

GEORGE MACDONALD

THE SEABOARD PARISH,
VOLUME 2

George MacDonald

The Seaboard Parish, Volume 2

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CHAPTER I. ANOTHER SUNDAY EVENING

In the evening we met in Connie's room, as usual, to have our talk. And this is what came out of it.

The window was open. The sun was in the west. We sat a little aside out of the course of his radiance, and let him look full into the room. Only Wynnie sat back in a dark corner, as if she would get out of his way. Below him the sea lay bluer than you could believe even when you saw it—blue with a delicate yet deep silky blue, the exquisiteness of which was thrown up by the brilliant white lines of its lapping on the high coast, to the northward. We had just sat down, when Dora broke out with—

"I saw Niceboots at church. He did stare at you, papa, as if he had never heard a sermon before."

"I daresay he never heard such a sermon before!" said Connie, with the perfect confidence of inexperience and partiality—not to say ignorance, seeing she had not heard the sermon herself.

Here Wynnie spoke from her dark corner, apparently forcing herself to speak, and thereby giving what seemed an unpleasant tone to what she said.

"Well, papa, I don't know what to think. You are always telling us to trust in Him; but how can we, if we are not good?"

"The first good thing you can do is to look up to him. That is the beginning of trust in him, and the most sensible thing that it is possible for us to do. That is faith."

"But it's no use sometimes."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you—I mean I—can't feel good, or care about it at all."

"But is that any ground for saying that it is no use—that he does not heed you? that he disregards the look cast up to him? that, till the heart goes with the will, he who made himself strong to be the helper of the weak, who pities most those who are most destitute—and who so destitute as those who do not love what they want to love—except, indeed, those who don't want to love?—that, till you are well on towards all right by earnestly seeking it, he won't help you? You are to judge him from yourself, are you?—forgetting that all the misery in you is just because you have not got his grand presence with you?"

I spoke so earnestly as to be somewhat incoherent in words. But my reader will understand. Wynnie was silent. Connie, as if partly to help her sister, followed on the same side.

"I don't know exactly how to say what I mean, papa, but I wish I could get this lovely afternoon, all full of sunshine and blue, into unity with all that you teach us about Jesus Christ. I wish this beautiful day came in with my thought of him, like the frame—gold and red and blue—that you have to that picture of him at home. Why doesn't it?"

"Just because you have not enough of faith in him, my dear. You do not know him well enough yet. You do not yet believe that he means you all gladness, heartily, honestly, thoroughly."

"And no suffering, papa?"

"I did not say that, my dear. There you are on your couch and can't move. But he does mean you such gladness, such a full sunny air and blue sea of blessedness that this suffering shall count for little in it; nay more, shall be taken in for part, and, like the rocks that interfere with the roll of the sea, flash out the white that glorifies and intensifies the whole—to pass away by and by, I trust, none the less. What a chance you have, my Connie, of believing in him, of offering upon his altar!"

"But," said my wife, "are not these feelings in a great measure dependent upon the state of one's health? I find it so different when the sunshine is inside me as well as outside me."

"Not a doubt of it, my dear. But that is only the more reason for rising above all that. From the way some people speak of physical difficulties—I don't mean you, wife—you would think that they were not merely the inevitable which they are, but the insurmountable which they are not. That they are physical and not spiritual is not only a great consolation, but a strong argument for overcoming them. For all that is physical is put, or is in the process of being put, under the feet of the spiritual. Do not mistake me. I do not say you can make yourself feel merry or happy when you are in a physical condition which is contrary to such mental condition. But you can withdraw from it—not all at once; but by practice and effort you can learn to withdraw from it, refusing to allow your judgments and actions to be ruled by it. You can climb up out of the fogs, and sit quiet in the sunlight on the hillside of faith. You cannot be merry down below in the fog, for there is the fog; but you can every now and then fly with the dove-wings of the soul up into the clear, to remind yourself that all this passes away, is but an accident, and that the sun shines always, although it may not at any given moment be shining on you. 'What does that matter?' you will learn to say. 'It is enough for me to know that the sun does shine, and that this is only a weary fog that is round about me for the moment. I shall come out into the light beyond presently.' This is faith—faith in God, who is the light, and is all in all. I believe that the most glorious instances of calmness in suffering are thus achieved; that the sufferers really do not suffer what one of us would if thrown into their physical condition without the refuge of their spiritual condition as well; for they have taken refuge in the inner chamber. Out of the spring of their life a power goes forth that quenches the flames of the furnace of their suffering, so far at least that it does not touch the deep life, cannot make them miserable, does not drive them from the possession of their soul in patience, which is the divine citadel of the suffering. Do you understand me, Connie?"

"I do, papa. I think perfectly."

"Still less, then, is the fact that the difficulty is physical to be used as an excuse for giving way to ill-temper, and, in fact, leaving ourselves to be tossed and shaken by every tremble of our nerves. That is as if a man should give himself into the hands and will and caprice of an organ-grinder, to work upon him, not with the music of the spheres, but with the wretched growling of the streets."

"But," said Wynnie, "I have heard you yourself, papa, make excuse for people's ill-temper on this very ground, that they were out of health. Indeed," she went on, half-crying, "I have heard you do so for myself, when you did not know that I was within hearing."

"Yes, my dear, most assuredly. It is no fiction, but a real difference that lies between excusing ourselves and excusing other people. No doubt the same excuse is just for ourselves that is just for other people. But we can do something to put ourselves right upon a higher principle, and therefore we should not waste our time in excusing, or even in condemning ourselves, but make haste up the hill. Where we cannot work—that is, in the life of another—we have time to make all the excuse we can. Nay more; it is only justice there. We are not bound to insist on our own rights, even of excuse; the wisest thing often is to forego them. But we are bound by heaven, earth, and hell to give them to other people. And, besides, what a comfort to ourselves to be able to say, 'It is true So-and-so was cross to-day. But it wasn't in the least that he wasn't friendly, or didn't like me; it was only that he had eaten something that hadn't agreed with him. I could see it in his eye. He had one of his headaches.' Thus, you see, justice to our neighbour, and comfort to ourselves, is one and the same thing. But it would be a sad thing to have to think that when we found ourselves in the same ungracious condition, from whatever cause, we had only to submit to it, saying, 'It is a law of nature,' as even those who talk most about laws will not do, when those laws come between them and their own comfort. They are ready enough then to call in the aid of higher laws, which, so far from being contradictory, overrule the lower to get things into something like habitable, endurable condition. It may be a law of nature; but what has the Law of the Spirit of Life to *propound anent* it? as the Scotch lawyers would say."

A little pause followed, during which I hope some of us were thinking. That Wynn timer, at least, was, her next question made evident.

"What you say about a law of nature and a law of the Spirit makes me think again how that walking on the water has always been a puzzle to me."

"It could hardly be other, seeing that we cannot possibly understand it," I answered.

"But I find it so hard to believe. Can't you say something, papa, to help me to believe it?"

"I think if you admit what goes before, you will find there is nothing against reason in the story."

"Tell me, please, what you mean."

"If all things were made by Jesus, the Word of God, would it be reasonable that the water that he had created should be able to drown him?"

"It might drown his body."

"It would if he had not the power over it still, to prevent it from laying hold of him. But just think for a moment. God is a Spirit. Spirit is greater than matter. Spirit makes matter. Think what it was for a human body to have such a divine creative power dwelling in it as that which dwelt in the human form of Jesus! What power, and influence, and utter rule that spirit must have over the body in which it dwells! We cannot imagine how much; but if we have so much power over our bodies, how much more must the pure, divine Jesus, have had over his! I suspect this miracle was wrought, not through anything done to the water, but through the power of the spirit over the body of Jesus, which was all obedient thereto. I am not explaining the miracle, for that I cannot do. One day I think it will be plain common sense to us. But now I am only showing you what seems to me to bring us a step nearer to the essential region of the miracle, and so far make it easier to believe. If we look at the history of our Lord, we shall find that, true real human body as his was, it was yet used by his spirit after a fashion in which we cannot yet use our bodies. And this is only reasonable. Let me give you an instance. You remember how, on the Mount of Transfiguration, that body shone so that the light of it illuminated all his garments. You do not surely suppose that this shine was external—physical light, as we say, *merely*? No doubt it was physical light, for how else would their eyes have seen it? But where did it come from? What was its source? I think it was a natural outburst of glory from the mind of Jesus, filled with the perfect life of communion with his Father—the light of his divine blessedness taking form in physical radiance that permeated and glorified all that surrounded him. As the body is the expression of the soul, as the face of Jesus himself was the expression of the being, the thought, the love of Jesus in like manner this radiance was the natural expression of his gladness, even in the face of that of which they had been talking—Moses, Elias, and he—namely, the de cease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem. Again, after his resurrection, he convinced the hands, as well as eyes, of doubting Thomas, that he was indeed there in the body; and yet that body could appear and disappear as the Lord willed. All this is full of marvel, I grant you; but probably far more intelligible to us in a further state of existence than some of the most simple facts with regard to our own bodies are to us now, only that we are so used to them that we never think how unintelligible they really are."

"But then about Peter, papa? What you have been saying will not apply to Peter's body, you know."

"I confess there is more difficulty there. But if you can suppose that such power were indwelling in Jesus, you cannot limit the sphere of its action. As he is the head of the body, his church, in all spiritual things, so I firmly believe, however little we can understand about it, is he in all natural things as well. Peter's faith in him brought even Peter's body within the sphere of the outgoing power of the Master. Do you suppose that because Peter ceased to be brave and trusting, therefore Jesus withdrew from him some sustaining power, and allowed him to sink? I do not believe it. I believe Peter's sinking followed naturally upon his loss of confidence. Thus he fell away from the life of the Master; was no longer, in that way I mean, connected with the Head, was instantly under the dominion of the natural law of gravitation, as we call it, and began to sink. Therefore the Lord must take other means to save him. He must draw nigh to him in a bodily manner. The pride of Peter had withdrawn him from the

immediate spiritual influence of Christ, conquering his matter; and therefore the Lord must come over the stormy space between, come nearer to him in the body, and from his own height of safety above the sphere of the natural law, stretch out to him the arm of physical aid, lift him up, lead him to the boat. The whole salvation of the human race is figured in this story. It is all Christ, my love.—Does this help you to believe at all?"

"I think it does, papa. But it wants thinking over a good deal. I always find as I think, that lighter bits shine out here and there in a thing I have no hope of understanding altogether. That always helps me to believe that the rest might be understood too, if I were only clever enough."

"Simple enough, not clever enough, my dear."

"But there's one thing," said my wife, "that is more interesting to me than what you have been talking about. It is the other instances in the life of St. Peter in which you said he failed in a similar manner from pride or self-satisfaction."

"One, at least, seems to me very clear. You have often remarked to me, Ethel, how little praise servants can stand; how almost invariably after you have commended the diligence or skill of any of your household, as you felt bound to do, one of the first visible results was either a falling away in the performance by which she had gained the praise, or a more or less violent access, according to the nature of the individual, of self-conceit, soon breaking out in bad temper or impertinence. Now you will see precisely the same kind of thing in Peter."

Here I opened my New Testament, and read fragmentarily, "'But whom say ye that I am?... Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.... Blessed art thou, Simon.... My Father hath revealed that unto thee. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.... I must suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.... Be it far from thee, Lord. This shall not be unto thee.... Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offence unto me.' Just contemplate the change here in the words of our Lord. 'Blessed art thou.' 'Thou art an offence unto me.' Think what change has passed on Peter's mood before the second of these words could be addressed to him to whom the first had just been spoken. The Lord had praised him. Peter grew self-sufficient, even to the rebuking of him whose praise had so uplifted him. But it is ever so. A man will gain a great moral victory: glad first, then uplifted, he will fall before a paltry temptation. I have sometimes wondered, too, whether his denial of our Lord had anything to do with his satisfaction with himself for making that onslaught upon the high priest's servant. It was a brave thing and a faithful to draw a single sword against a multitude. In his fiery eagerness and inexperience, the blow, well meant to cleave Malchus's head, missed, and only cut off his ear; but Peter had herein justified his confident saying that he would not deny him. He was not one to deny his Lord who had been the first to confess him! Yet ere the cock had crowed, ere the morning had dawned, the vulgar grandeur of the palace of the high priest (for let it be art itself, it was vulgar grandeur beside that grandeur which it caused Peter to deny), and the accusing tone of a maid-servant, were enough to make him quail whom the crowd with lanterns, and torches, and weapons, had only roused to fight. True, he was excited then, and now he was cold in the middle of the night, with Jesus gone from his sight a prisoner, and for the faces of friends that had there surrounded him and strengthened him with their sympathy, now only the faces of those who were, or whom at least Peter thought to be on the other side, looking at him curiously, as a strange intruder into their domains. Alas, that the courage which led him to follow the Lord should have thus led him, not to deny him, but into the denial of him! Yet why should I say *alas*? If the denial of our Lord lay in his heart a possible thing, only prevented by his being kept in favourable circumstances for confessing him, it was a thousand times better that he should deny him, and thus know what a poor weak thing that heart of his was, trust it no more, and give it up to the Master to make it strong, and pure, and grand. For such an end the Lord was willing to bear all the pain of Peter's denial. O, the love of that Son of Man, who in the midst of all the wretched weaknesses of those who surrounded him, loved the best in them, and looked forward to his own victory for them that they might become all that they were meant to be—like him; that the lovely glimmerings of truth and love that were in

them now—the breakings forth of the light that lighteneth every man—might grow into the perfect human day; loving them even the more that they were so helpless, so oppressed, so far from that ideal which was their life, and which all their dim desires were reaching after!"

Here I ceased, and a little overcome with the great picture in my soul to which I had been able only to give the poorest expression, rose, and retired to my own room. There I could only fall on my knees and pray that the Lord Christ, who had died for me, might have his own way with me—that it might be worth his while to have done what he did and what he was doing now for me. To my Elder Brother, my Lord, and my God, I gave myself yet again, confidently, because he cared to have me, and my very breath was his. I *would* be what he wanted, who knew all about it, and had done everything that I might be a son of God—a living glory of gladness.

CHAPTER II. NICEBOOTS

The next morning the captain of the lost vessel called upon me early to thank me for himself and his men. He was a fine honest-looking burly fellow, dressed in blue from head to heel. He might have sat for a portrait of Chaucer's shipman, as far as his hue and the first look of him went. It was clear that "in many a tempest had his beard be shake," and certainly "the hote somer had made his hew all broun;" but farther the likeness would hardly go, for the "good fellow" which Chaucer applies with such irony to the shipman of his time, who would filch wine, and drown all the captives he made in a sea-fight, was clearly applicable in good earnest to this shipman. Still, I thought I had something to bring against him, and therefore before we parted I said to him—

"They tell me, captain, that your vessel was not seaworthy, and that you could not but have known that."

"She was my own craft, sir, and I judged her fit for several voyages more. If she had been A 1 she couldn't have been mine; and a man must do what he can for his family."

"But you were risking your life, you know."

"A few chances more or less don't much signify to a sailor, sir. There ain't nothing to be done without risk. You'll find an old tub go voyage after voyage, and she beyond bail, and a clipper fresh off the stocks go down in the harbour. It's all in the luck, sir, I assure you."

"Well, if it were your own life I should have nothing to say, seeing you have a family to look after; but what about the poor fellows who made the voyage with you? Did they know what kind of a vessel they were embarking in?"

"Wherever the captain's ready to go he'll always find men ready to follow him. Bless you, sir, they never asks no questions. If a sailor was always to be thinking of the chances, he'd never set his foot off shore."

"Still, I don't think it's right they shouldn't know."

"I daresay they knowed all about the old brig as well as I did myself. You gets to know all about a craft just as you do about her captain. She's got a character of her own, and she can't hide it long, any more than you can hide yours, sir, begging your pardon."

"I daresay that's all correct, but still I shouldn't like anyone to say to me, 'You ought to have told me, captain.' Therefore, you see, I'm telling you, captain, and now I'm clear.—Have a glass of wine before you go," I concluded, ringing the bell.

"Thank you, sir. I'll turn over what you've been saying, and anyhow I take it kind of you."

So we parted. I have never seen him since, and shall not, most likely, in this world. But he looked like a man that could understand why and wherefore I spoke as I did. And I had the advantage of having had a chance of doing something for him first of all. Let no man who wants to do anything for the soul of a man lose a chance of doing something for his body. He ought to be willing, and ready, which is more than willing, to do that whether or not; but there are those who need this reminder. Of many a soul Jesus laid hold by healing the suffering the body brought upon it. No one but himself can tell how much the nucleus of the church was composed of and by those who had received health from his hands, loving-kindness from the word of his mouth. My own opinion is that herein lay the very germ of the kernel of what is now the ancient, was then the infant church; that from them, next to the disciples themselves, went forth the chief power of life in love, for they too had seen the Lord, and in their own humble way could preach and teach concerning him. What memories of him theirs must have been!

Things went on very quietly, that is, as I mean now, from the view-point of a historian, without much to record bearing notably upon after events, for the greater part of the next week. I wandered

about my parish, making acquaintance with different people in an outside sort of way, only now and then finding an opportunity of seeing into their souls except by conclusion. But I enjoyed endlessly the aspects of the country. It was not picturesque except in parts. There was little wood and there were no hills, only undulations, though many of them were steep enough even from a pedestrian's point of view. Neither, however, were there any plains except high moorland tracts. But the impression of the whole country was large, airy, sunshiny, and it was clasped in the arms of the infinite, awful, yet how bountiful sea—if one will look at the ocean in its world-wide, not to say its eternal aspects, and not out of the fears of a hidebound love of life! The sea and the sky, I must confess, dwarfed the earth, made it of small account beside them; but who could complain of such an influence? At least, not I.

My children bathed in this sea every day, and gathered strength and knowledge from it. It was, as I have indicated, a dangerous coast to bathe upon. The sweep of the tides varied with the varying sands that were cast up. There was now in one place, now in another, a strong *undertow*, as they called it—a reflux, that is, of the inflowing waters, which was quite sufficient to carry those who could not swim out into the great deep, and rendered much exertion necessary, even in those who could, to regain the shore. But there was a fine strong Cornish woman to take charge of the ladies and the little boys, and she, watching the ways of the wild monster, knew the when and the where, and all about it.

Connie got out upon the downs every day. She improved in health certainly, and we thought a little even in her powers of motion. The weather continued superb. What rain there was fell at night, just enough for Nature to wash her face with and so look quite fresh in the morning. We contrived a dinner on the sands on the other side of the bay, for the Friday of this same week.

The morning rose gloriously. Harry and Charlie were turning the house upside down, to judge by their noise, long before I was in the humour to get up, for I had been reading late the night before. I never made much objection to mere noise, knowing that I could stop it the moment I pleased, and knowing, which was of more consequence, that so far from there being anything wrong in making a noise, the sea would make noise enough in our ears before we left Kilkhaven. The moment, however, that I heard a thread of whining or a burst of anger in the noise, I would interfere at once—treating these just as things that must be dismissed at once. Harry and Charlie were, I say, to use their own form of speech, making such a row that morning, however, that I was afraid of some injury to the house or furniture, which were not our own. So I opened my door and called out—

"Harry! Charlie! What on earth are you about?"

"Nothing, papa," answered Charlie. "Only it's so jolly!"

"What is jolly, my boy?" I asked.

"O, I don't know, papa! It's *so* jolly!"

"Is it the sunshine?" thought I; "and the wind? God's world all over? The God of gladness in the hearts of the lads? Is it that? No wonder, then, that they cannot tell yet what it is!"

I withdrew into my room; and so far from seeking to put an end to the noise—I knew Connie did not mind it—listened to it with a kind of reverence, as the outcome of a gladness which the God of joy had kindled in their hearts. Soon after, however, I heard certain dim growls of expostulation from Harry, and having, from experience, ground for believing that the elder was tyrannising over the younger, I stopped that and the noise together, sending Charlie to find out where the tide would be between one and two o'clock, and Harry to run to the top of the hill, and find out the direction of the wind. Before I was dressed, Charlie was knocking at my door with the news that it would be half-tide about one; and Harry speedily followed with the discovery that the wind was north-east by south-west, which of course determined that the sun would shine all day.

As the dinner-hour drew near, the servants went over, with Walter at their head, to choose a rock convenient for a table, under the shelter of the rocks on the sands across the bay. Thither, when Walter returned, we bore our Connie, carrying her litter close by the edge of the retreating tide, which sometimes broke in a ripple of music under her, wetting our feet with innocuous rush. The child's delight was extreme, as she thus skimmed the edge of the ocean, with the little ones gambolling about

her, and her mamma and Wynn timer walking quietly on the landward side, for she wished to have no one between her and the sea.

After scrambling with difficulty over some rocky ledges, and stopping at Connie's request, to let her look into a deep pool in the sand, which somehow or other retained the water after the rest had retreated, we set her down near the mouth of a cave, in the shadow of a rock. And there was our dinner nicely laid for us on a flat rock in front of the cave. The cliffs rose behind us, with curiously curved and variously angled strata. The sun in his full splendour threw dark shadows on the brilliant yellow sand, more and more of which appeared as the bright blue water withdrew itself, now rippling over it as if it meant to hide it all up again, now uncovering more as it withdrew for another rush. Before we had finished our dinner, the foremost wavelets appeared so far away over the plain of the sand, that it seemed a long walk to the edge that had been almost at our feet a little while ago. Between us and it lay a lovely desert of glittering sand.

When even Charlie and Harry had arrived at the conclusion that it was time to stop eating, we left the shadow and went out into the sun, carrying Connie and laying her down in the midst of "the ribbed sea-sand," which was very ribby to-day. On a shawl a little way off from her lay her baby, crowing and kicking with the same jollity that had possessed the boys ever since the morning. I wandered about with Wynn timer on the sands, picking up amongst other things strange creatures in thin shells ending in vegetable-like tufts, if I remember rightly. My wife sat on the end of Connie's litter, and Dora and the boys, a little way off, were trying how far the full force of three wooden spades could, in digging a hole, keep ahead of the water which was ever tumbling in the sand from the sides of the same. Behind, the servants were busy washing the plates in a pool, and burying the fragments of the feast; for I made it a rule wherever we went that the fair face of nature was not to be defiled. I have always taken the part of excursionists in these latter days of running to and fro, against those who complain that the loveliest places are being destroyed by their inroads. But there is one most offensive, even disgusting habit amongst them—that of leaving bones, fragments of meat pies, and worse than all, pieces of greasy paper about the place, which I cannot excuse, or at least defend. Even the surface of Cumberland and Westmoreland lakes will be defiled with these floating abominations—not abominations at all if they are decently burned or buried when done with, but certainly abominations when left to be cast hither and thither in the wind, over the grass, or on the eddy and ripple of the pure water, for days after those who have thus left their shame behind them have returned to their shops or factories. I forgive them for trampling down the grass and the ferns. That cannot be helped, and in comparison of the good they get, is not to be considered at all. But why should they leave such a savage trail behind them as this, forgetting too that though they have done with the spot, there are others coming after them to whom these remnants must be an offence?

At length in our roaming, Wynn timer and I approached a long low ridge of rock, rising towards the sea into which it ran. Crossing this, we came suddenly upon the painter whom Dora had called Niceboots, sitting with a small easel before him. We were right above him ere we knew. He had his back towards us, so that we saw at once what he was painting.

"O, papa!" cried Wynn timer involuntarily, and the painter looked round.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "We came over from the other side, and did not see you before. I hope we have not disturbed you much."

"Not in the least," he answered courteously, and rose as he spoke.

I saw that the subject on his easel suggested that of which Wynn timer had been making a sketch at the same time, on the day when Connie first lay on the top of the opposite cliff. But he was not even looking in the same direction now.

"Do you mind having your work seen before it is finished?"

"Not in the least, if the spectators will do me the favour to remember that most processes have to go through a seemingly chaotic stage," he answered.

I was struck with the mode and tone of the remark.

"Here is no common man," I said to myself, and responded to him in something of a similar style.

"I wish we could always keep that in mind with regard to human beings themselves, as well as their works," I said aloud.

The painter looked at me, and I looked at him.

"We speak each from the experience of his own profession, I presume," he said.

"But," I returned, glancing at the little picture in oils upon his easel, "your work here, though my knowledge of painting is next to nothing—perhaps I ought to say nothing at all—this picture must have long ago passed the chaotic stage."

"It is nearly as much finished as I care to make it," he returned. "I hardly count this work at all. I am chiefly amusing, or rather pleasing, my own fancy at present."

"Apparently," I remarked, "you had the conical rock outside the hay for your model, and now you are finishing it with your back turned towards it. How is that?"

"I will soon explain," he answered. "The moment I saw this rock, it reminded me of Dante's Purgatory."

"Ah, you are a reader of Dante?" I said. "In the original, I hope."

"Yes. A friend of mine, a brother painter, an Italian, set me going with that, and once going with Dante, nobody could well stop. I never knew what intensity *per se* was till I began to read Dante."

"That is quite my own feeling. Now, to return to your picture."

"Without departing at all from natural forms, I thought to make it suggest the Purgatorio to anyone who remembered the description given of the place *ab extra* by Ulysses, in the end of the twenty-sixth canto of the Inferno. Of course, that thing there is a mere rock, yet it has certain mountain forms about it. I have put it at a much greater distance, you see, and have sought to make it look a solitary mountain in the midst of a great water. You will discover even now that the circles of the Purgatory are suggested without any approach, I think, to artificial structure; and there are occasional hints at figures, which you cannot definitely detach from the rocks—which, by the way, you must remember, were in one part full of sculptures. I have kept the mountain near enough, however, to indicate the great expanse of wild flowers on the top, which Matilda was so busy gathering. I want to indicate too the wind up there in the terrestrial paradise, ever and always blowing one way. You remember, Mr. Walton?"—for the young man, getting animated, began to talk as if we had known each other for some time—and here he repeated the purport of Dante's words in English:

"An air of sweetness, changeless in its flow,
With no more strength than in a soft wind lies,
Smote peacefully against me on the brow.
By which the leaves all trembling, level-wise,
Did every one bend thitherward to where
The high mount throws its shadow at sunrise."

"I thought you said you did not use translations?"

"I thought it possible that—Miss Walton (?)" interrogatively this—"might not follow the Italian so easily, and I feared to seem pedantic."

"She won't lag far behind, I flatter myself," I returned. "Whose translation do you quote?"

He hesitated a moment; then said carelessly:

"I have cobbled a few passages after that fashion myself."

"It has the merit of being near the original at least," I returned; "and that seems to me one of the chief merits a translation can possess."

"Then," the painter resumed, rather hastily, as if to avoid any further remark upon his verses, "you see those white things in the air above?" Here he turned to Wynn timer. "Miss Walton will remember

—I think she was making a drawing of the rock at the same time I was—how the seagulls, or some such birds—only two or three of them—kept flitting about the top of it?"

"I remember quite well," answered Wynn timer, with a look of appeal to me.

"Yes," I interposed; "my daughter, in describing what she had been attempting to draw, spoke especially of the birds over the rock. For she said the white lapping of the waves looked like spirits trying to get loose, and the white birds like foam that had broken its chains, and risen in triumph into the air."

Here Mr. Niceboots, for as yet I did not know what else to call him, looked at Wynn timer almost with a start.

"How wonderfully that falls in with my fancy about the rock!" he said. "Purgatory indeed! with imprisoned souls lapping at its foot, and the free souls winging their way aloft in ether. Well, this world is a kind of purgatory anyhow—is it not, Mr. Walton?"

"Certainly it is. We are here tried as by fire, to see what our work is—whether wood, hay, and stubble, or gold and silver and precious stones."

"You see," resumed the painter, "if anybody only glanced at my little picture, he would take those for sea-birds; but if he looked into it, and began to suspect me, he would find out that they were Dante and Beatrice on their way to the sphere of the moon."

"In one respect at least, then, your picture has the merit of corresponding to fact; for what thing is there in the world, or what group of things, in which the natural man will not see merely the things of nature, but the spiritual man the things of the spirit?"

"I am no theologian," said the painter, turning away, I thought somewhat coldly.

But I could see that Wynn timer was greatly interested in him. Perhaps she thought that here was some enlightenment of the riddle of the world for her, if she could but get at what he was thinking. She was used to my way of it: here might be something new.

"If I can be of any service to Miss Walton with her drawing, I shall be happy," he said, turning again towards me.

But his last gesture had made me a little distrustful of him, and I received his advances on this point with a coldness which I did not wish to make more marked than his own towards my last observation.

"You are very kind," I said; "but Miss Walton does not presume to be an artist."

I saw a slight shade pass over Wynn timer's countenance. When I turned to Mr. Niceboots, a shade of a different sort was on his. Surely I had said something wrong to cast a gloom on two young faces. I made haste to make amends.

"We are just going to have some coffee," I said, "for my servants, I see, have managed to kindle a fire. Will you come and allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Walton?"

"With much pleasure," he answered, rising from the rock whereon, as he spoke about his picture, he had again seated himself. He was a fine-built, black-bearded, sunburnt fellow, with clear gray eyes notwithstanding, a rather Roman nose, and good features generally. But there was an air of suppression, if not of sadness, about him, however, did not in the least interfere with the manliness of his countenance, or of its expression.

"But," I said, "how am I to effect an introduction, seeing I do not yet know your name."

I had had to keep a sharp look-out on myself lest I should call him Mr. Niceboots. He smiled very graciously and replied,

"My name is Percivale—Charles Percivale."

"A descendant of Sir Percivale of King Arthur's Round Table?"

"I cannot count quite so far back," he answered, "as that—not quite to the Conquest," he added, with a slight deepening of his sunburnt hue. "I do come of a fighting race, but I cannot claim Sir Percivale."

We were now walking along the edge of the still retreating waves towards the group upon the sands, Mr. Percivale and I foremost, and Wynn timer lingering behind.

"O, do look here papa!" she cried, from some little distance.

We turned and saw her gazing at something on the sand at her feet. Hastening back, we found it to be a little narrow line of foam-bubbles, which the water had left behind it on the sand, slowly breaking and passing out of sight. Why there should be foam-bubbles there then, and not always, I do not know. But there they were—and such colours! deep rose and grassy green and ultramarine blue; and, above all, one dark, yet brilliant and intensely-burnished, metallic gold. All of them were of a solid-looking burnished colour, like opaque body-colour laid on behind translucent crystal. Those little ocean bubbles were well worth turning to see; and so I said to Wynn timer. But, as we gazed, they went on vanishing, one by one. Every moment a heavenly glory of hue burst, and was nowhere.

We walked away again towards the rest of our party.

"Don't you think those bubbles more beautiful than any precious stones you ever saw, papa?"

"Yes, my love, I think they are, except it be the opal. In the opal, God seems to have fixed the evanescent and made the vanishing eternal."

"And flowers are more beautiful things than jewels?" she said interrogatively.

"Many—perhaps most flowers are," I granted. "And did you ever see such curves and delicate textures anywhere else as in the clouds, papa?"

"I think not—in the cirrhus clouds at least—the frozen ones. But what are you putting me to my catechism for in this way, my child?"

"O, papa, I could go on a long time with that catechism; but I will end with one question more, which you will perhaps find a little harder to answer. Only I daresay you have had an answer ready for years lest one of us should ask you some day."

"No, my love. I never got an answer ready for anything lest one of my children should ask me. But it is not surprising either that children should be puzzled about the things that have puzzled their father, or that by the time they are able to put the questions, he should have found out some sort of an answer to most of them. Go on with your catechism, Wynn timer. Now for your puzzle!"

"It's not a funny question, papa; it's a very serious one. I can't think why the unchanging God should have made all the most beautiful things wither and grow ugly, or burst and vanish, or die somehow and be no more. Mamma is not so beautiful as she once was, is she?"

"In one way, no; but in another and better way, much more so. But we will not talk about her kind of beauty just now; we will keep to the more material loveliness of which you have been speaking—though, in truth, no loveliness can be only material. Well, then, for my answer; it is, I think, because God loves the beauty so much that he makes all beautiful things vanish quickly."

"I do not understand you, papa."

"I daresay not, my dear. But I will explain to you a little, if Mr. Percivale will excuse me."

"On the contrary, I am greatly interested, both in the question and the answer."

"Well, then, Wynn timer; everything has a soul and a body, or something like them. By the body we know the soul. But we are always ready to love the body instead of the soul. Therefore, God makes the body die continually, that we may learn to love the soul indeed. The world is full of beautiful things, but God has saved many men from loving the mere bodies of them, by making them poor; and more still by reminding them that if they be as rich as Croesus all their lives, they will be as poor as Diogenes—poorer, without even a tub—when this world, with all its pictures, scenery, books, and—alas for some Christians!—bibles even, shall have vanished away."

"Why do you say *alas*, papa—if they are Christians especially?"

"I say *alas* only from their point of view, not from mine. I mean such as are always talking and arguing from the Bible, and never giving themselves any trouble to do what it tells them. They insist on the anise and cummin, and forget the judgment, mercy, and faith. These worship the body of the truth, and forget the soul of it. If the flowers were not perishable, we should cease to contemplate

their beauty, either blinded by the passion for hoarding the bodies of them, or dulled by the hebetude of commonplaceness that the constant presence of them would occasion. To compare great things with small, the flowers wither, the bubbles break, the clouds and sunsets pass, for the very same holy reason, in the degree of its application to them, for which the Lord withdrew from his disciples and ascended again to his Father—that the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the Soul of things, might come to them and abide with them, and so the Son return, and the Father be revealed. The flower is not its loveliness, and its loveliness we must love, else we shall only treat them as flower-greedy children, who gather and gather, and fill hands and baskets, from a mere desire of acquisition, excusable enough in them, but the same in kind, however harmless in mode, and degree, and object, as the avarice of the miser. Therefore God, that we may always have them, and ever learn to love their beauty, and yet more their truth, sends the beneficent winter that we may think about what we have lost, and welcome them when they come again with greater tenderness and love, with clearer eyes to see, and purer hearts to understand, the spirit that dwells in them. We cannot do without the 'winter of our discontent.' Shakspeare surely saw that when he makes Titania say, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

'The human mortals want their winter here'—

namely, to set things right; and none of those editors who would alter the line seem to have been capable of understanding its import."

"I think I understand you a little," answered Wynnie. Then, changing her tone, "I told you, papa, you would have an answer ready; didn't I?"

"Yes, my child; but with this difference—I found the answer to meet my own necessities, not yours."

"And so you had it ready for me when I wanted it."

"Just so. That is the only certainty you have in regard to what you give away. No one who has not tasted it and found it good has a right to offer any spiritual dish to his neighbour."

Mr. Percivale took no part in our conversation. The moment I had presented him to Mrs. Walton and Connie, and he had paid his respects by a somewhat stately old-world obeisance, he merged the salutation into a farewell, and, either forgetting my offer of coffee, or having changed his mind, withdrew, a little to my disappointment, for, notwithstanding his lack of response where some things he said would have led me to expect it, I had begun to feel much interested in him.

He was scarcely beyond hearing, when Dora came up to me from her digging, with an eager look on her sunny face.

"Hasn't he got nice boots, papa?"

"Indeed, my dear, I am unable to support you in that assertion, for I never saw his boots."

"I did, then," returned the child; "and I never saw such nice boots."

"I accept the statement willingly," I replied; and we heard no more of the boots, for his name was now substituted for his nickname. Nor did I see himself again for some days—not in fact till next Sunday—though why he should come to church at all was something of a puzzle to me, especially when I knew him better.

CHAPTER III. THE BLACKSMITH

The next day I set out after breakfast to inquire about a blacksmith. It was not every or any blacksmith that would do. I must not fix on the first to do my work because he was the first. There was one in the village, I soon learned; but I found him an ordinary man, who, I have no doubt, could shoe a horse and avoid the quick, but from whom any greater delicacy of touch was not to be expected. Inquiring further, I heard of a young smith who had lately settled in a hamlet a couple of miles distant, but still within the parish. In the afternoon I set out to find him. To my surprise, he was a pale-faced, thoughtful-looking man, with a huge frame, which appeared worn rather than naturally thin, and large eyes that looked at the anvil as if it was the horizon of the world. He had got a horse-shoe in his tongs when I entered. Notwithstanding the fire that glowed on the hearth, and the sparks that flew like a nimbus in eruption from about his person, the place looked very dark to me entering from the glorious blaze of the almost noontide sun, and felt cool after the deep lane through which I had come, and which had seemed a very reservoir of sunbeams. I could see the smith by the glow of his horse-shoe; but all between me and the shoe was dark.

"Good-morning," I said. "It is a good thing to find a man by his work. I heard you half a mile off or so, and now I see you, but only by the glow of your work. It is a grand thing to work in fire."

He lifted his hammered hand to his forehead courteously, and as lightly as if the hammer had been the butt-end of a whip.

"I don't know if you would say the same if you had to work at it in weather like this," he answered.

"If I did not," I returned, "that would be the fault of my weakness, and would not affect the assertion I have just made, that it is a fine thing to work in fire."

"Well, you may be right," he rejoined with a sigh, as, throwing the horse-shoe he had been fashioning from the tongs on the ground, he next let the hammer drop beside the anvil, and leaning against it held his head for a moment between his hands, and regarded the floor. "It does not much matter to me," he went on, "if I only get through my work and have done with it. No man shall say I shirked what I'd got to do. And then when it's over there won't be a word to say agin me, or—"

He did not finish the sentence. And now I could see the sunlight lying in a somewhat dreary patch, if the word *dreary* can be truly used with respect to any manifestation of sunlight, on the dark clay floor.

"I hope you are not ill," I said.

He made no answer, but taking up his tongs caught with it from a beam one of a number of roughly-finished horse-shoes which hung there, and put it on the fire to be fashioned to a certain fit. While he turned it in the fire, and blew the bellows, I stood regarding him. "This man will do for my work," I said to myself; "though I should not wonder from the look of him if it was the last piece of work he ever did under the New Jerusalem." The smith's words broke in on my meditations.

"When I was a little boy," he said, "I once wanted to stay at home from school. I had, I believe, a little headache, but nothing worth minding. I told my mother that I had a headache, and she kept me, and I helped her at her spinning, which was what I liked best of anything. But in the afternoon the Methodist preacher came in to see my mother, and he asked me what was the matter with me, and my mother answered for me that I had a bad head, and he looked at me; and as my head was quite well by this time, I could not help feeling guilty. And he saw my look, I suppose, sir, for I can't account for what he said any other way; and he turned to me, and he said to me, solemn-like, 'Is your head bad enough to send you to the Lord Jesus to make you whole?' I could not speak a word, partly from bashfulness, I suppose, for I was but ten years old. So he followed it up, as they say: 'Then you

ought to be at school,' says he. I said nothing, because I couldn't. But never since then have I given in as long as I could stand. And I can stand now, and lift my hammer, too," he said, as he took the horse-shoe from the forge, laid it on the anvil, and again made a nimbus of coruscating iron.

"You are just the man I want," I said. "I've got a job for you, down to Kilkhaven, as you say in these parts."

"What is it, sir? Something about the church? I should ha' thought the church was all spick and span by this time."

"I see you know who I am," I said.

"Of course I do," he answered. "I don't go to church myself, being brought up a Methodist; but anything that happens in the parish is known the next day all over it."

"You won't mind doing my job though you are a Methodist, will you?" I asked.

"Not I, sir. If I've read right, it's the fault of the Church that we don't pull all alongside. You turned us out, sir; we didn't go out of ourselves. At least, if all they say is true, which I can't be sure of, you know, in this world."

"You are quite right there though," I answered. "And in doing so, the Church had the worst of it—as all that judge and punish their neighbours have. But you have been the worse for it, too: all of which is to be laid to the charge of the Church. For there is not one clergyman I know—mind, I say, that I know—who would have made such a cruel speech to a boy as that the Methodist parson made to you."

"But it did me good, sir?"

"Are you sure of that? I am not. Are you sure, first of all, it did not make you proud? Are you sure it has not made you work beyond your strength—I don't mean your strength of arm, for clearly that is all that could be wished, but of your chest, your lungs? Is there not some danger of your leaving someone who is dependent on you too soon unprovided for? Is there not some danger of your having worked as if God were a hard master?—of your having worked fiercely, indignantly, as if he wronged you by not caring for you, not understanding you?"

He returned me no answer, but hammered momentarily on his anvil. Whether he felt what I meant, or was offended at my remark, I could not then tell. I thought it best to conclude the interview with business.

"I have a delicate little job that wants nice handling, and I fancy you are just the man to do it to my mind," I said.

"What is it, sir?" he asked, in a friendly manner enough.

"If you will excuse me, I would rather show it to you than talk about it," I returned.

"As you please, sir. When do you want me?"

"The first hour you can come."

"To-morrow morning?"

"If you feel inclined."

"For that matter, I'd rather go to bed."

"Come to me instead: it's light work."

"I will, sir—at ten o'clock."

"If you please."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER IV. THE LIFE-BOAT

The next day rose glorious. Indeed, early as the sun rose, I saw him rise—saw him, from the down above the house, over the land to the east and north, ascend triumphant into his own light, which had prepared the way for him; while the clouds that hung over the sea glowed out with a faint flush, as anticipating the hour when the west should clasp the declining glory in a richer though less dazzling splendour, and shine out the bride of the bridegroom east, which behold each other from afar across the intervening world, and never mingle but in the sight of the eyes. The clear pure light of the morning made me long for the truth in my heart, which alone could make me pure and clear as the morning, tune me up to the concert-pitch of the nature around me. And the wind that blew from the sunrise made me hope in the God who had first breathed into my nostrils the breath of life, that he would at length so fill me with his breath, his wind, his spirit, that I should think only his thoughts and live his life, finding therein my own life, only glorified infinitely.

After breakfast and prayers, I would go to the church to await the arrival of my new acquaintance the smith. In order to obtain entrance, I had, however, to go to the cottage of the sexton. This was not my first visit there, so that I may now venture to take my reader with me. To reach the door, I had to cross a hollow by a bridge, built, for the sake of the road, over what had once been the course of a rivulet from the heights above. Now it was a kind of little glen, or what would in Scotland be called a den, I think, grown with grass and wild flowers and ferns, some of them, rare and fine. The roof of the cottage came down to the road, and, until you came quite near, you could not but wonder where the body that supported this head could be. But you soon saw that the ground fell suddenly away, leaving a bank against which the cottage was built. Crossing a garden of the smallest, the principal flowers of which were the stoncrop on its walls, by a flag-paved path, you entered the building, and, to your surprise, found yourself, not in a little cottage kitchen, as you expected, but in a waste-looking space, that seemed to have forgotten the use for which it had been built. There was a sort of loft along one side of it, and it was heaped with indescribable lumber-looking stuff with here and there a hint at possible machinery. The place had been a mill for grinding corn, and its wheel had been driven by the stream which had run for ages in the hollow of which I have already spoken. But when the canal came to be constructed, the stream had to be turned aside from its former course, and indeed was now employed upon occasion to feed the canal; so that the mill of necessity had fallen into disuse and decay. Crossing this floor, you entered another door, and turning sharp to the left, went down a few steps of a ladder-sort of stair, and after knocking your hat against a beam, emerged in the comfortable quaint little cottage kitchen you had expected earlier. A cheerful though small fire burns in the grate—for even here the hearth-fire has vanished from the records of cottage-life—and is pleasant here even in the height of summer, though it is counted needful only for cooking purposes. The ceiling, which consists only of the joists and the boards that floor the bedroom above, is so low, that necessity, if not politeness, would compel you to take off your already-bruised hat. Some of these joists, you will find, are made further useful by supporting each a shelf, before which hangs a little curtain of printed cotton, concealing the few stores and postponed eatables of the house—forming, in fact, both store-room and larder of the family. On the walls hang several coloured prints, and within a deep glazed frame the figure of a ship in full dress, carved in rather high relief in sycamore.

As I now entered, Mrs. Coombes rose from a high-backed settle near the fire, and bade me good-morning with a courtesy.

"What a lovely day it is, Mrs. Coombes! It is so bright over the sea," I said, going to the one little window which looked out on the great Atlantic, "that one almost expects a great merchant navy

to come sailing into Kilkhaven—sunk to the water's edge with silks, and ivory, and spices, and apes, and peacocks, like the ships of Solomon that we read about—just as the sun gets up to the noonstead."

Before I record her answer, I turn to my reader, who in the spirit accompanies me, and have a little talk with him. I always make it a rule to speak freely with the less as with the more educated of my friends. I never *talk down* to them, except I be expressly explaining something to them. The law of the world is as the law of the family. Those children grow much the faster who hear all that is going on in the house. Reaching ever above themselves, they arrive at an understanding at fifteen, which, in the usual way of things, they would not reach before five-and-twenty or thirty; and this in a natural way, and without any necessary priggishness, except such as may belong to their parents. Therefore I always spoke to the poor and uneducated as to my own people,—freely, not much caring whether I should be quite understood or not; for I believed in influences not to be measured by the measure of the understanding.

But what was the old woman's answer? It was this:

"I know, sir. And when I was as young as you"—I was not so very young, my reader may well think—"I thought like that about the sea myself. Everything come from the sea. For my boy Willie he du bring me home the beautifullest parrot and the talkingest you ever see, and the red shawl all worked over with flowers: I'll show it to you some day, sir, when you have time. He made that ship you see in the frame there, sir, all with his own knife, out on a bit o' wood that he got at the Marishes, as they calls it, sir—a bit of an island somewheres in the great sea. But the parrot's gone dead like the rest of them, sir.—Where am I? and what am I talking about?" she added, looking down at her knitting as if she had dropped a stitch, or rather as if she had forgotten what she was making, and therefore what was to come next.

"You were telling me how you used to think of the sea—"

"When I was as young as you. I remember, sir. Well, that lasted a long time—lasted till my third boy fell asleep in the wide water; for it du call it falling asleep, don't it, sir?"

"The Bible certainly does," I answered.

"It's the Bible I be meaning, of course," she returned. "Well, after that, but I don't know what began it, only I did begin to think about the sea as something that took away things and didn't bring them no more. And somehow or other she never look so blue after that, and she give me the shivers. But now, sir, she always looks to me like one o' the shining ones that come to fetch the pilgrims. You've heard tell of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, I daresay, sir, among the poor people; for they du say it was written by a tinker, though there be a power o' good things in it that I think the gentlefolk would like if they knowed it."

"I do know the book—nearly as well as I know the Bible," I answered; "and the shining ones are very beautiful in it. I am glad you can think of the sea that way."

"It's looking in at the window all day as I go about the house," she answered, "and all night too when I'm asleep; and if I hadn't learned to think of it that way, it would have driven me mad, I du believe. I was forced to think that way about it, or not think at all. And that wouldn't be easy, with the sound of it in your ears the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning."

"The truth of things is indeed the only refuge from the look of things," I replied. "But now I want the key of the church, if you will trust me with it, for I have something to do there this morning; and the key of the tower as well, if you please."

With her old smile, ripened only by age, she reached the ponderous keys from the nail where they hung, and gave them into my hand. I left her in the shadow of her dwelling, and stepped forth into the sunlight. The first thing I observed was the blacksmith waiting for me at the church door.

Now that I saw him in the full light of day, and now that he wore his morning face upon which the blackness of labour had not yet gathered, I could see more plainly how far he was from well. There was a flush on his thin cheek by which the less used exercise of walking revealed his inward weakness, and the light in his eyes had something of the far-country in them—"the light that never

was on sea or shore." But his speech was cheerful, for he had been walking in the light of this world, and that had done something to make the light within him shine a little more freely.

"How do you find yourself to-day?" I asked.

"Quite well, sir, I thank you," he answered. "A day like this does a man good. But," he added, and his countenance fell, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness."

"It may know it too much," I returned, "just because it refuses to let a stranger intermeddle therewith."

He made no reply. I turned the key in the great lock, and the iron-studded oak opened and let us into the solemn gloom.

It did not require many minutes to make the man understand what I wanted of him.

"We must begin at the bells and work down," he said.

So we went up into the tower, where, with the help of a candle I fetched for him from the cottage, he made a good many minute measurements; found that carpenter's work was necessary for the adjustment of the hammers and cranks and the leading of the rods, undertook the management of the whole, and in the course of an hour and a half went home to do what had to be done before any fixing could be commenced, assuring me that he had no doubt of bringing the job to a satisfactory conclusion, although the force of the blow on the bell would doubtless have to be regulated afterwards by repeated trials.

"In a fortnight, I hope you will be able to play a tune to the parish, sir," he added, as he took his leave.

I resolved, if possible, to know more of the man, and find out his trouble, if haply I might be able to give him any comfort, for I was all but certain that there was a deeper cause for his gloom than the state of his health.

When he was gone I stood with the key of the church in my hand, and looked about me. Nature at least was in glorious health—sunshine in her eyes, light fantastic cloud-images passing through her brain, her breath coming and going in soft breezes perfumed with the scents of meadows and wild flowers, and her green robe shining in the motions of her gladness. I turned to lock the church door, though in my heart I greatly disapproved of locking the doors of churches, and only did so now because it was not my church, and I had no business to force my opinions upon other customs. But when I turned I received a kind of questioning shock. There was the fallen world, as men call it, shining in glory and gladness, because God was there; here was the way into the lost Paradise, yea, the door into an infinitely higher Eden than that ever had or ever could have been, iron-clamped and riveted, gloomy and low-browed like the entrance to a sepulchre, and surrounded with the grim heads of grotesque monsters of the deep. What did it mean? Here was contrast enough to require harmonising, or if that might not be, then accounting for. Perhaps it was enough to say that although God made both the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace, yet the symbol of the latter was the work of man, and might not altogether correspond to God's idea of the matter. I turned away thoughtful, and went through the churchyard with my eye on the graves.

As I left the churchyard, still looking to the earth, the sound of voices reached my ear. I looked up. There, down below me, at the foot of the high bank on which I stood, lay a gorgeous shining thing upon the bosom of the canal, full of men, and surrounded by men, women, and children, delighting in its beauty. I had never seen such a thing before, but I knew at once, as by instinct, which of course it could not have been, that it was the life-boat. But in its gorgeous colours, red and white and green, it looked more like the galley that bore Cleopatra to Actium. Nor, floating so light on the top of the water, and broad in the beam withal, curved upward and ornamented at stern and stem, did it look at all like a creature formed to battle with the fierce elements. A pleasure-boat for floating between river banks it seemed, drawn by swans mayhap, and regarded in its course by fair eyes from green terrace-walks, or oriel windows of ancient houses on verdant lawns. Ten men sat on the thwarts, and one in the stern by the yet useless rudder, while men and boys drew the showy thing by a rope downward

to the lock-gates. The men in the boat, wore blue jerseys, but you could see little of the colour for strange unshapely things that they wore above them, like an armour cut out of a row of organ pipes. They were their cork-jackets; for every man had to be made into a life-boat himself. I descended the bank, and stood on the edge of the canal as it drew near. Then I saw that every oar was loosely but firmly fastened to the rowlock, so that it could be dropped and caught again in a moment; and that the gay sides of the unwieldy-looking creature were festooned with ropes from the gunwale, for the men to lay hold of when she capsized, for the earlier custom of fastening the men to their seats had been quite given up, because their weight under the water might prevent the boat from righting itself again, and the men could not come to the surface. Now they had a better chance in their freedom, though why they should not be loosely attached to the boat, I do not quite see.

They towed the shining thing through the upper gate of the lock, and slowly she sank from my sight, and for some moments was no more to be seen, for I had remained standing where first she passed me. All at once there she was beyond the covert of the lock-head, abroad and free, fleeting from the strokes of ten swift oars over the still waters of the bay towards the waves that roared further out where the ground-swell was broken by the rise of the sandy coast. There was no vessel in danger now, as the talk of the spectators informed me; it was only for exercise and show that they went out. It seemed all child's play for a time; but when they got among the broken waves, then it looked quite another thing. The motion of the waters laid hold upon her, and soon tossed her fearfully, now revealing the whole of her capacity on the near side of one of their slopes, now hiding her whole bulk in one of their hollows beyond. She, careless as a child in the troubles of the world, floated about amongst them with what appeared too much buoyancy for the promise of a safe return. Again and again she was driven from her course towards the low rocks on the other side of the bay, and again and again, returned to disport herself, like a sea-animal, as it seemed, upon the backs of the wild, rolling, and bursting billows.

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