemen, I am fairly overpowered by the beautiful language which our humble but worthy friend has uttered on my behalf—fairly overpowered and—"

"No wonder," interrupted Carmody, "I won't be able to do a day's work for a week after it."

"Sh—shame!" from several of the skippers.

"Try a little brimstone. It'll revive you," said Sullivan.

"Fie, fie, Pat!" said the Bishop, scowling at Carmody. "I really wonder at you, to be disturbing the harmony of this entertainment with your nasty, carping manner. And you too, Captain Sullivan," he continued, shaking his forefinger at that worthy mariner, "interrupting a peaceable and friendly discussion with your jeering remarks about brimstone! Fie, fie!"

"I wasn't jeering. I give you my word, Captain Flynn," murmured Sullivan, with downcast face.

"Oh, hang it! Can't ye all be quiet, boys?" cried Bendall impatiently. "Let the Bishop speak. Have manners."

"Thank you, Tom," said the Bishop, smiling at

Bendall—he was not aware that Captain Tom had already made away with his hat, and was endeavouring to place it, in company with Arkwright's, up the flue of the chimney.

“Go on with your speech, Augy,” grunted Broaders, “and don't be paying attention to those play-actors,”—pointing to Carmody and Bendall.

“Well, gentlemen,” continued the Bishop, making a sweeping gesture with his right arm, “I own I am fairly nonplussed with the language of this address—an address, gentlemen,” placing his hand on his breast, “which I shall ever wear next my heart—”

“Don't!” interrupted Carmody. “'Twould fall in through your ribs, it's so heavy.”

“Pat!” said the Bishop sternly, “these remarks of yours are scandalous, and show an amount of carping frivolity which I didn't give you credit for.”

“Fulsome interloper!” muttered Arkwright, spasmodically clutching his trousers at the knee.

As Arkwright spoke the door of the “Nest” was flung open, and the landlady, her face aflame with anger, stepped into the room. All eyes were turned towards her.

“Angus,” she cried, in a shrill, rasping voice, “I

must speak to you at once. You sit here as if nothing was the matter, nothing—”

“Why, what *is* the matter, woman?” growled Nixon, standing up.

“Yes, ma’am,” said the Bishop, “what has happened thus to disturb you? Is anything wrong?”

“Wrong!” she cried, glaring at her husband; “I should think there was. I don’t mind telling the company here, for I know I can reckon some good friends among them. I have been over to that infamous jade, my brother’s wife, this evening, gentlemen, and—”

“And I suppose you women had a row, you had,” sneered Nixon. “I don’t see why your squabble should make you interrupt the harmony of the evening here, I don’t.”

“Don’t you? I’ll soon interrupt *your* harmony for you. A nice way you got rid of my savings for me—you fool!”

“Oh, come,” said Nixon angrily, “you are not going to make an exhibition of our family affairs here,” advancing to his wife and seizing her by the shoulder.

“Take your hands off me, sir!” she cried, twisting herself from him, and treating him to a demoniacal

scowl. "Maybe it would interest you to know that my brother made a later will than the one stolen—or supposed to be stolen—from that rascal Butler, and that your dear friend Madden has left Sloughford this evening—I have just come from his lodgings. I don't think any reasonable person could doubt that he has bolted with my money. Now, sir, what have you to say?" she panted, placing her arms akimbo and glaring at her husband.

"Madden gone away!—a later will!" gasped Nixon, almost stupefied by the news.

"Yes, gentlemen," cried his wife, looking round at the mariners, who could not quite understand the import of her words, and speaking, slowly and distinctly, in a subdued tone, "my good brother's wife *says* she holds a later will, and that I am a beggar if *she* wishes it to be so; and Mr Arthur Madden has disappeared from Sloughford with five hundred pounds stolen—yes, *stolen*," she cried, with sudden and startling energy—"from my silly husband!"





CHAPTER XV.

NEWS OF THE *WATER NYMPH*.

HELEN was astounded when she discovered that Susan's surmise had been a correct one, and that her uncle had indeed brought back with him a new mistress for the house in Princes Street.

When the first shock of surprise was over, Butler took his niece aside and told her the same story he had told Dalton a couple of months previously, making no mention, however, of his son. The only addition to his narrative was that his wife's first husband had died about a week before the ship-broker had left Sloughford.

Helen was so much astonished at the strange lady's arrival, and at the story which Butler subsequently told her, that she had not at first noticed

how badly her uncle looked, and in what dull spirits he and his new wife were. Butler made no mention of Madden to his niece. He feared he would distress Helen too much if he were to inform her what a scoundrel her lover was. He had made up his mind that he would not allow it to be known for a time that Madden was his son; he dreaded not the bearing of the burden of his son's disgrace, but the expressions of sympathy which would be droned into his ears for many days if it were known that he was the father of his absconding clerk.

He thought he might possibly be able to hush up Madden's transaction with Nixon, and leaving his wife and his niece chatting together, he set out for the "Bold Dragoon" shortly before eleven o'clock.

The Bishop and his friends had left the public-house about half an hour prior to Butler's arrival. Foxy Ned was the only member of the company who had remained behind, and Ned was standing at the counter—still drinking, but not drunk—when the shipbroker appeared in the doorway.

Nixon and his wife were behind the counter,

indulging in loud and mutual recriminations. Butler heard a few sentences of the matrimonial squabble before his entry was observed by the angry pair, and he knew at once that he had arrived too late to save his son's reputation. Nevertheless, when Mrs Nixon's fiendish face was at length turned towards him, he did not quail, but in a quiet voice he asked Nixon to lead the way into some private room: and disregarding the landlady's shrill denunciations of Butler's villainy, and her sneers at Nixon's gullibility, the shipbroker and the skipper entered the Nest.

In a few minutes the proprietor of the "Bold Dragoon," his face beaming with smiles, bowed the shipbroker out of the house; and Mrs Nixon, judging by her husband's countenance that Madden's defalcation has been made good, so far forgot her anger as to cry out, 'Good night, Mr Butler. Glad to see you back again, sir, and looking so well, too.'

While the shipbroker was at the "Bold Dragoon," Helen and her aunt found time to talk about many things which mutually interested them. Each woman had been instantly attracted by the other. Helen had been struck by the pale, careworn, but still beau-

tiful face of her new aunt; and the story of her trials had caused the young girl's heart to go out in pity towards her uncle's wife. Helen's loveliness and her bright, good-humoured face had momentarily deadened the terrible pain which gnawed at the elder woman's heart since she had learned at Stonehill the disgraceful position of that son whom she had for years been vainly longing to clasp in a mother's warm embrace.

Helen could easily account to herself for her aunt's grief-stricken face, but she could not understand why her uncle seemed so cheerless and agitated. Surely he ought to be happy; he had been granted his dearest wish. However, she decided to ask no questions. Perhaps her uncle was tired after his long journey. And after half a life-time of silent sorrow, the greatest joy would naturally have some alloy of pain.

Next morning Butler's family breakfasted at the usual hour—nine o'clock; and immediately after breakfast the shipbroker left the house. He felt the bitterness of the blow which his son had inflicted upon him even more keenly than he had felt it the previous night, and with bowed head he walked slowly to his office.

He was received with tokens of demonstrative joy by Foxy Ned, who made no mention of having seen his master at the "Bold Dragoon." Ned also wisely decided not to speak of the rumour about Madden, which was now the talk of the town.

Opening some letters which lay on the desk, Butler asked if Ryan had been at the office that morning. Ned answered "No," and that his not having put in an appearance was a course of great surprise to him. "Misther Michael," said Ned, "sent word to say he would certainly be at his work again this morning, and he's not the sort of man for breakin' his word, especially to yourself, sir, unless, without a sayrious raison."

The shipbroker was evidently vexed at Ryan's non-appearance, when suddenly he picked up a note, unstamped and marked private. "This is Ryan's writing," he said, half aloud, as he opened the note. "I suppose his cold is still troublesome, poor fellow?"

The note ran—

"Friday Evening.

"DEAR MR BUTLER,—My sister died rather suddenly this afternoon. She had overtaxed herself nursing me, I fear—I was worse than I said I was—and a

sudden shock did the rest. I am distracted, mad ;
God help me.—Yours respectfully,

“MICHAEL RYAN.”

“God help him!” said Butler, taking off his hat. The tears were now trickling down his cheeks. The pity he felt for another’s trouble had softened the brunt of his own sorrow. In a few moments he was considerably relieved, and, taking up Ryan’s note, he saw that some words were scrawled on the back of it: “Do not, please, come near me or send for me for a day or two,” he read. “Poor fellow!” he murmured ; “I shall respect his request, at any rate.”

“And now,” he mused, “I have a somewhat difficult mission to perform. There is little probability that my news will have already reached Mrs M’Cormick through any other channel. I wonder how she will receive the news—I must be cautious how I break it to her. She is bound to be deeply moved one way or the other—which way, I wonder, will it be?”

Putting his letters in his pocket, he called Foxy Ned, and told him to order a car to the door, as he had to go over to the Bankside at once. “You must try and get on somehow until I return,” he said: “I sup-

pose business will not be very pressing until eleven o'clock. I shall be back before that time."

Butler found Mrs M'Cormick at home. She was delighted to see him: but, like Helen, she observed with pain that the shipbroker's kindly face bore traces of recent suffering. His voice, too, was more subdued than usual.

Butler told her the story of the trouble which had saddened his early life and the best years of his manhood, and his face brightened as he spoke of his recent marriage. He made no mention to Mrs M'Cormick of his relationship to Madden, nor of Madden's flight, and Susan was again pained to observe that the pleasant smile which had illumined his face while he was speaking of his marriage vanished quickly. She was not only pained but puzzled; for why, she argued with herself, should he, now that he had attained the consummation of his hopes, be saddened or weary looking?

"And now, Mrs M'Cormick," said Butler, after he had received her congratulations. "I have some news of an important nature for yourself."

Susan looked up at him anxiously, but did not interrupt him.

"I know," he went on, "that for some months you have been distressed and grieved, and I am loth to be the bearer of news for you, which, I fear, I must warn you, is bad news."

"Bad news for me!" she said quickly, all the colour dying out of her cheeks. It flashed through her mind that he was about to tell her that her lover was ill—had met with some accident at sea—had been lost at sea, perhaps. "Tell me. Do not fear I shall break down." Her cheeks had grown suddenly bright, and her dark eyes glowed.

Butler scarcely knew how to treat this strange, excitable woman. But no good could come of hesitation. Someone would surely tell her before the day had grown old what he had heard; perhaps someone was already on the way to Bankside, for the news must have reached Sloughford.

"I don't like to distress you, and you have become so excitable latterly, that perhaps I shall give you too great a shock."

"No, no," she cried. "Do not keep me in suspense. Tell me, please, what is wrong."

"Well, there has been further news received about the *Water Nymph*. I shall hurry over details. A

second boat was picked up by a ship outward bound to the River Plate, and in the boat was found—

“My husband!”

“Yes! but listen to me. Great heaven!”—rising quickly from his seat and bending over Susan—
“some curse appears to fall upon everything connected with me. Mrs M'Cormick! What is the matter? Look up at me.”

“Nothing,” she murmured hoarsely, lifting a white, tear-stained face. “Thank God he is alive! Thank God I have sinned only in thought.”





CHAPTER XVI.

MORE UNPLEASANT NEWS.

WHEN Butler drove back to his office, Foxy Ned met him at the door and informed him that there was a strange policeman inside, who wished to speak to him privately.

Butler had heard a rumour that the police in arresting a gang of professional thieves at a neighbouring town, had got a clue to the perpetrators of the burglary at his office, and he supposed that some information to this effect was now about to be conveyed to him; but he had lost all interest in the burglary. The missing will, which had been his chief concern, was destroyed.

Since the night Mrs M'Cormick had visited him at his house, and had handed him the document enclosed in the letter brought to her by Dalton, he had been

aware that the will left in his charge by M'Cormick was worthless from a legal point of view.

In the letter her husband had written to her ere he left the Slough, he had mentioned that there were some small legacies he would wish to leave his friends, an account of which would be found in the will lying at the shipbroker's office. He also expressed a desire in his letter that the "Bold Dragoon" might be presented to his half-sister, but he left the matter entirely in the hands of his wife; and the will which Dalton on the morning—for ever a memorable morning for Susan—of his first visit to Woodbine Cottage had placed in her hands, left unconditionally to her all that her husband might die possessed of.

Mrs M'Cormick had put Butler in possession of the facts; and it had been arranged that if it were found necessary to take out administration, the will in the shipbroker's possession should be opened, and Susan would divide the estate according to the terms of that will.

Butler had tried to argue Susan out of her quixotic determination, but he was unable to move her from her resolution.

On the platform at Stonehill he had learned from his son that Captain M'Cormick had by his first will left half his property to his wife, on the condition that she did not marry again. If she did marry again, she would have nothing but her marriage settlement—the house she lived in and five hundred pounds.

As Butler walked up the passage in his office after his return from Bankside, it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps it was in connection with his son the policeman wished to see him. Possibly the authorities had determined to arrest his son, and had come to him, his father, to ascertain if he could give him any information as to the whereabouts of the runaway.

Full of this agonising thought, he turned quickly into Madden's office. Foxy Ned followed him and said,—

“I wish you'd have a talk with this policeman, sir. He says he is anxious to see yourself, particular, at once?”

“Tell him I shall come to him directly, Ned. Any-one else in the other office?”

“No, sir. There were a few skippers there when

the peeler came in ; but they cleared out directly he showed his nose, and the man is all alone by himself now."

"All right. I'll be with him in a moment."

He walked across the passage and entered Ryan's office. The policeman rose from the chair on which he was seated, and said,—

"You are Mr James Butler, I believe?"

"Yes; that is my name."

"And this," presenting the shipbroker with a business card, "is your card, I presume, sir?"

"Yes; that is my business card."

"You know a Mr Arthur Madden?"

"Yes. He is a clerk of mine."

"So we thought, sir. There were several of your cards in his pocket."

Then his son had been arrested. Well, he should bow to the will of Heaven. He hung his head, and was silent.

"I'm sorry to tell you, sir," the policeman went on, "that he was found near the railway station at Stonehill early this morning—"

"Found! How? What do you mean, man?" interrupted Butler excitedly, raising his head, his

eyes almost starting from their sockets. The policeman's tone now frightened him. "What do you mean?" he shouted. "Don't stand there staring foolishly at me! Say what you have to say at once."

"He was found, sir," said the policeman, dropping his voice, "in a pool of blood, with a pistol by his side."

"Great God!" cried Butler, staggering against the wall; "shot himself!"

"Like enough, sir, but it isn't well to jump to conclusions too rapidly—Hallo! some water, quick!"





CHAPTER XVII.

SKIPPERS AND SCANDAL.

SLOUGHFORD was unusually disturbed. Ill news proverbially travels fast, and the truth of the proverb was upheld in the seaport the day after Butler's return. There was such abundant material, too, for gossip that the Sloughfordians scarcely knew which topic interested them most. The richness of the scandal harvest was positively embarrassing.

In the evening the "Nest" was occupied by four worthy mariners: Bendall, Carmody, Arkwright, and Broaders. They entered the "Bold Dragoon" in a very subdued manner: there was no boisterousness nor levity in their speech or demeanour. The landlady had deserted her usual post behind the counter, and when the skippers

saw her seat vacated, they glanced at each other and nodded gloomily. The weather was still chilly, and rain had fallen steadily since noon. There was no fire in the skippers' sanctum; and, observing this, the mercury fell several tenths, if their countenances might be judged by a barometrical standard.

"This looks bad, boys," said Bendall, as he pulled the bell-rope in the "Nest;" "so let us have something at once to rouse our spirits. I suppose it will be all the same in a hundred years. Sit down, boys."

The skippers sighed as they seated themselves, and omitted to give the legs of their various trousers the ordinary upward jerk. Bendall had temporarily forgot the art of chuckling; Broaders refrained from snorting; Carmody did not begin by offering anybody an insult; and the first words of Arkwright (who was encased in oilskins and sou-wester) showed that polysyllables for the moment possessed few charms for him.

"Poor M'Cormick," he murmured, folding his arms. "Gone to his long home, alas! and here are we heedlessly enjoying ourselves, while our

old friend is — is —” he stammered, and rubbed his nose confusedly.

“Is what?” asked Carmody. “Hang it, man, you speak as if poor Jack hadn’t a chance of salvation in the other world. ’Twill be well for you if you go off the hooks trying to save another man’s life; and well for those you leave behind you, if you die worth as much as M’Cormick.”

“What may he be worth, Pat?” asked Broaders.

“Twenty thousand, some say.”

“Take a nought off, my boy, and you’ll be nearer to the mark,” said Bendall.

“Mr Butler told me the figures lay between six and seven, and *he* ought to know,” put in Arkwright.

This seemed to settle the question, and Arkwright twirled his thumbs complacently. He had this time, he felt, vanquished his companions, and a solemn satisfaction filled his breast.

“As you seem to know all about it, perhaps you’ll tell us, Anthony, the true story of the *Water Nymph*,” said Carmody, a mixture of curiosity and contempt in his voice. To be obliged to obtain information from Arkwright seemed to the irascible skipper the last in-

firmity of noble mind. But, he reflected, the man on this occasion is merely the mouthpiece of the shipbroker. There was balm in the thought.

"Certainly," replied Arkwright, brightening at Carmody's invitation to enlighten the company. He was—he knew it—rapidly rising in the estimation of his nautical acquaintances, but he would not allow them to see how much gratification this conviction afforded him. He would not assume airs and graces yet awhile. He would now go so far as to attempt a style of conversation less scholarly than was his wont.

"You see," he began, throwing his head back, and making a motion of his arms as if his oilskins pinched him under the armpits, "when the barque went smash into the iceberg, most of the crew got hurriedly into the boats, but M'Cormick stuck to his guns until he saw there was no use in sticking to them any longer; and as he was going over the side he heard a cry for'a'd. The sailors in the boat shouted to him that it was one of the crew who had been knocked down by a falling spar; but as the foremast was evidently tottering, the skipper had best get clear of the ship at once. M'Cormick didn't coincide with this view of the situa-

tion, so he rushed to where the cry came from, and got the man clear, but as soon as he did, down came some more top hamper, and poor Jack was badly crushed under it."

"He was always a plucky fellow," cried Carmody. "A pity his temper was so quick!"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" chuckled Bendall. "I suppose Doctor Carmody is thinking of prescribing for people afflicted with his own complaint."

"Go on, Anthony," said Carmody, who had made up his mind to pay no attention to Bendall. "What next?"

"Well," continued Arkwright, "there is little more to relate. The crew came back and got poor M'Cormick off, and a few more of them were knocked about in the attempt; but, to make a long story short, they were eventually picked up by a ship bound for the River Plate, and M'Cormick died aboard her: the injuries he received in rescuing the man were of a mortal nature."

"And where are the *Water Nymph's* crew now?" asked Broaders.

"I don't exactly know," replied Arkwright. "They are mostly alien to the town. The mate, however, is a native, as you all doubtless know, and he arrived

in Plymouth the other day. I suppose he is now on his way home."

"Oh! then Cummins will catch it hot, if that's the case!" laughed Carmody. "He's after proposing to the mate's wife, and I believe the wedding-ring is bought. I'm told they'd have been married this week, only they couldn't get a clergyman to tie the knot."

"What indecent haste!" said Arkwright, puckering his brow.

"I wonder what'll become of the pair that did get married on the strength of the *Water Nymph's* loss?" asked Broaders. "I mean the missus here, and our blue-nosed friend."

"I'm informed," said the oracular Arkwright, "that Mrs M'Cormick graciously intends to present Mrs Nixon with the premises in which we are now located."

"More fool she!" said Carmody. "She'll want all her money and property now, if it's true what we hear, and if she's a sensible woman—"

"And what is it 'we hear,' sir?" asked Arkwright.

"*You* ought to know, surely," replied Carmody. "You seem to be bursting with knowledge this evening again, only the complaint takes another form with you now."

"If you mean, sir," said Arkwright, "the rumour which collocates Mrs M'Cormick's name with that of Captain Richard Dalton, allow me to inform you that you are talking without authority. Captain Dalton, it is true, has fallen in for some money, and is likely to settle down here; but that you should jump to ulterior conclusions, surprises me. If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is innuendo."

"Jawbreakers once more!" sneered Carmody. "I thought you gave us such a strong dose of them last night, that you'd be ashamed to open your mouth wide for the remainder of your natural life."

"Let the man alone, Pat," snorted Broaders? "You were glad enough to get him to tell you all he knew about poor M'Cormick."

"Ah, sure Anthony and myself know each other!" grinned Carmody, offering his hand to Arkwright, who shook it effusively. "We'll never come to blows anyhow; will we, skipper?"

"No," said Arkwright cheerily. "Our acquaintance, I opine, is too antiquated, for that."

"Well, for antiquated acquaintance' sake, I'll order a round," laughed Carmody.

A figure now appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, come in, Jim!" exclaimed the skippers; and Captain Sullivan entered and seated himself on the end of one of the forms.

"Any news?" asked Carmody, pulling the bell-rope.

"Not much; not much," replied Sullivan.

"No news about Mr Madden?—or young Mr Butler, I ought to say."

"None that I've heard. I believe they don't quite know whether he's dead or alive yet."

"A state of coma, no doubt," murmured Arkwright.

"I hope he'll get over it, anyhow," snorted Broaders.

"I always had a presentiment he was Mr Butler's son," observed Arkwright.

"Had you now?" sneered Carmody. "I believe you'd have a presentiment about eggs, if you saw the shells."

"And did you hear no more about Mr Ryan?" asked Bendall of Sullivan.

"No; but they say he was a little soft in his head after his sister's death. Poor young fellow! he took it to heart awfully. It was as much as they could do to prevent him from destroying himself; and I'm told they can't trace him at all, or make out where he has disappeared to."

"Poor fellow," snorted Broaders; "I fear he never took proper care of himself. His constitution must have been very weak."

Ryan having been a strict teetotaler, Broaders of course always looked upon him as a young man who was travelling through life with one leg in the grave.

"Oh, I forget!" exclaimed Sullvian, taking off his hat and rubbing his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief. "There *is* some news, of course. The proprietor of this place," lowering his voice, and glancing cautiously over his shoulder, "sailed down the river this evening. Himself and the missus had no end of a row. All the quay folk could hear them ballyragging each other; and he swore he'd never show his nose inside the harbour again."

"Hurrah!" shouted Carmody, tossing his cap in the air. "Let us drink success to the gale that blows him out of the port, and may a double-dyed hurricane come out of the skies whenever he faces the Slough!"

"You don't seem very partial to him, Pat," chuckled Bendall. "But," turning to Sullivan, "what about herself?—the landlady I mean."

"Oh, she went over to Bankside after the *Green-*

back got under weigh ; I suppose she's going to tackle Mrs M'Cormick next. Poor woman ! I'm sorry for her trouble."

"For Mrs Nixon, is it ?" asked Carmody.

"No ; for the sister-in-law," replied Sullivan meekly. "Ah, boys !" he cried, after a momentary pause, "I was near forgetting another great piece of news. It ought to make ye all split your sides. I met the Bishop to-day, and what do you think he lets out to me ? Give a guess now !"

"Maybe that he wrote Captain Arkwright's testimonial—the thing he read out with the pipe, I mean," said Carmody, glancing slyly at Arkwright.

"I give you my word, gentlemen, he did nothing of the sort !" exclaimed Arkwright, in a tremulous voice.

"No, it isn't that," said Sullivan. "You'd never guess, so I may as well tell ye all. He offered himself in marriage to Mrs M'Cormick, and she refused him."

"You don't mean it !" chuckled Carmody.

"And did he tempt her with the new hat and umbrella, I wonder ?" asked Bendall.

"You must ask him that yourself, Tom. But, to be serious, the poor man is greatly cut up over it, and

that's the true explanation of this foreign-going venture of his."

"Poor Augy!" murmured Arkwright; "who would have thought he would, at his age, have fallen a victim to woman's wiles?"

"And I have another bit of news for you about Augy," began Sullivan.

"What's come over you at all to-night?" asked Carmody; "the salt and the sulphur and even the lucifer matches seem to have foundered, and gossip is the craft you're sailing now. But what's the other news about the Bishop?"

"He sat on the meerschaum last night, and broke it into powder."

A chorus of lamentations went up from the mariners. Their hard-earned money squandered in buying a pipe for a man who sits on it the same night it is presented to him!

"Why didn't you take my advice and give him a silver-mounted umbrella?" said Bendall, a little angrily.

"Ay! or a pack of cards?" said Carmody. "He might sit on them all day long, without breaking them."

“A patent log, in my opinion, would have been the most adventitious piece of goods you could have selected,” said Arkwright.

“A parcel of nonsense all these grand ideas of yours!” snorted Broaders. “Why couldn’t ye have sense, and have done the right thing? For a man going foreign, what could be more natural than a cask of rum out of bond?”





CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AVENGER.

MADDEN recovered slowly. He had received an ugly wound in the shoulder, and loss of blood had brought him within measurable distance of death's door; but his constitution was a strong one, and in less than a fortnight he was well enough to be removed into Sloughford.

No one had been actually injured by his conduct with regard to Nixon and to the will, and as the master of the *Greenback* had sailed from the port without giving any information about the fraud to the authorities, there was no danger of a prosecution being instituted against Butler's son.

Madden, as he was still called by almost every

one in Sloughford, was not a little surprised to find that popular feeling ran high in his favour. People pitied him rather than blamed him. Had he not suffered, and caused poor Butler, too, infinite suffering through his folly—no stronger term than folly was used in the seaport when the young man's conduct formed a topic for gossip? At first he refused to give any information how it was he came to be discovered wounded on the roadway; but he found it was necessary that he should make some statement to the police.

He declared he had been suddenly attacked as he walked along the road after Butler had parted from him at the railway station, but he could not identify the man who had fired at him. The only explanation he could offer about the pistol found by his side was that his assailant had placed it there, in order to make people suppose it was a case of suicide.

The explanation did not quite satisfy many of his acquaintances; and it was shrewdly suspected that Madden could tell, if he wished to do so, who the person was that had fired the shot. Some still believed that he had really meant to

destroy himself; but the fact of his having been wounded in the shoulder was an argument almost unanswerable against this view of the case. No would-be suicide could possibly have selected his shoulder as a place for depositing a bullet. There was scarcely any doubt that a shot had been fired by a strange hand, and had missed its mark. But who could have fired the shot? And if Madden did know, why should he refuse to tell?

.

Had Madden chosen to speak, this is what he would have told:

He had been deeply affected—deeply as it was possible for one of his shallow nature—by his mother's tears, and his father's heart-broken good-bye. He watched the car drive away from the station at Stonehill, until it was lost to sight in a dip in the road. Then, lighting a cigar, he walked down the narrow country lane leading from the station to the village.

While he had been closeted in the waiting-room with his newly-found parents, the train by which he had intended to travel had arrived and started from Stonehill. He was not eager to travel by it; he re-

membered that another train would pass about two o'clock in the morning ; and he could get a bed somewhere in the village, he had little doubt, if he felt inclined for a few hours' sleep.

The village was about a mile from the railway station. Madden walked slowly down the lane. Night had set in, but there was still a faint light in the starry sky.

The young man was now in a nervous, excitable mood. The slightest sound attracted his attention and startled him. Sometimes he fancied he heard a footfall inside the whitethorn hedge which bordered the lane for a considerable distance. With a shudder, he would stand still in the centre of the road, and listen attentively ; and then, smiling uneasily at his fearfulness, he would walk forward quickly for a short distance, and gradually and unconsciously his pace would slacken, until some fresh sound startled him again.

What a fool he had been ! what chances he had flung away ! Butler's son ! His father was wealthy, as wealth went in Sloughford. How stupidly he had acted about Helen ! What could have turned her against him ? And as he thought of Helen, the image of his other sweetheart, Maggie, would force itself

upon him. He had treated both girls badly. He had pretended to be cool with Helen, for the purpose of making poor Ryan believe he meant to keep his promise to him. Ryan would be sure to hear of the coolness from some quarter. And probably this very conduct of his was really what had set Helen against him. Perhaps it was all the better he had left Sloughford unhampered.

Again that footfall ! Was it a footfall ?

He was approaching a break in the hedge. He would look through the gap and ease his mind. But what folly to suppose there was anyone there ! Would he be silly enough to look behind the hedge like a child who is afraid to pass the open door of a dark room, and yet is impelled to peep inside, and prove to himself that he is not afraid of bogeys ? Yes ; he would take a survey of the inside of the hedge. He shuddered as he approached the gap.

Suddenly a form appeared in the gap, and a man leaped on the low ditch, and in a moment was confronting Madden with wild, haggard face, and mad, blazing eyes.

“ Ryan ! ” he shrieked, starting back. “ Damn you ! what do you mean ? ”

"You have killed her!" hissed the other. "I warned you I would be her avenger."

He raised his hand as he spoke, and Madden, almost rooted to the ground with terror, cried,—

"Ryan! are you mad? Put that down. Listen to me. For—"

The sharp crack of a pistol rang through the air, and Madden fell backward on the roadway.





CONCLUSION.

LATE in the following August a woman dressed in mourning passed through the Bankside gate of Sloughford bridge at dusk, and walked slowly towards the drawbridge. Here she paused, and leant against the parapet.

Lifting her veil, she gazed down the stream. There was a sad, wearied expression in her pale face, and her eyes were swimming in tears.

The bridge was almost deserted. Foot-passengers occasionally went by, and a few had stopped for a moment to stare at the figure of the woman on the drawbridge. One man had caught a faint glimpse of her white, sorrow-laden face, as he approached her, and he had at once concluded that there was something peculiar about this woman. Was she con-

templating suicide? he asked himself. He would stop and address her. But perhaps he was mistaken, and his attempting to speak to her would be regarded as an impertinence. He would walk a little further on, and keep her in sight. Evidently she had taken no notice of him as he crossed the drawbridge. She would not be aware that he was loitering near her.

The woman continued to stand almost motionless by the parapet. Her thoughts at first had been far away from the scene before her; but now, scarcely conscious of the fact, her eye was taking in every detail.

Towards the south the sky was dark, but cloudless; the southern horizon was veiled in a haze. There were several ships lying at anchor in the stream; their great black hulls were distinguishable each from the other, but the spars and rigging were merged, and stood out faintly against the sky, a dusky mass of trellis-work.

She could count the hulls; there were ten of them. Turning her head slightly to the right, her eyes rested awhile on the quiet old town. What a number of ships there were at the quays! Mr Butler must be

very busy. No wonder, then, he had not called upon her for many days. He would be grieved that she had gone away without bidding him farewell. And Helen too. Helen would never forgive her. But she could not, she would not, remain in Sloughford any longer; the river, the bridge, the ships—every sight that met her eye, every sound that filled her ears, brought memories which saddened her beyond endurance. She would be better away from them all. And the burden of her dead husband's money, which was being forced upon her, was a burden she could not bear. She deserved nothing that had been his. She had been a traitor at heart to him while he was dying with words of love for her upon his lips. It was a just punishment that her lover had forgotten her. He knew everything now; he was near her, and yet he would not come to her. "Dick! Dick!" she cried, "what have I done to you, now that you should desert me?"

With a struggle she kept back the tears which welled into her eyes, and turning her eyes from the ships at Sloughford quay, she gazed again down the stream.

She started back with a gasp of alarm. She was

growing dizzy. The ships in the river seemed to be wheeling round.

Then, smiling at her alarm, she knew that the tide had turned, and the vessels at anchor were slowly swinging round. In a few minutes the black hulls were motionless again; and like angry eyes the pale anchor-lights, visible only when the ships had swung down with the ebb, glared at her.

The man who had been watching her had started forward as he observed her stepping back from the parapet; but ere he had advanced half-a-dozen paces he saw that she had moved back to her former position. He stopped abruptly, and tired of his self-imposed guardianship, he turned on his heel, audibly cursing his folly in troubling himself about the vagaries of some sentimental widow.

The woman on the drawbridge hearing his voice turned her head quickly to the left, and with a shiver watched the man walk towards the bridge gates. For the first time it occurred to her that there was possibly some danger attending so late a visit to the now deserted bridge. That man had evidently been watching her. She would return home at once. There, it was nine o'clock—the melancholy boom

of the town clock disturbed the stillness of the night.

“Good-bye, dearest, dearest old river,” she murmured, taking off her gloves and stretching out her white hands. “Your music was in my ears the night he kissed me—the night I kissed him first,” she added, slowly and tremulously, a vivid glow stealing into her cheeks.

She turned slowly round. The northern horizon was flooded with a soft violet light. A startling thrill of pleasure ran through her frame as she stood still awhile, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed tenderly on the luminous sky in the north. It was so different—such a relief from the horrid darkness in the south. With a sigh, she unclasped her hands. Suddenly she was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps. She had no right to have remained out alone so late.

The figure of a man—he was scarcely a dozen paces distant now—arrested her timorous gaze. She felt her breath come and go quickly.

“Dick, Dick!” she cried, and in a moment the arms of her lover were round her, his kisses burning her lips, eyes, and cheeks.

"Susie, my love, my darling," he murmured.

Withdrawing herself from his embrace, she said,—
"You do not deserve that I should ever speak to you. You have left me without a word, a message of any kind, for many a weary week."

"Your own fault, Susie," he smiled, drawing her towards him again. "I was not to come near you ever again until you sent for me."

"Sent for you! Do you think I should ever ask you to come to me?"

"Well, what was I to do? You extract a promise from me, and you are angry because I keep it. It was a hard struggle, but I did keep my promise. I have written many a letter to you, and have torn every one up again. I knew I might come to you—that is, if I could be certain you cared about me—when I arrived in Liverpool nearly three weeks ago."

"And you didn't come?"

"No. I could not tell if I should be welcome. And, Susie, darling; it would have broken my heart if I saw you again and could not read in your eyes, darling, that you loved me."

"And what do you read in them now, Dick?"

"That is not fair—they are closed."

“And that is not fair that you should take such an advantage. You must not kiss them again. I shall not trust you any more.”

“I should not advise you to trust me while your face is so close to mine.”

“Why did you not write to me during those three weeks you speak of?”

“I suppose you think me incapable of being romantic?”

“That is not an answer. What has romance to do with it? I was going to run away from Sloughford to-morrow, Dick. If you had been many minutes later, you would probably never have seen me again.”

“Never!”

“Not until I found I could not be happy without giving you one chance to make your peace with me. I thought you had forgotten me.”

“Foolish little woman! Susie, to look at you now, who would think that—”

“I am twenty-seven. If you saw me ten minutes ago, you would have guessed me to be ten years older, at least.”

“No, I did not mean that. There is no occasion to remind me that it is eight years ago this very night

since we stood on this very spot. I meant that no one would fancy you had lived through so much trouble and anxiety and unhappiness all those years. You don't look a bit changed since we parted here long ago."

"Flattery, gross flattery, Dick. Excitement colours my cheeks rapidly—but you have not answered my question. Why didn't you write?"

"I am almost ashamed to own the reason, darling; and I am myself astonished that all the romance has not been knocked out of me long ago. I said, 'If my treasure loves me in her heart of hearts, she will remember that this is the anniversary of the night she kissed me—'"

"*I* kissed you!"

"Yes; you know you did. I was horribly shocked, I can assure you; and if you contradict me again, I shall make you repeat your abominable conduct."

"I shall hold my tongue."

"I thought you would remember it was the night you— Now, Susie, how can I explain, if you keep your hand on my mouth? Let me hold your hand. There, that is better."

"What did you think?"

"That if you still loved your old sweetheart, you would come to the old trysting-place."

"And what then?"

"Then I should know, my love, my love, that your heart was my own, all my own."

"Dick! how dare you? How many kisses do you think you have had already?"

"Not half as many as I want, certainly."

"You shall not have one more, sir. How long have you been in Sloughford?"

"A whole day—it seemed a century. I made up my mind I would wait until the very hour of our meeting long ago. I have been standing near the gates of the bridge since about eight o'clock, waiting to hear that dear old town clock strike the magic hour of nine. What a leap my heart gave as I saw you here, Susie! I feel as if it were only yesterday we said good-bye on this very spot. Everything that has happened in the interval—except one thing—seems to be blotted from my memory since I clasped you in my arms to-night."

"What is the one thing? You've been in love with somebody else, haven't you? Tell me. I shall try and forgive you."

"No. I haven't had the courage to fall in love since you threw me over;—don't look at me like that."

"You are very tormenting. You have not answered me. What is the memory that has not been blotted out?"

"The memory of that moment when a forward young lady put her arms round my neck a few months ago—I can tell you the exact day and the exact hour, if you like—"

"I don't like, and it is very stupid of you to tease me. I thought you had some wickedness to ask my forgiveness about—some horrid love affair."

"Surely that was wicked enough."

"Oh, Dick! I feel quite miserable. It *was* wicked. And it *is* wicked of me to be so happy as I am now—when I think of everything."

"Susie—Susie, darling. Come, don't go on like that. Dry those lovely eyes of yours. You are miserable and happy in the same breath. Which is it? Why, here we are at the bridge gate! I give you my word, I did not know we had moved from the drawbridge. But which is it

Susie, dearest? Which is it to be—happiness or misery for evermore?”

“Happiness, I hope, my love. Dick, dearest, you may kiss me again—just one kiss while the sound of the river is still in our ears.”

THE END.

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61



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