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CHARLIE TO THE RESCUE

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R. M. Ballantyne

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Chapter One. Introduces the Hero

To be generally helpful was one of the chief points in the character of Charlie Brooke.

He was evidently born to aid mankind. He began by helping himself to everything in life that seemed at all desirable. This was natural, not selfish.

At first there were few things, apparently, that did seem to his infant mind desirable, for his earliest days were marked by a sort of chronic crossness that seemed quite unaccountable in one so healthy; but this was eventually traced to the influence of pins injudiciously disposed about the person by nurse. Possibly this experience may have tended to develop a spirit of brave endurance, and might perhaps account for the beautiful modifications of character that were subsequently observed in him. At all events, sweet, patient amiability was a prevailing feature in the boy long before the years of infancy were over, and this heavenly aspect of him was pleasantly diversified, in course of time, by occasional displays of resolute—we might almost say heroic—self-will, which proved a constant source of mingled pride and alarm to his widowed mother.

From a very early period of life little Charlie manifested an intense desire, purpose, and capacity for what may be called his life-work of rescuing human beings from trouble and danger. It became a passion with him as years rolled on, and was among the chief means that brought about the changes in his chequered career.

Appropriately enough he began—almost in babyhood—by rescuing himself!

It happened thus. One day, when he had reached the immature age of five, he was left in the nursery for a few moments in company with a wash-tub, in which his mother had been cleansing the household linen.

Mrs Brooke, it may be remarked, although in the middle ranks of life, was very much below the middle ranks in financial prosperity, and had therefore to perform much household drudgery.

Charlie's earnest desire to please and obey his mother constantly came into collision with that self-will to which we have referred. Separately, these qualities may perhaps work quietly, at least as regards their possessor, but unitedly they form a mixture which is apt to become explosive in early youth.

"Don't touch the tub, Charlie; I'll be back directly," said Mrs Brooke, as she was leaving the nursery. "Don't even go near it."

"No, muvver, I won't."

He spoke with much decision, for he adored water—not to drink but to play with—and seemed to realise the danger of his position, and the necessity for self-control.

The temptation to avail himself of the chance, however, was almost too much for him. Feeling that an internal conflict was pending, he toddled to the fire, turned his back to it *à la* paterfamilias, and glared at the tub, resolved, come what might, to be "dood." But fate was against him!

Suddenly he became aware that something more than radiated heat was operating in rear. He glanced behind. His cotton tunic was in flames! In the twinkling of an eye he was seated in the wash-tub, his hands clasped in horror as he thought of his guilt, and the flames thoroughly extinguished!

The solemn glare and pursed mouth with which he met his mother's look of blank amazement may be imagined but cannot be described—he looked so quiet, too, and so evidently contented, for the warm water was congenial!

“O Charlie! did I not say that—”

“Yes, muvver, but I’m bu’nt.”

The fearsome and dripping black patch which presented itself to the agonised mother when she lifted him out of the tub sufficiently enlightened her and exonerated the child, but her anxiety was not relieved till she had stripped him naked and ascertained for certain that no scrap of his fair skin had been injured.

This may be said to have been the real commencement of Charlie Brooke’s career. We mention it chiefly to show that our hero was gifted with some power of ready resource even in childhood. He was also gifted with a fearless and daring disposition, a quietly enthusiastic spirit, a modest mien, and a strong muscular body.

Of course these admirable qualities were not fully developed in childhood, but the seeds were there. In due time the plants came up and the flowers bloomed.

We would here caution the reader—especially the youthful reader—against supposing that from this point our hero was engaged in rescue-work, and continued at it ever after without intermission. Like Samson, with his great strength, he exercised his powers only now and then—more than half unconscious of what was in him—and on many occasions without any definite purpose in view.

His first act of heroism was exercised, when he had reached the age of nine, in behalf of a kitten.

It was on a magnificent summer day, soon after he had been sent to the village school, that the incident occurred. Charlie was walking at the time with one of his school-fellows named Shank Leather.

Shank was a little older than himself, and a good enough fellow in his way, but much given to boasting, and possessed of very few of the fine qualities that characterised our hero. The two were out for a holiday-ramble, a long way from home, and had reached a river on the banks of which they sat down to enjoy their mid-day meal. The meal was simple, and carried in their pockets. It consisted of two inch-and-a-half-thick slices of bread, with two lumps of cheese to match.

“I wish this river was nearer home,” said Shank Leather, as they sat down under a spreading oak to dine.

“Why?” asked his companion, with a felicitous brevity and straightforwardness which occasionally marked his conversation.

“Because then I would have a swim in it everyday.”

“Can you swim?” asked Charlie, a slight elevation of the eyebrows indicating surprise not unmingled with admiration—for our hero was a hero-worshipper. He could not well have been a hero otherwise!

“Of course I can swim,” returned Shank; “that is to say, a little; but I feel sure that I’ll be a splendid swimmer some day.”

His companion’s look of admiration increased.

“What’ll you take to drink?” asked Shank, drawing a large flask from the pocket in which he had concealed it up to that moment with the express purpose of giving his companion a pleasant surprise.

It may be well to add that the variety of dunks implied in his question was imaginary. Shank had only one flask, but in the exuberance of convivial generosity he quoted his own father—who was addicted to “the bottle.”

“What is it?” asked Brooke, in curious expectancy.

“Taste and see,” said his friend, uncorking the flask.

Charlie tasted, but did not “see,” apparently, for he looked solemn, and tasted again.

“It’s liquorice-water,” said Shank, with the look of one who expects approval. “I made it myself!”

Nauseous in the extreme, it might have served the purpose of an emetic had not the digestion of the boys been ostrich-like, but, on hearing how it came into existence, Charlie put it a third time to

his lips, took a good gulp, and then, nodding his head as he wiped his mouth with his cuff, declared that it was “wonderful.”

“Yes, isn’t it? There’s not many fellows could make stuff like that.”

“No, indeed,” assented the other heartily, as he attacked the bread and cheese. “Does your father know you made it?”

“Oh yes, and he tasted it too—he’d taste anything in the shape of drink—but he spat it out, and then washed his mouth with brandy an’ water. Mother took some too, and she said she had tasted worse drinks; and she only wished that father would take to it. That made father laugh heartily. Then I gave some to little May, and she said it was ‘So nice.’”

“Ay. That was like little May,” remarked Charlie, with a quiet laugh; “she’d say that a mess o’ tar an’ shoe-blackening was nice if *you* made it. But I say, Shank, let’s see you swim. I’d give anything if I could swim. Do, like a brick as you are. There’s a fine deep hole here under the bank.”

He pointed to a pool in the river where the gurgling eddies certainly indicated considerable depth of water, but his friend shook his head.

“No, Charlie,” he said, “you don’t understand the danger as I do. Don’t you see that the water runs into the hole at such a rate that there’s a tree-mendous eddy that would sweep any man off his legs—”

“But you’re goin’ to swim, you know,” interrupted his friend, “an’ have got to be off your legs anyhow!”

“That’s all *you* know,” returned the other. “If a man’s swept round by an eddy, don’t you know, he’ll be banged against things, and then the water rushes out of the hole with *such* a gush, an’ goes thunderin’ down below, over boulders and stones, and—an’—don’t you see?”

“That’s true, Shank; it does look dangerous, even for a man that can swim.”

He put such emphasis on the “man” that his comrade glanced sharply at him, but the genuine innocence of our hero’s face was too obvious to suggest irony. He simply saw that the use of the word *man* pleased his friend, therefore he used it.

Conversation was cut short at this point by the sudden appearance on the scene of two strangers—a kitten and a dog.

The assertion that “dogs delight to bark and bite” is, perhaps, too sweeping, but then it was made by a poet and poets have an acknowledged licence—though not necessarily a dog-licence. Certain it is, however, that this dog—a mongrel cur—did bark with savage delight, and display all its teeth, with an evident desire to bite, as it chased a delirious tortoise-shell kitten towards the river.

It was a round, soft, lively kitten, with the hair on its little body sticking straight out, its heart in its mouth, and horror in its lovely eyes. It made straight for the tree under which the dinner was going on. Both boys started up. Enemies in front and rear! Even a human general might have stood appalled. Two courses were still open—right and left. The kitten turned right and went wrong, for that was the river-side. No time for thought! Barking cur and yelling boys! It reached the edge of the pool, spread out all its legs with a caterwaul of despair, and went headlong into the water.

Shank Leather gazed—something like glee mingled with his look of consternation. Not so our hero. Pity was bursting his bosom. With one magnificent bound he went into the pool, caught the kitten in his right hand, and carried it straight to the bottom. Next moment he re-appeared on the surface, wildly beating the water with one hand and holding the kitten aloft in the other. Shank, to do him justice, plunged into the river up to his waist, but his courage carried him no further. There he stuck, vainly holding out a hand and shouting for help.

But no help was near, and it seemed as if the pair of strugglers were doomed to perish when a pitiful eddy swept them both out of the deep pool into the foaming rapid below. Shank followed them in howling despair, for here things looked ten times worse: his comrade being tossed from billow to breaker, was turned heels over head, bumped against boulders, stranded on shallows, overturned

and swept away again—but ever with the left arm beating wildly, and the right hand with the kitten, held high in air.

But the danger, except from being dashed against the boulders, was not really as great as it seemed, for every time that Brooke got a foothold for an instant, or was driven on a rock, or was surged, right-end-up, on a shoot of water, he managed to gasp a little air—including a deal of water. The kitten, of course, had the same chances, and, being passive, perhaps suffered less.

At the foot of the rapid they were whirled, as if contemptuously, into an eddy. Shank was there, as deep as he dared venture. He even pushed in up to the arm-pits, and, catching his comrade by the hair, dragged him to bank.

“O Charlie, I’ve saved ye!” he exclaimed, as his friend crawled out and sat down.

“Ay, an’ you’ve saved the kitten too!” replied his friend, examining the poor animal.

“It’s dead,” said Shank; “dead as mutton.”

“No, only stunned. No wonder, poor beast!”

With tender care the rescuer squeezed the water from the fur of the rescued. Then, pulling open his vest and shirt, he was about to place the kitten in his bosom to warm it.

“No use doin’ that,” said Leather. “You’re as wet an’ nigh as cold as itself.”

“That’s true. Sit down here,” returned Brooke, in a tone of command which surprised his comrade. “Open your shirt.”

Again Shank obeyed wonderingly. Next moment he gave a gasp as the cold, wet creature was thrust into his warm bosom.

“It makes me shiver all over,” he said.

“Never mind,” replied his friend coolly, as he got up and wrung the water out of his own garments.

“It’s beginning to move, Charlie,” said Shank, after a few minutes.

“Give it here, then.”

The creature was indeed showing feeble symptoms of revival, so Brooke—whose bosom was not only recovering its own heat, but was beginning to warm the wet garments—thrust it into his own breast, and the two friends set off homeward at a run.

At the nearest house they made inquiry as to the owner of the kitten, but failed to find one. Our hero therefore resolved to carry it home. Long before that haven was reached, however, his clothes were nearly dry, and the rescued one was purring sweetly, in childlike innocence—all the horrors, sufferings, and agonies of the past forgotten, apparently, in the enjoyment of the present.

Chapter Two. The Shipwreck

We have no intention of carrying our reader on step by step through all the adventures and deeds of Charlie Brooke. It is necessary to hasten over his boyhood, leaving untold the many battles fought, risks run, and dangers encountered.

He did not cut much of a figure at the village school—though he did his best, and was fairly successful—but in the playground he reigned supreme. At football, cricket, gymnastics, and, ultimately, at swimming, no one could come near him. This was partly owing to his great physical strength, for, as time passed by he shot upwards and outwards in a way that surprised his companions and amazed his mother, who was a distinctly little woman—a neat graceful little woman—with, like her stalwart son, a modest opinion of herself.

As a matter of course, Charlie's school-fellows almost worshipped him, and he was always so willing to help and lead them in all cases of danger or emergency, that "Charlie to the rescue!" became quite a familiar cry on the playground. Indeed it would have been equally appropriate in the school, for the lad never seemed to be so thoroughly happy as when he was assisting some boy less capable than himself to master his lessons.

About the time that Charlie left school, while yet a stripling, he had the shoulders of Samson, the chest of Hercules, and the limbs of Apollo. He was tall also—over six feet—but his unusual breadth deceived people as to this till they stood close to him. Fair hair, close and curly, with bright blue eyes and a permanent look of grave benignity, completes our description of him.

Rowing, shooting, fishing, boxing, and swimming seemed to come naturally to him, and all of them in a superlative degree. Swimming was, perhaps, his most loved amusement and in this art he soon far outstripped his friend Leather. Some men are endowed with exceptional capacities in regard to water. We have seen men go into the sea warm and come out warmer, even in cold weather. Experience teaches that the reverse is usually true of mankind in northern regions, yet we once saw a man enter the sea to all appearance a white human being, after remaining in it upwards of an hour, and swimming away from shore; like a vessel outward bound, he came back at last the colour of a boiled lobster!

Such exceptional qualities did Charlie Brooke possess. A South Sea Islander might have envied but could not have excelled him.

It was these qualities that decided the course of his career just after he left school.

"Charlie," said his mother, as they sat eating their mid-day meal alone one day—the mother being, as we have said, a widow, and Charlie an only child—"what do you think of doing, now that you have left school? for you know my income renders it impossible that I should send you to college."

"I don't know what to think, mother. Of course I intend to do something. If you had only influence with some one in power who could enable a fellow to get his foot on the first round of any sort of ladder, something might be done, for you know I'm not exactly useless, though I can't boast of brilliant talents, but—"

"Your talents are brilliant enough, Charlie," said his mother, interrupting; "besides, you have been sent into this world for a purpose, and you may be sure that you will discover what that purpose is, and receive help to carry it out if you only ask God to guide you. Not otherwise," she added, after a pause.

"Do you *really* believe, mother, that *every* one who is born into the world is sent for a purpose, and with a specific work to do?"

"I do indeed, Charlie."

“What! all the cripples, invalids, imbeciles, even the very infants who are born to wail out their sad lives in a few weeks, or even days?”

“Yes—all of them, without exception. To suppose the opposite, and imagine that a wise, loving, and almighty Being would create anything for *no* purpose seems to me the very essence of absurdity. Our only difficulty is that we do not always see the purpose. All things are ours, but we must ask if we would have them.”

“But I *have* asked, mother,” said the youth, with an earnest flush on his brow. “You know I have done so often, yet a way has not been opened up. I believe in *your* faith, mother, but I don’t quite believe in my own. There surely must be something wrong—a screw loose somewhere.”

He laid down his knife and fork, and looked out at the window with a wistful, perplexed expression.

“How I wish,” he continued, “that the lines had been laid down for the human race more distinctly, so that we could not err!”

“And yet,” responded his mother, with a peculiar look, “such lines as *are* obviously laid down we don’t always follow. For instance, it is written, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you,’ and we stop there, but the sentence does not stop: ‘Seek, and ye shall find’ implies care and trouble; ‘Knock, and it shall be opened unto you’ hints at perseverance, does it not?”

“There’s something in that, mother,” said Charlie, casting another wistful glance out of the window. “Come, I will go out and ‘seek’! I see Shank Leather waiting for me. We agreed to go to the shore together, for we both like to watch the waves roaring in on a breezy day like this.”

The youth rose and began to encase his bulky frame in a great pilot-cloth coat, each button of which might have done duty as an afternoon tea-saucer.

“I wish you would choose any companion to walk with but young Leather,” said the widow, with a sigh. “He’s far too like his father to do you any good.”

“Mother, would you have me give up an old playmate and school-fellow because he is not perfect?” asked the youth in grave tones as he tied on a sou’-wester.

“Well, no—not exactly, but—”

Not having a good reason ready, the worthy woman only smiled a remonstrance. The stalwart son stooped, kissed her and was soon outside, battling with the storm—for what he styled a breezy day was in reality a wild and stormy one.

Long before the period we have now reached Mrs Brooke had changed her residence to the sea-coast in the small town of Sealford. Her cottage stood in the centre of the village, about half-a-mile from the shore, and close to that of her bosom friend, Mrs Leather, who had migrated along with her, partly to be near her and partly for the sake of her son Shank, who was anxious to retain the companionship of his friend Brooke. Partly, also, to get her tippling husband away from old comrades and scenes, in the faint hope that she might rescue him from the great curse of his life.

When Charlie went out, as we have said, he found that Shank had brought his sister May with him. This troubled our hero a good deal, for he had purposed having a confidential talk with his old comrade upon future plans and prospects, to the accompaniment of the roaring sea, and a third party was destructive of such intention. Besides, poor May, although exceedingly unselfish and sweet and good, was at that transition period of life when girlhood is least attractive—at least to young men: when bones are obtrusive, and angles too conspicuous, and the form generally is too suggestive of flatness and longitude; while shyness marks the manners, and inexperience dwarfs the mind. We would not, however, suggest for a moment that May was ugly. By no means, but she had indeed reached what may be styled a plain period of life—a period in which some girls become silently sheepish, and others tomboyish; May was among the former, and therefore a drag upon conversation. But, after all, it mattered little, for the rapidly increasing gale rendered speech nearly impossible.

“It’s too wild a day for you, May,” said Brooke, as he shook hands with her; “I wonder you care to be out.”

“She *doesn't* care to be out, but I wanted her to come, and she's a good obliging girl, so she came,” said Shank, drawing her arm through his as they pressed forward against the blast in the direction of the shore.

Shank Leather had become a sturdy young fellow by that time, but was much shorter than his friend. There was about him, however, an unmistakable look of dissipation—or, rather, the beginning of it—which accounted for Mrs Brooke's objection to him as a companion for her son.

We have said that the cottage lay about half-a-mile from the shore, which could be reached by a winding lane between high banks. These effectually shut out the view of the sea until one was close to it, though, at certain times, the roar of the waves could be heard even in Sealford itself.

Such a time was the present, for the gale had lashed the sea into wildest fury, and not only did the three friends hear it, as, with bent heads, they forced their way against the wind, but they felt the foam of ocean on their faces as it was carried inland sometimes in lumps and flakes. At last they came to the end of the lane, and the sea, lashed to its wildest condition, lay before them like a sheet of tortured foam.

“Grand! isn't it?” said Brooke, stopping and drawing himself up for a moment, as if with a desire to combat the opposing elements.

If May Leather could not speak, she could at all events gaze, for she had superb brown eyes, and they glittered, just then, like glowing coals, while a wealth of rippling brown hair was blown from its fastenings, and flew straight out behind her.

“Look! look there!” shouted her brother with a wild expression, as he pointed to a part of the rocky shore where a vessel was dimly seen through the drift.

“She's trying to weather the point,” exclaimed Brooke, clearing the moisture from his eyes, and endeavouring to look steadily.

“She'll never weather it. See! the fishermen are following her along-shore,” cried young Leather, dropping his sister's arm, and bounding away.

“Oh! don't leave me behind, Shank,” pleaded May.

Shank was beyond recall, but our hero, who had also sprung forward, heard the pleading voice and turned back.

“Here, hook on to me,” he cried quickly, for he was in no humour to delay.

The girl grasped his arm at once, and, to say truth, she was not much of a hindrance, for, although somewhat inelegant, as we have said, she was lithe as a lizard and fleet as a young colt.

A few minutes brought them to the level shore where Brooke left May to shelter herself with some fisher-women behind a low wall, while he ran along to a spot where a crowd of fishermen and old salts, enveloped in oil-skins, were discussing the situation as they leaned against the shrieking wind.

“Will she weather it, Grinder, think you?” he asked of an elderly man, whose rugged features resembled mahogany, the result of having bid defiance to wind and weather for nigh half a century.

“She may, Mr Brooke, an' she mayn't,” answered the matter-of-fact man of the sea, in the gruff monotone with which he would have summoned all hands to close reef in a hurricane. “If her tackle holds she'll do it. If it don't she won't.”

“We've sent round for the rocket anyhow,” said a smart young fisherman, who seemed to rejoice in opposing his broad chest to the blast, and in listening to the thunder of the waves as they rolled into the exposed bay in great battalions, chasing each other in wild tumultuous fury, as if each were bent on being first in the mad assault upon the shore.

“Has the lifeboat coxswain been called?” asked Charlie, after a few minutes' silence, for the voice of contending elements was too great to render converse easy or agreeable.

“Yes, sir,” answered the man nearest to him, “but she's bin called to a wreck in Mussel Bay, an' that brig will be all right or in Davy Jones's locker long afore th' lifeboat 'ud fetch round here.”

Silence again fell on the group as they gazed out to sea, pushing eagerly down the beach until they were ankle-deep in the foam of each expended wave; for the brig was by that time close on the point of rocks, staggering under more sail than she could carry with safety.

“She’ll do it!” exclaimed the smart young fisherman, ready to cheer with enthusiastic hope.

“Done for! Lost!” cried one, while something like a groan burst from the others as they saw the brig’s topmasts go over the side, and one of her sails blown to ribbons. She fell away towards the rocks at once.

Like great black teeth these rocks seemed to leap in the midst of the foam, as if longing to grasp the ill-fated vessel, which had, indeed, all but weathered the dangerous point, and all might have been well if her gear had only held; but now, as if paralysed, she drifted into the bay where certain destruction awaited her.

Just at that moment a great cheer arose, for the rocket-cart, drawn by the men of the Coast-Guard, was seen rattling over the downs towards them.

Anxiety for the fate of the doomed brig was now changed into eager hope for the rescue of her crew. The fishermen crowded round the Coast-Guard men as they ran the cart close down to the water’s edge, and some of them—specially the smart young fellow already mentioned—made eager offer of their services. Charlie Brooke stood aloof, looking on with profound interest, for it was the first time he had ever seen the Manby rocket apparatus brought into action. He made no hasty offer to assist, for he was a cool youth—even while burning with impatient enthusiasm—and saw at a glance that the men of the Coast-Guard were well able to manage their own affairs and required no aid from him.

As the brig was coming straight in they could easily calculate where she would strike, so that the rocket men could set up their triangle and arrange their tackle without delay. This was fortunate, for the wreck was carried shoreward with great rapidity. She struck at last when within a short distance of the beach, and the faces of those on board could be distinctly seen, and their cries heard, as both masts snapped off and were swept over the side, where they tore at the shrouds like wild creatures, or charged the hulk like battering-rams. Instantly the billows that had borne the vessel on their crests burst upon her sides, and spurted high in air over her, falling back on her deck, and sweeping off everything that was moveable. It could be seen that only three or four men were on deck, and these kept well under the lee of the bulwarks near the stern where they were strongest.

“No passengers, I think,” said one of the fishermen; “no women, anyhow.”

“Not likely they’d be ’lowed on deck even if there was,” growled Grinder, in his monotone.

“Now, then, out o’ the way,” cried the leader of the Coast-Guard men, as he laid a rocket in its place. “Line all clear, Fred?”

“All clear.”

Next moment there was a burst of flame, a crash, and a vicious whizz as the powerful projectile leaped from its stand and sped out to sea, in grand defiance of the opposing gale, with its light line behind it.

A cheer marked its flight, but a groan told of its descent into the boiling sea, considerably to the left of the wreck.

“*What* a pity!” cried Shank Leather, who had come close to his friend when the rocket-cart arrived.

“No matter,” said Brooke, whose compressed lips and flashing eyes told of deep but suppressed feelings. “There are more rockets.”

He was right. While he was speaking, another rocket was placed and fired. It was well directed, but fell short. Another, and yet another, rose and fell, but failed to reach its mark, and the remainder of the rockets refused to go off from some unknown cause—either because they had been too long in stock or had become damp.

Meantime the brig was tossed farther and farther in, until she stuck quite fast. Then it became evident that she must soon break up, and her crew perish. Hasty plans and eager advice were proposed and given. Then the smart young fisherman suddenly sprang forward, and threw off his oil-coat and sou'-wester.

“Here! hold on!” he cried, catching up the end of the rocket line, and fastening it round his waist, while he kicked off his heavy boots.

“You can’t do it, Bill,” cried some.

“Too far to swim,” cried others.

“The seas ’ll knock the life out o’ ye,” said Grinder, “afore you’re clear o’ the sand.”

Despite these warnings the brave young fellow dashed into the foam, and plunged straight into the first mighty breaker that towered over his head. But he was too much excited to act effectively. He failed to time his plunge well. The wave fell upon him with a roar and crushed him down. In a few seconds he was dragged ashore almost insensible.

Example, whether good or bad, is infectious. Another strapping young fellow, stirred to emulation, ran forward, and, seizing the rope, tied it round his own waist, while they helped poor Bill up the beach and seated him on a sand-bank.

The second youth was more powerful than the first—and cooler. He made a better attempt, but only got past the first wave, when his comrades, seeing that he was exhausted, drew him back. Then a third—a broad burly youth—came forward.

At this point the soul of Shank Leather took fire, for he was by no means destitute of generous impulses, and he tried to get hold of the rope.

“Out o’ the way,” cried the burly youth, giving Leather a rough push that almost sent him on his back; “we don’t want no land-lubbers for this kind o’ work.”

Up to this point Charlie Brooke, although burning with eager desire to take some active part in the rescue, had restrained himself and held back, believing, with characteristic modesty, that the fishermen knew far better than he did how to face the sea and use their appliances; but when he saw his friend stagger backward, he sprang to the front, caught hold of the line, and, seizing the burly fisherman by the arm, exclaimed, “You’ll let *this* land-lubber try it, anyhow,” and sent him spinning away like a capsized nine-pin.

There was a short laugh, as well as a cheer at this; but next moment all were gazing at the sea in breathless anxiety, for Brooke had rushed deep into the surf. He paused one moment, as the great wave curled over him, then went through it head-first with such force that he shot waist-high out of the sea on the other side. His exceptional swimming-powers now served him well, for his otter-like rapidity of action enabled him to avoid the crushing billows either by diving through them at the right moment, or holding back until they fell, and left him only the mad swirling foam to contend with. This last was bad enough, but here his great muscular strength and his inexhaustible caloric, with his cork-like power of flotation, enabled him to hold his own without exhaustion until another opportunity of piercing an unbroken wave offered. Thus he gradually forced his way through and beyond the worst breakers, which are always those nearest shore. Had any one been close to him, and able calmly to watch his movements, it would have been seen that, great as were the youth’s powers, he did not waste them in useless battling with a force against which no man could effectively contend; that, with a cool head, he gave way to every irresistible force, swimming for a moment, as it were, with the current—or, rather, floating easily in the whirlpools—so as to conserve his strength; that, ever and anon, he struck out with all his might, rushing through foam and wave like a fish, and that, in the midst of it all, he saw and seized the brief moments in which he could take a gasping inhalation.

Those who watched him with breathless anxiety on shore saw little of all this as they paid out the line or perched themselves on tiptoe on the few boulders that here and there strewed the sand.

“Haul him back!” shouted the man who was farthest out on the line. “He’s used up!”

“No, he’s not, I know him well!” roared Shank Leather. “Pay out, men—pay out line!”

“Ay, ease away,” said Grinder, in a thunderous growl. “He’s a rigler walrus, he is. Niver see’d sich a feller since I left the southern seas. Ease away, boys.”

A cheer followed his remark, for at that moment it was seen that our hero had reached the tail of the eddy which was caused by the hull of the wreck, and that one of her crew had darted from the cover of the vessel’s bulwarks and taken shelter under the stump of the mainmast. His object was seen in a moment, for he unhooked a coil of rope from the belaying-pins, and stood ready to heave it to the approaching swimmer. In making even this preparation the man ran very great risk, for the stump was but a partial shelter—each wave that burst over the side sweeping wildly round it and leaping on the man higher than his waist, so that it was very difficult for him to avoid being torn from his position.

Charlie’s progress was now comparatively easy. A few vigorous strokes brought him under the lea of the wreck, which, however, was by no means a quiet spot, for each divided wave, rushing round bow and stern, met there in a tumult of foam that almost choked the swimmer, while each billow that burst over the wreck poured a small Niagara on his head.

How to get on board in such circumstances was a subject that had troubled Charlie’s mind as he drew near, but the action of the sailor unhooking the coil of rope at once relieved him. The moment he came within reach, the sailor, watching his opportunity between waves, threw out the coil. It was aimed by an accustomed hand and fell on the rescuer’s head. Another minute and young Brooke stood on the deck. Without waiting an instant he leaped under the shelter of the stump of the mainmast beside the seaman. He was only just in time, for a wave burst in thunder on the weather side of the quivering brig, and, pouring over the bulwarks, almost dragged him from the belaying-pins to which he clung.

The instant the strain was off, he passed a rope round his waist and gave the end of it to the sailor.

“Here, make it fast,” he said, beginning to haul with all his might on the line which he had brought from shore. “You’re the skipper—eh?”

“Yes. Don’t waste your breath in speech. I know what to do. All’s ready.”

These few words were an unspeakable relief to our hero, who was well aware that the working of the rocket apparatus required a slight amount of knowledge, and who felt from his manner and tone that the skipper was a thorough man. He glanced upwards as he hauled in the line, assisted by his companion, and saw that a stout rope with two loops on it had been fixed to the stump of the mast. Just as he noted this with satisfaction a large block with a thin line rove through it emerged from the boiling sea. It had been attached by the men on shore to the rocket line which Charlie had been hauling out with so much energy. Its name was indicated by the skipper.

“Here comes the *whip*,” he cried, catching hold of the block when it reached him. “Hold me up, lad, while I make it fast to them loops.”

While Charlie obeyed he saw that by fixing the tail-lines of the block quickly to the loops prepared for them, instead of winding them round the mast,—a difficult process in such a sea—much time was saved.

“There, *our* part o’ the job is done now,” said the skipper, pulling off his sou’-wester as he spoke and holding it up as a signal to the men on shore.

Meanwhile those to whom he signalled had been watching every movement with intense eagerness, and with the expressions of men whose gaze has to penetrate with difficulty through a haze of blinding spray.

“They’ve got the block now,” cried one man.

“Does that young feller know about fixin’ of it?” asked another.

“Clap a stopper on your mugs; they’re a-fixin’ of it now,” said old Grinder. “There’s the signal! Haul away, lads!”

We must explain here that the “whip” above mentioned was a double or endless line, passing through the block which had been hauled out to the wreck by our hero.

By means of this whip one end of a stout cable was sent off to the wreck, and on this cable a sling-lifebuoy was hung to a pulley and also run out to the wreck. The working of the apparatus, though simple enough to seamen, would entail a complicated, perhaps incomprehensible, description to landsmen: we therefore pass it by with the remark that, connection with the shore having been established, and the sling-lifebuoy—or life-saving machine—run out, the crew received it with what was meant for a hearty cheer, but which exhaustion modified to a feeble shout.

“Now, lads,” cried the skipper to his men, “look sharp! Let out the passengers.”

“Passengers?” exclaimed Charlie Brooke in surprise.

“Ay—my wife an’ little gurl, two women and an old gentleman. You don’t suppose I’d keep ’em on deck to be washed overboard?”

As he spoke two of the men opened the doors of the companion-hatch, and caught hold of a little girl of about five years of age, who was handed up by a woman.

“Stay! keep her under cover till I get hold of her,” cried the skipper.

As he was passing from the mast to the companion a heavy sea burst over the bulwarks, and swept him into the scuppers. The same wave wrenched the child from the grasp of the man who held it and carried it right overboard. Like an eel, rather than a man, Charlie cleft the foam close behind her, caught her by the skirt and bore her to the surface, when a few strokes of his free arm brought him close under the lee of the wreck just in time to prevent the agonised father from leaping after his child. There was terrible suspense for a few minutes. At one moment our hero, with his burden held high aloft, was far down in the hollow of the watery turmoil, with the black hull like a great wall rising above him, while the skipper in the main-chains, pale as death but sternly silent held on with his left hand and reached down with his right—every finger rigid and ready! Next moment a water-spout, so to speak, bore the rescuer upward on its crest, but not near enough—they went downward again. Once more the leaping water surged upwards; the skipper’s strong hand closed like the grip of death on the dress, and the child was safe while its rescuer sank away from it.

“Help him!” shouted the skipper, as he staggered to the shelter of the companion.

But Charlie required no help. A loose rope hanging over the side caught his eye: he seized it and was on deck again in a few seconds. A minute later and he was down in the cabin.

There, terror-stricken, sat the skipper’s wife, never venturing to move, because she had been told to remain there till called. Happily she knew nothing of the incident just described.

Beside her sat the other women, and, near to them, a stern old gentleman, who, with compressed lips, quietly awaited orders.

“Come, quick!” said Charlie, grasping by the arm one of the women.

It was the skipper’s wife. She jumped up right willingly and went on deck. There she found her child already in the life-buoy, and was instantly lifted in beside it by her husband, who looked hastily round.

“Come here, Dick,” he said to a little cabin-boy who clung to a stanchion near by. “Get in.”

The boy looked surprised, and drew back.

“Get in, I say,” repeated the skipper sternly.

“There’s more women, sir,” said the boy, still holding back.

“True—brave lad! but you’re wanted to keep these from getting washed out. I am too heavy, you know.”

The boy hesitated no longer. He squeezed himself into the machine beside the woman and child.

Then up at arm’s-length went the skipper’s sou’-wester as a signal that all was ready, and the fishermen began to haul the life-buoy to the shore.

It was an awful trip! Part of the distance, indeed, the trio were borne along well out of the sea, though the waves leaped hungrily up and sent spray over them, but as they drew near the shore they were dipped again and again into the foam, so that the little cabin boy needed all his energy and knowledge, as well as his bravery and strength, to prevent his charge being washed out. Amid

ringing cheers from the fishermen—and a treble echo from the women behind the wall—they were at last safely landed.

“My lass, that friend o’ your’n be a braave cheeld,” said an old woman to May Leather, who crouched beside her.

“Ay, *that* he is!” exclaimed May, with a gush of enthusiasm in tone and eyes that made them all turn to look at her.

“Your brother?” asked a handsome, strapping young woman.

“No—I wish he was!”

“Hm! ha!” exclaimed the strapping young woman—whereat there was exchanged a significant laugh; but May took no notice of it, being too deeply engrossed with the proceedings on shore and sea.

Again the fishermen ran out the life-buoy and soon hauled it back with another woman; then a third. After that came the old gentleman, quite self-possessed and calm, though very pale and dishevelled; and, following him, the crew, one by one, were rescued. Then came the hero of the hour, and last of all, as in duty bound, the skipper—not much too soon, for he had barely reached the land when the brig was overwhelmed and engulfed in the raging sea.

Chapter Three.

“It’s an Ill Wind that Blows Naebody Guid.”

That many if not most names have originated in the character or condition of individuals seems obvious, else why is it that so many people take after their names? We have no desire to argue the question, but hasten on to remark that old Jacob Crossley was said to be—observe, we do not say that he was—a notable illustration of what we refer to.

Jacob was “as cross as two sticks,” if we are to believe Mrs Bland, his housekeeper—and Mrs Bland was worthy of belief, for she was an honest widow who held prevarication to be equivalent to lying, and who, besides having been in the old bachelor’s service for many years, had on one occasion been plucked by him from under the feet of a pair of horses when attempting the more dangerous than nor’-west passage of a London crossing. Gratitude, therefore, rendered it probable that Mrs Bland spake truly when she said that her master was as cross as two sticks. Of course we admit that her judgment may have been faulty.

Strange to say Mr Crossley had no reason—at least no very apparent reason—for being cross, unless, indeed, the mere fact of his being an old bachelor was a sufficient reason. Perhaps it was! But in regard to everything else he had, as the saying goes, nothing to complain of. He was a prosperous East India merchant—not a miser, though a cross old bachelor, and not a millionaire, though comfortably rich. His business was prosperous, his friends were numerous, his digestion was good, his nervous system was apparently all that could be desired, and he slept well!

Standing one morning in the familiar British position before his dining-room fire in London, he frowningly contemplated his housekeeper as that indefatigable woman removed the breakfast equipage.

“Has the young man called this morning?”

“Not yet, sir.”

“Well, when he comes tell him I had business in the city and could wait no—”

A ring and a sharp knock interrupted him. A few moments later Charlie Brooke was ushered into the room. It was a smallish room, for Mr Crossley, although well off, did not see the propriety of wasting money on unnecessary space or rent, and the doorway was so low that Charlie’s hair brushed against the top as he entered.

“I called, Mr Crossley, in accordance with the wish expressed in your letter. Although, being a stranger, I do not—”

The young man stopped at this point and looked steadily at the old gentleman with a peculiarly questioning expression.

“You recognise me, I see,” said the old man, with a very slight smile.

“Well—I may be mistaken, but you do bear some resemblance to—”

“Just so, I’m the man that you hauled so violently out of the cabin of the wreck last week, and shoved so unceremoniously into the life-buoy, and I have sent for you, first, to thank you for saving my life, because they tell me that, but for your swimming off with a rope, we should certainly have all been lost; and, secondly, to offer you aid in any course of life you may wish to adopt, for I have been informed that you are not at present engaged in any special employment.”

“You are very kind, sir, very kind,” returned Charlie, somewhat embarrassed. “I can scarcely claim, however, to have saved your life, though I thankfully admit having had the opportunity to lend a hand. The rocket-men, in reality, did the work, for without their splendid working of the apparatus my swimming off would have been useless.”

Mr Crossley frowned while the youth was speaking, and regarded him with some suspicion.

“You admit, I suppose,” he rejoined sternly, “that if you had *not* swum off, the rocket apparatus would have been equally useless.”

“By no means,” returned Charlie, with that benignant smile that always accompanied his opposition in argument. “I do not admit that, because, if I had not done it, assuredly some one else would. In fact a friend of mine was on the point of making the attempt when I pulled him back and prevented him.”

“And why did you prevent him?”

“Because he was not so well able to do it as I.”

“Oh! I see. In other words, you have a pretty high opinion of your own powers.”

“Possibly I have,” returned the youth, somewhat sharply. “I lay claim to no exemption from the universal law of vanity which seems to affect the entire human race—especially the cynical part of it. At the same time, knowing from long experience that I am physically stronger, can swim better, and have greater power of endurance, though not greater courage, than my friend, it would be mere pretence were I to assume that in such matters I was his inferior. You asked me why I prevented him: I gave you the reason exactly and straightforwardly. I now repeat it.”

“Don’t be so ready to fire up, young man,” said Crossley, with a deprecating smile. “I had no intention of hurting your feelings.”

“You have not hurt them, sir,” returned Charlie, with almost provoking urbanity of manner and sweetness of voice, “you have only misunderstood me.”

“Well, well, let it pass. Tell me, now, can I do anything for you?”

“Nothing, thank you.”

“Eh?” exclaimed the old gentleman in surprise.

“Nothing, thank you,” repeated his visitor. “I did not save you for the purpose of being rewarded, and I refuse to accept reward for saving you.”

For a second or two Mr Crossley regarded his visitor in silence, with a conflicting mixture of frown and smile—a sort of acidulated-drop expression on his rugged face. Then he asked—

“What is the name of this friend whom you prevented from swimming off to us?”

“Shank Leather.”

“Is he a very great friend of yours?”

“Very. We have been playmates from childhood, and school-fellows till now.”

“What is he?—his profession, I mean?”

“Nothing at present. That is to say, he has, like myself, been trained to no special profession, and the failure of the firm in the counting-house of which we have both served for some months has cast us adrift at the same time.”

“Would it give you much satisfaction if I were to find good employment for your friend?”

“Indeed it would—the highest possible satisfaction,” exclaimed Charlie, with the first symptom of enthusiasm in his tone and look.

“What can your friend Shank Leather do?” asked the old man brusquely.

“Oh! many things. He’s capital at figures, thoroughly understands book-keeping, and—and is a hard-working fellow, whatever he puts his hand to.”

“Is he steady?”

Charlie was silent for a few moments.

“Well, one cannot be sure,” he answered, with some hesitation, “what meaning you attach to the word ‘steady.’ I—”

“Yes, yes, I see,” interrupted Crossley, consulting his watch. “No time to discuss meanings of words just now. Will you tell your friend to call on me here the day after to-morrow at six o’clock? You live in Sealford, I have been told; does he live near you?”

“Yes, within a few minutes’ walk.”

“Well, tell him to be punctual. Punctuality is the soul of business. Hope I won’t find your friend as independent as you seem to be! You are quite sure, are you, that I can do nothing for you? I have both money and influence.”

The more determined that our hero became to decline all offers of assistance from the man who had misconstrued his motives, the more of urbanity marked his manner, and it was with a smile of ineffable good-nature on his masculine features that he repeated, “Nothing, thank you—quite sure. You will have done me the greatest possible service when you help my friend. Yet—stay. You mentioned money. There is an institution in which I am much interested, and which you might appropriately remember just now.”

“What is that?”

“The Lifeboat Institution.”

“But it was not the Lifeboat Institution that saved *me*. It was the Rocket apparatus.”

“True, but it *might* have been a lifeboat that saved you. The rockets are in charge of the Coast-Guard and need no assistance, whereas the Lifeboat Service depends on voluntary contributions, and the fact that it did not happen to save Mr Crossley from a grave in the sea does not affect its claim to the nation’s gratitude for the hundreds of lives saved by its boats every year.”

“Admitted, my young friend, your reasoning is just,” said the old gentleman, sitting down at a writing table and taking a cheque-book from a drawer; “what shall I put down?”

“You know your circumstances best,” said Charlie, somewhat amused by the question.

“Most people in ordinary circumstances,” returned the old man slowly as he wrote, “contribute a guinea to such charities.”

“Many people,” remarked Charlie, with a feeling of pity rather than contempt, “contribute five, or even fifteen.”

“Ah, indeed—yes, well, Mr Brooke, will you condescend to be the bearer of my contribution? Fourteen Saint John Street, Adelphi, is not far from this, and it will save a penny of postage, you know!”

Mr Crossley rose and handed the cheque to his visitor, who felt half disposed—on the strength of the postage remark—to refuse it and speak his mind somewhat freely on the subject, but, his eye happening to fall on the cheque at the moment, he paused.

“You have made a mistake, I think,” he said. “This is for five *hundred* pounds.”

“I make no mistakes, Mr Brooke,” returned the old man sternly. “You said something about five or fifteen. I could not well manage fifteen *hundred* just now, for it is bad times in the city at present. Indeed, according to some people, it is always bad times there, and, to say truth, some people are not far wrong—at least as regards their own experiences. Now, I must be off to business. Good-bye. Don’t forget to impress on your friend the importance of punctuality.”

Jacob Crossley held out his hand with an expression of affability which was for him quite marvellous.

“You’re a much better man than I thought!” exclaimed Charlie, grasping the proffered hand with a fervour that caused the other to wince.

“Young sir,” returned Crossley, regarding the fingers of his right hand somewhat pitifully, “people whose physique is moulded on the pattern of Samson ought to bear in mind that rheumatism is not altogether unknown to elderly men. Your opinion of me was probably erroneous to begin with, and it is certainly false to end with. Let me advise you to remember that the gift of money does not necessarily prove anything except that a man has money to give—nay, it does not always prove even that, for many people are notoriously prone to give away money that belongs to somebody else. Five hundred pounds is to some men not of much more importance than five pence is to others. Everything is relative. Good-bye.”

While he was speaking Mr Crossley rang the bell and politely opened the dining-room door, so that our hero found himself in the street before he had quite recovered from his astonishment.

“Please, sir,” said Mrs Bland to her master after Charlie was gone, “Cap’en Stride is awaitin’ in the library.”

“Send him here,” said Crossley, once more consulting his watch.

“Well, Captain Stride, I’ve had a talk with him,” he said, as an exceedingly broad, heavy, short-legged man entered, with a bald head and a general air of salt water, tar, and whiskers about him. “Sit down. Have you made up your mind to take command of the *Walrus*?”

“Well, Mr Crossley, since you’re so *very* good,” said the sea-captain with a modest look, “I had feared that the loss o’—”

“Never mind the loss of the brig, Captain. It was no fault of yours that she came to grief. Other ship-owners may do as they please. I shall take the liberty of doing as *I* please. So, if you are ready, the ship is ready. I have seen Captain Stuart, and I find that he is down with typhoid fever, poor fellow, and won’t be fit for duty again for many weeks. The *Walrus* must sail not later than a week or ten days hence. She can’t sail without a captain, and I know of no better man than yourself; so, if you agree to take command, there she is, if not I’ll find another man.”

“I’m agreeable, sir,” said Captain Stride, with a gratified, meek look on his large bronzed face—a look so very different from the leonine glare with which he was wont to regard tempestuous weather or turbulent men. “Of course it’ll come rather sudden on the missus, but w’en it blows hard what’s a man got to do but make all snug and stand by?”

“Quite true, Stride, I have no doubt that you are nautically as well as morally correct, so I leave it to you to bring round the mistress, and consider that matter as settled. By the way, I hope that she and your little girl have not suffered from the wetting and rough handling experienced when being rescued.”

“Not in the least, sir, thankee. In fact I incline to the belief that they are rather more frisky than usual in consekince. Leastwise *little* Maggie is.”

“Glad to hear it. Now, about that young fellow.”

“By which I s’pose you mean Mr Brooke, sir?”

“The same. He has just left me, and upon my word, he’s about the coolest young fellow I ever met with.”

“That’s just what I said to the missus, sir, the very night arter we was rescued. ‘The way that young feller come off, Maggie,’ says I, ‘is most extraor’nar’. No fish that—”

“Yes, yes, Stride, I know, but that’s not exactly what I mean: it’s his being so amazingly independent that—”

“Zactly what I said, sir. ‘Maggie,’ says I, ‘that young feller seemed to be quite independent of fin or tail, for he came right off in the teeth o’ wind and tide—”

“That’s not what I mean either, Captain,” interrupted the old gentleman, with slight impatience. “It’s his independent spirit I refer to.”

“Oh! I ax your pardon, sir.”

“Well, now, listen, and don’t interrupt me. But first let me ask, does he know that I am the owner of the brig that was lost?”

“Yes; he knows that.”

“Does he know that I also own the *Walrus*.”

“No, I’m pretty sure he don’t. Leastwise I didn’t tell him, an’ there’s nobody else down there as knows anything about you.”

“So far, good. Now, Stride, I want you to help me. The young goose is so proud, or I know not what, that he won’t accept any favours or rewards from me, and I find that he is out of work just now, so I’m determined to give him something to do in spite of himself. The present supercargo of the *Walrus* is a young man who will be pleased to fall in with anything I propose to him. I mean, therefore, to put him in another ship and appoint young Brooke to the *Walrus*. Fortunately the firm of Withers and Company does not reveal my name—I having been Company originally, though I’m

the firm now, so that he won't suspect anything, and what I want is, that you should do the engaging of him—being authorised by Withers and Company—you understand?"

"I follow you, sir. But what if he objects?"

"He won't object. I have privately inquired about him. He is anxious to get employment, and has strong leanings to an adventurous life on the sea. There's no accounting for taste, Captain!"

"Right you are, sir," replied the Captain, with an approving nod. "That's what I said only this mornin' to my missus. 'Maggie,' says I, 'salt water hasn't a good taste, as even the stoopidest of mortals knows, but w'en a man has had to lick it off his lips at sea for the better part of half a century, it's astonishin' how he not only gits used to it, but even comes to like the taste of it.' 'Pooh!' says she, 'don't tell me you likes it, for you don't! It's all a d'lusion an' a snare. I hates both the taste an' the smell of it.' 'Maggie,' says I, quite solemn-like, 'that may be so, but you're not me.' 'No, thank goodness!' says she—which you mustn't suppose, sir, meant as she didn't like *me*, for she's a true-hearted affectionate creetur—though I say it as shouldn't—but she meant that she'd have had to go to sea reg'lar if she had been me, an' that would have done for her in about six weeks, more or less, for the first time she ever went she was all but turned inside—"

"If you're going citywards," interrupted Mr Crossley, again pulling out his watch, "we may as well finish our talk in the street."

As Captain Stride was "quite agreeable" to this proposal, the two left the house together, and, hailing a hansom, drove off in the direction of the City.

Chapter Four. Drifting on the Rocks

On the sea-shore, not far from the spot where the brig had been wrecked, Charlie Brooke and Shank Leather walked up and down engaged in earnest conversation soon after the interviews just described.

Very different was the day from that on which the wreck had taken place. It seemed almost beyond possibility that the serene sky above, and the calm, glinting ocean which rippled so softly at their feet, could be connected with the same world in which inky clouds and snowy foam and roaring billows had but a short time before held high revelry.

“Well, Charlie,” said his friend, after a pause, “it was very good of you, old boy, and I hope that I’ll do credit to your recommendation. The old man seems a decent sort of chap, though somewhat cross-grained.”

“He is kind-hearted, Shank; I feel quite sure of that, and hope sincerely that you will get on well with him.”

“With him!” repeated Leather; “you don’t seem to understand that the situation he is to get for me is *not* in connection with his own business, whatever that may be. It is in some other City firm, the name of which he has not yet mentioned. I can’t myself understand why he is so close!”

“Perhaps because he has been born with a secretive nature,” suggested Charlie.

“May be so. However, that’s no business of mine, and it doesn’t do to be too inquisitive when a man is offering you a situation of two hundred a year. It would be like looking a gift-horse in the mouth. All I care about is that I’m to go to London next week and begin work—Why, you don’t seem pleased to hear of my good fortune,” continued Leather, turning a sharp look on his friend, who was gazing gravely at the sand, in which he was poking holes with his stick.

“I congratulate you, Shank, with all my heart, and you know it; but—I’m sorry to find that you are not to be in connection with Mr Crossley himself, for there is more good in him than appears on the surface. Did he then make no mention of the nature of his own business?”

“None whatever. To say truth, that mysteriousness or secrecy is the only point about the old fellow’s character that I don’t like,” said Leather, with a frown of virtuous disapproval. “‘All fair and above-board,’ that’s my motto. Speak out your mind and fear nothing!”

At these noble sentiments a faint smile, if we may say so, hovered somewhere in the recesses of Charlie Brooke’s interior, but not the quiver of a muscle disturbed the solemnity of his face.

“The secrecy of his nature seems even to have infected that skipper with—or rather by—whom he was wrecked,” continued Leather, “for when I asked him yesterday about the old gentleman, he became suddenly silent, and when I pressed him, he made me a rigmarole speech something like this: ‘Young man, I make it a rule to know nothin’ whatever about my passengers. As I said only two days past to my missus: “Maggie,” says I, “it’s of no use your axin’ me. My passengers’ business is *their* business, and my business is mine. All I’ve got to do is to sail my ship, an’ see to it that I land my passengers in safety.’”

“‘You made a pretty mess of your business, then, the last trip,’ said I, for I was bothered with his obvious determination not to give me any information.

“‘Right you are, young man,’ said he, ‘and it would have been a still prettier mess if your friend Mr Brooke hadn’t come off wi’ that there line!’

“I laughed at this and recovered my temper, but I could pump nothing more out of him. Perhaps there was nothing to pump.—But now tell me, how is it—for I cannot understand—that you refused all offers to yourself? You are as much ‘out of work’ just now as I am.”

“That’s true, Shank, and really I feel almost as incapable of giving you an answer as Captain Stride himself. You see, during our conversation Mr Crossley attributed mean—at all events wrong—motives to me, and somehow I felt that I *could* not accept any favour at his hands just then. I suspect I was too hasty. I fear it was false pride—”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Leather; “pride! I wonder in what secret chamber of your big corpus your pride lies.”

“Well, I don’t know. It must be pretty deep. Perhaps it is engrained, and cannot be easily recognised.”

“That last is true, Charlie. Assuredly it can’t be recognised, for it’s not there at all. Why, if you had been born with a scrap of false pride you and I could never have been friends—for I hate it!”

Shank Leather, in saying this, had hit the nail fairly on the head, although he had not intelligently probed the truth to the bottom. In fact a great deal of the friendship which drew these young men together was the result of their great dissimilarity of character. They acted on each other somewhat after the fashion of a well-adjusted piece of mechanism, the ratchets of selfishness and cog-wheels of vanity in Shank fitting easily into the pinions of good-will and modesty which characterised his friend, so that there was no jarring in their intercourse. This alone would not, perhaps, have induced the strong friendship that existed if it had not been coupled with their intimacy from childhood, and if Brooke had not been particularly fond of Shank’s invalid mother, and recognised a few of her good characteristics faintly reproduced in her son, while Shank fully appreciated in Charlie that amiable temperament which inclines its happy possessor to sympathise much with others, to talk little of self, to believe all things and to hope all things, to the verge almost of infantine credulity.

“Well, well,” resumed Charlie, with a laugh, “however that may be, I *did* decline Mr Crossley’s offers, but it does not matter much now, for that same worthy captain who bothered you so much has told me of a situation of which he has the gift, and has offered it to me.”

“You don’t say so! Is it a good one?”

“Yes, and well paid, I’m told, though I don’t know the exact amount of the salary yet.”

“And have you accepted?”

“I have. Mother agreed, after some demur, that it is better than nothing, so, like you, I begin work in a few days.”

“Well now, how strangely things do happen sometimes!” said Leather, stopping and looking out seaward, where the remains of the brig could still be distinguished on the rocks that had fixed her doom. “But for that fortunate wreck and our saving the people in her, you and I might still have been whistling in the ranks of the Great Unemployed—And what sort of a situation is it, Charlie?”

“You will smile, perhaps, when I tell you. It is to act as supercargo of the *Walrus*, which is commanded by Captain Stride himself.”

Young Leather’s countenance fell. “Why, Charlie,” he said, “that means that you’re going away to sea!”

“I fear it does.”

“Soon?”

“In a week or two.”

For some little time Leather did not speak. The news fell upon him with a shock of disagreeable surprise, for, apart from the fact that he really loved his friend, he was somehow aware that there were not many other young men who cared much for himself—in regard to which he was not a little surprised, for it never occurred to him that egotism and selfishness had anything to do with the coolness of his friends, or that none but men like our hero, with sweet tempers and self-forgetting dispositions, could by any possibility put up with him.

“Who are the owners of the *Walrus*, Charlie?” he asked, as they turned into the lane that led from the beach to the village.

“Withers and Company of London.”

“H’m—don’t know them. They must be trustful fellows, however, to take a captain into their employ who has just lost his vessel.”

“They have not *taken* him into their employ,” said Charlie. “Captain Stride tells me he has been in their service for more than a quarter of a century, and they exonerate him from all blame in the loss of the brig. It does seem odd to me, however, that he should be appointed so immediately to a new ship, but, as you remarked, that’s none of my business. Come, I’ll go in with you and congratulate your mother and May on your appointment.”

They had reached the door of Shank Leather’s house by that time. It was a poor-looking house, in a poor side street or blind alley of the village, the haunt of riotous children during the day-time, and of maddening cats at night. Stray dogs now and then invaded the alley, but, for the most part, it was to children and cats that the region was given over. Here, for the purpose of enabling the proverbial “two ends” to “meet,” dwelt a considerable population in houses of diminutive size and small accommodation. A few of these were persons who, having “seen better days,” were anxious to hide their poverty and existence from the “friends” of those better days. There was likewise a sprinkling of individuals and families who, having grown callous to the sorrows of earth, had reached that condition wherein the meeting of the two ends is a matter of comparative indifference, because they never met, and were never more expected to meet—the blank, annually left gaping, being filled up, somehow, by a sort of compromise between bankruptcy, charity, and starvation.

To the second of these the Leather family belonged. They had been brought to their sad condition by that prolific source of human misery—the bottle.

To do the family justice, it was only the father who had succumbed. He had been a gentleman; he was now a sot. His wife—delicate owing to bad treatment, sorrow, and insufficient nourishment—was, ever had been, and ever would be, a lady and a Christian. Owing to the last priceless condition she was still alive. It is despair that kills, and despair had been banished from her vocabulary ever since she had laid down the arms of her rebellion and accepted the Saviour of mankind as her guide and consolation.

But sorrow, suffering, toil had not departed when the demon despair fled away. They had, however, been wonderfully lightened, and one of the brightest gleams of hope in her sad life was that she might possibly be used as the means of saving her husband. There were other gleams of light, however, one of the brightest of them being that May, her only daughter, was loving and sympathetic—or, as she sometimes expressed it, “as good as gold.” But there was also a very dark spot in her life: Shank, her only son, was beginning to show a tendency to tread in his father’s steps.

Many golden texts were enshrined in the heart of poor Mrs Leather, and not a few of these—painted by the hand of May—hung on the walls of their little sitting-room, but the word to which she turned her eyes in seasons of profoundest obscurity, and which served her as a sheet-anchor in the midst of the wildest storms, was, “Hope thou in God, for thou shalt *yet* praise Him.” And alongside of that text, whenever she thought of it or chanced to look at it, there invariably flashed another: “Immanuel, God with us.”

May and her mother were alone when the young men entered; the former was at her lessons, the latter busy with knitting-needles.

Knitting was the means by which Mrs Leather, with constant labour and inexhaustible perseverance, managed to fill up the gap between the before-mentioned “two ends,” which her dissolute husband failed to draw together. She could read or assist May with her lessons, while her delicate fingers, working below the table, performed miraculous gyrations with steel and worsted. To most male minds, we presume, this is utterly incomprehensible. It is well not to attempt the description of that which one does not understand. The good lady knitted socks and stockings, and mittens and cuffs, and comforters, and other things, in absolutely overwhelming quantities, so that the accumulation in the press in which she stored them was at times quite marvellous. Yet that press

never quite filled up, owing to the fact that there was an incurable leak in it—a sort of secret channel—through which the products of her toil flowed out nearly as fast as she poured them in.

This leak in the worsted press, strange to say, increased wonderfully just after the wreck described in a previous chapter, and the rivulet to which it gave rise flowed in the direction of the back-door of the house, emptying itself into a reservoir which always took the form of a little elderly lady, with a plain but intensely lovable countenance, who had been, perhaps still was, governess in a family in a neighbouring town where Mrs Leather had spent some of her “better days.” Her name was Molloy.

Like a burglar Miss Molloy came in a stealthy manner at irregular intervals to the back-door of the house, and swept the press of its contents, made them up into a bundle of enormous size, and carried them off on the shoulders of an appropriately disreputable blackguard boy—as Shank called him—whom she retained for the purpose. Unlike a burglar, however, Miss Molloy did not “bolt with the swag,” but honestly paid for everything, from the hugest pair of gentlemen’s fishing socks to the smallest pair of children’s cuffs.

What Miss Molloy did with this perennial flow of woollen work, whom she came from, where she went to, who discovered her, and why she did it, were subjects of inquiry which baffled investigation, and always simmered in the minds of Shank and May, though the mind of Mrs Leather herself seemed to be little if at all exercised by it. At all events she was uncommunicative on the point, and her children’s curiosity was never gratified, for the mother was obdurate, and, torture being illegal at that time in England, they had no means of compelling disclosure. It was sometimes hinted by Shank that their little dog Scraggy—appropriately named!—knew more than he chose to tell about the subject, for he was generally present at the half-secret interviews, and always closed the scene with a sham but furious assault on the ever contemptuous blackguard boy. But Scraggy was faithful to his trust, and revealed nothing.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am, Mrs Leather, about Shank’s good fortune,” said Charlie, with a gentle shake of the hand, which Mr Crossley would have appreciated. Like the Nasmyth steam-hammer, which flattens a ton of iron or gently cracks a hazel-nut, our Herculean hero could accommodate himself to circumstances; “as your son says, it has been a lucky wreck for *us*.”

“Lucky indeed for *him*,” responded the lady, instantly resuming her knitting, which she generally kept down near her lap, well hidden by the table, while she looked at her visitor and talked, “but not very pleasant for those who have lost by it.”

“Pooh! mother, nobody has lost by it,” said Shank in his free-and-easy style. “The owners don’t lose, because of course it was insured; and the Insurance Companies can’t be said to lose, for the value of a small brig will be no more felt by them than the losing of a pin would be felt by yourself; and the captain won’t lose—except a few sea-garments and things o’ that kind—for he has been appointed to another ship already. By the way, mother, that reminds me that Charlie has also got a situation through this lucky wreck, for Captain Stride feels so grateful that he has offered him the situation of supercargo in his new ship.”

For once Mrs Leather’s knitting-needles came to a sudden stop, and she looked inquiringly at her young friend. So did May.

“Have you accepted it?”

“Well, yes. I have.”

“I’m *so* sorry,” said May; “I don’t know what Shank will do without you.”

At that moment a loud knocking was heard at the door. May rose to open it, and Mrs Leather looked anxiously at her son.

A savage undertoned growl and an unsteady step told all too plainly that the head of the house had returned home.

With sudden interest in worsted fabrics, which he was far from feeling, Charlie Brooke turned his back to the door, and, leaning forward, took up an end of the work with which the knitter was busy.

“That’s an extremely pretty pattern, Mrs Leather. Does it take you long to make things of the kind?”

“Not long; I—I make a good many of them.”

She said this with hesitation, and with her eyes fixed on the doorway, through the opening of which her husband thrust a shaggy dishevelled head, with dissipation stamped on a countenance which had evidently been handsome once.

But Charlie saw neither the husband’s head nor the poor wife’s gaze, for he was still bending over the worsted-work in mild admiration.

Under the impression that he had not been observed, Mr Leather suddenly withdrew his head, and was heard to stumble up-stairs under the guidance of May. Then the bang of a door, followed by a shaking of the slimly-built house, suggested the idea that the poor man had flung himself on his bed.

“Shank Leather,” said Charlie Brooke, that same night as they strolled on the sea-shore, “you gave expression to some sentiments to-day which I highly approved of. One of them was ‘Speak out your mind, and fear nothing!’ I mean to do so now, and expect that you will not be hurt by my following your advice.”

“Well!” exclaimed Shank, with a dubious glance, for he disliked the seriousness of his friend’s tone.

“Your father—” began Charlie.

“Please don’t speak about *him*,” interrupted the other. “I know all that you can say. His case is hopeless, and I can’t bear to speak about it.”

“Well, I won’t speak about him, though I cannot agree with you that his case is hopeless. But it is yourself that I wish to speak about. You and I are soon to separate; it must be for a good long while—it may be for ever. Now I must speak out my mind before I go. My old playmate, school-fellow, and chum, you have begun to walk in your poor father’s footsteps, and you may be sure that if you don’t turn round all your hopes will be blasted—at least for this life—perhaps also for that which is to come. Now don’t be angry or hurt, Shank. Remember that you not only encouraged me, but advised me to speak out my mind.”

“Yes, but I did not advise you to form a false, uncharitable judgment of your chum,” returned Leather, with a dash of bitterness in his tone. “I admit that I’m fond of a social glass, and that I sometimes, though rarely, take a little—a very little—more than, perhaps, is necessary. But that is very different from being a drunkard, which you appear to assume that I am.”

“Nay, Shank, I don’t assume that. What I said was that you are *beginning* to walk in your dear father’s footsteps. No man ever yet became a drunkard without *beginning*. And I feel certain that no man ever, when beginning, had the most distant intention or expectation of becoming a drunkard. Your danger, dear old fellow, lies in your *not seeing* the danger. You admit that you like a social glass. Shank, I candidly make the same admission—I like it,—but after seeing your father, and hearing your defence, the danger has been so deeply impressed on *me*, that from this hour I resolve, God helping me, never more to taste a social glass.”

“Well, Charlie, you know yourself best,” returned his friend airily, “and if you think yourself in so great danger, of course your resolve is a very prudent one; but for myself, I admit that I see no danger, and I don’t feel any particular weakness of will in regard to temptation.”

“Ah, Shank, you remind me of an eccentric old lady I have heard of who was talking with a friend about the difficulties of life. ‘My dear,’ said the friend, ‘I do find it such a *difficult* thing to resist temptation—don’t you?’ ‘No,’ replied the eccentric old lady, ‘I don’t, for I *never* resist temptation, I always give way to it!’”

“I can’t quite make out how your anecdote applies to me, Charlie.”

“Don’t you see? You feel no weakness of will in regard to temptation because you never give your will an opportunity of resisting it. You always give way to it. You see, I am speaking out my mind freely—as you have advised!”

“Yes, and you take the whole of my advice, and fear nothing, else you would not risk a quarrel by doing so. But really, my boy, it’s of no use your troubling your head on that subject, for I feel quite safe, and I don’t mean to give in, so there’s an end on’t.”

Our hero persevered notwithstanding, and for some time longer sought to convince or move his friend both by earnest appeal and light pleasantry, but to all appearance without success, although he reduced him to silence. He left him at last, and went home meditating on the truth of the proverb that “a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

Chapter Five.

All Things to All Men

Under the influence of favouring breezes and bright skies the *Walrus* swept gaily over the ocean at the beginning of her voyage, with “stuns’ls slow and aloft, royals and sky-scrapers,” according to Captain Stride. At least, if these were not the exact words he used, they express pretty well what he meant, namely, a “cloud of canvas.”

But this felicitous state of things did not last. The tropics were reached, where calms prevailed with roasting heat. The Southern Atlantic was gained, and gales were met with. The celebrated Cape was doubled, and the gales, if we may say so, were trebled. The Indian Ocean was crossed, and the China Seas were entered, where typhoons blew some of the sails to ribbons, and snapped off the topmasts like pipe-stems. Then she sailed into the great Pacific, and for a time the *Walrus* sported pleasantly among the coral islands.

During all this time, and amid all these changes, Charlie Brooke, true to his character, was the busiest and most active man on board. Not that his own special duties gave him much to do, for, until the vessel should reach port, these were rather light; but our hero—as Stride expressed it—“must always be doing.” If he had not work to do he made it—chiefly in the way of assisting other people. Indeed there was scarcely a man or boy on board who did not have the burden of his toil, whatever it was, lightened in consequence of young Brooke’s tendency to put his powerful shoulder voluntarily to the wheel. He took the daily observations with the captain, and worked out the ship’s course during the previous twenty-four hours. He handled the adze and saw with the carpenter, learned to knot and splice, and to sew canvas with the bo’s’n’s mate, commented learnedly and interestingly on the preparation of food with the cook, and spun yarns with the men on the forecastle, or listened to the long-winded stories of the captain and officers in the cabin. He was a splendid listener, being much more anxious to ascertain exactly the opinions of his friends and mates than to advance his own. Of course it followed that Charlie was a favourite.

With his insatiable desire to acquire information of every kind, he had naturally, when at home, learned a little rough-and-tumble surgery, with a slight smattering of medicine. It was not much, but it proved to be useful as far as it went, and his “little knowledge” was not “dangerous,” because he modestly refused to go a single step beyond it in the way of practice, unless, indeed, he was urgently pressed to do so by his patients. In virtue of his attainments, real and supposed, he came to be recognised as the doctor of the ship, for the *Walrus* carried no medical man.

“Look here, Brooke,” said the only passenger on board—a youth of somewhat delicate constitution, who was making the voyage for the sake of his health,—“I’ve got horrible toothache. D’you think you can do anything for me?”

“Let’s have a look at it,” said Charlie, with kindly interest, though he felt half inclined to smile at the intensely lugubrious expression of the youth’s face.

“Why, Raywood, that is indeed a bad tooth; nothing that I know of will improve it. There’s a cavern in it big and black enough to call to remembrance the Black Hole of Calcutta! A red-hot wire might destroy the nerve, but I never saw one used, and should not like to try it.”

“Horrible!” exclaimed Raywood. “I’ve been mad with pain all the morning, and can’t afford to be driven madder. Perhaps, somewhere or other in the ship there may be a—a—thingumy.”

“A whatumy?” inquired the other.

“A key, or—or—pincers,” groaned Raywood, “for extracting—oh! man, couldn’t you pull it out?”

“Easily,” said Charlie, with a smile. “I’ve got a pair of forceps—always carry them in case of need, but never use them unless the patient is very bad, and *must* have it out.”

Poor Raywood protested, with another groan, that his was a case in point, and it *must* come out; so Charlie sought for and found his forceps.

“It won’t take long, I suppose?” said the patient rather nervously, as he opened his mouth.

“Oh no. Only a moment or—”

A fearful yell, followed by a gasp, announced to the whole ship’s company that a crisis of some sort had been passed by some one, and the expert though amateur dentist congratulated his patient on his deliverance from the enemy.

Only three of the ship’s company, however, had witnessed the operation. One was Dick Darvall, the seaman who chanced to be steering at the time, and who could see through the open skylight what was being enacted in the cabin. Another was the captain, who stood beside him. The third was the cabin-boy, Will Ward, who chanced to be cleaning some brasses about the skylight at the time, and was transfixed by what we may style delightfully horrible sensations. These three watched the proceedings with profound interest, some sympathy, and not a little amusement.

“Mind your helm, Darvall,” said the Captain, stifling a laugh as the yell referred to burst on his ears.

“Ay, ay, sir,” responded the seaman, bringing his mind back to his duty, as he bestowed a wink on the brass-polishing cabin-boy.

“He’s up to everything,” said Darvall in a low voice, referring to our hero.

“From pitch-and-toss to manslaughter,” responded the boy, with a broad grin.

“I do believe, Mr Brooke, that you can turn your hand to anything,” said Captain Stride, as Charlie came on deck a few minutes later. “Did you ever study doctoring or surgery?”

“Not regularly,” answered Charlie; “but occasionally I’ve had the chance of visiting hospitals and dissecting-rooms, besides hearing lectures on anatomy, and I have taken advantage of my opportunities. Besides, I’m fond of mechanics; and tooth-drawing is somewhat mechanical. Of course I make no pretension to a knowledge of regular dentistry, which involves, I believe, a scientific and prolonged education.”

“May be so, Mr Brooke,” returned the captain, “but your knowledge seems deep and extensive enough to me, for, except in the matter o’ navigation, I haven’t myself had much schoolin’, but I do like to see a fellow that can use his hands. As I said to my missus, not two days before I left ’er: ‘Maggie,’ says I, ‘a man that can’t turn his hands to anything ain’t worth his salt. For why? He’s useless at sea, an’, by consequence, can’t be of much value on land.’”

“Your reasoning is unanswerable,” returned Charlie, with a laugh.

“Not so sure o’ that,” rejoined the captain, with a modestly dubious shake of his head; “leastwise, however unanswerable it may be, my missus always manages to answer it—somehow.”

At that moment one of the sailors came aft to relieve the man-at-the-wheel.

Dick Darvall was a grave, tall, dark, and handsome man of about five-and-twenty, with a huge black beard, as fine a seaman as one could wish to see standing at a ship’s helm, but he limped when he left his post and went forward.

“How’s the leg to-day, Darvall!” asked young Brooke, as the man passed.

“Better, sir, thankee.”

“That’s well. I’ll change the dressing in half-an-hour. Don’t disturb it till I come.”

“Thankee, sir, I won’t.”

“Now then, Raywood,” said Charlie, descending to the cabin, where his patient was already busy reading Maury’s *Physical Geography of the Sea*, “let’s have a look at the gum.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” said Raywood. “D’you know, I think one of the uses of severe pain is to make one inexpressibly thankful for the mere absence of it. Of course there is a little sensation of pain left, which might make me growl at other times, but that positively feels comfortable now by contrast!”

“There is profound sagacity in your observations,” returned Charlie, as he gave the gum a squeeze that for a moment or two removed the comfort; “there, now, don’t suck it, else you’ll renew the bleeding. Keep your mouth shut.”

With this caution the amateur dentist left the cabin, and proceeded to the fore-part of the vessel. In passing the steward’s pantry a youthful voice arrested him.

“Oh, please, sir,” said Will Ward, the cabin-boy, advancing with a slate in his hand, “I *can’t* make out the sum you set me yesterday, an’ I’m quite sure I’ve tried and tried as hard as ever I could to understand it.”

“Let me see,” said his friend, taking the slate and sitting down on a locker. “Have you read over the rule carefully?”

“Yes, sir, I have, a dozen times at least, but it won’t come right,” answered the boy, with wrinkles enough on his young brow to indicate the very depths of puzzlement.

“Fetch the book, Will, and let’s examine it.”

The book was brought, and at his teacher’s request the boy read:—

“Add the interest to the principal, and then multiply by—”

“Multiply?” said Charlie, interrupting. “Look!”

He pointed to the sum on the slate, and repeated “multiply.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the cabin-boy, with a gasp of relief and wide-open eyes, “I’ve *divided!*”

“That’s so, Will, and there’s a considerable difference between division and multiplication, as you’ll find all through life,” remarked the teacher, with a peculiar lift of his eyebrows, as he handed back the slate and went on his way.

More than once in his progress “for’ard” he was arrested by men who wished hint to give advice, or clear up difficulties in reference to subjects which his encouragement or example had induced them to take up, and to these claims on his attention or assistance he accorded such a ready and cheerful response that his pupils felt it to be a positive pleasure to appeal to him, though they each professed to regret giving him “trouble.” The boatswain, who was an amiable though gruff man in his way, expressed pretty well the feelings of the ship’s company towards our hero when he said: “I tell you, mates, I’d sooner be rubbed up the wrong way, an’ kicked down the fore hatch by Mr Brooke, than I’d be smoothed or buttered by anybody else.”

At last the fo’c’sl was reached, and there our surgeon found his patient, Dick Darvall, awaiting him. The stout seaman’s leg had been severely bruised by a block which had fallen from aloft and struck it during one of the recent gales.

“A good deal better to-day,” said Charlie. “Does it pain you much?”

“Not nearly as much as it did yesterday, sir. It’s my opinion that I’ll be all right in a day or two. Seems to me outrageous to make so much ado about it.”

“If we didn’t take care of it, my man, it might cost you your limb, and we can’t afford to bury such a well-made member before its time! You must give it perfect rest for a day or two. I’ll speak to the captain about it.”

“I’d rather you didn’t, sir,” objected the seaman. “I feel able enough to go about, and my mates’ll think I’m shirkin’ dooty.”

“There’s not a man a-board as’ll think that o’ Dick Darvall,” growled the boatswain, who had just entered and heard the last remark.

“Right, bo’s’n,” said Brooke, “you have well expressed the thought that came into my own head.”

“Have ye seen Samson yet, sir?” asked the boatswain, with an unusually grave look.

“No; I was just going to inquire about him. No worse, I hope?”

“I think he is, sir. Seems to me that he ain’t long for this world. The life’s bin too much for him: he never was cut out for a sailor, an’ he takes things so much to heart that I do believe worry is doin’ more than work to drive him on the rocks.”

“I’ll go and see him at once,” said our hero.

Fred Samson, the sick man referred to, had been put into a swing-cot in a berth amidships to give him as much rest as possible. To all appearance he was slowly dying of consumption. When Brooke entered he was leaning on one elbow, gazing wistfully through the port-hole close to his head. His countenance, on which the stamp of death was evidently imprinted, was unusually refined for one in his station in life.

“I’m glad you have come, Mr Brooke,” he said slowly, as his visitor advanced and took his thin hand.

“My poor fellow,” said Charlie, in a tone of low but tender sympathy, “I wish with all my heart I could do you any good.”

“The sight of your kind face does me good,” returned the sailor, with a pause for breath between almost every other word. “I don’t want you to doctor me any more. I feel that I’m past that, but I want to give you a message and a packet for my mother. Of course you will be in London when you return to England. Will you find her out and deliver the packet? It contains only the Testament she gave me at parting and a letter.”

“My dear fellow—you may depend on me,” replied Brooke earnestly. “Where does she live?”

“In Whitechapel. The full address is on the packet. The letter enclosed tells all that I have to say.”

“But you spoke of a message,” said Brooke, seeing that he paused and shut his eyes.

“Yes, yes,” returned the dying man eagerly, “I forgot. Give her my dear love, and say that my last thoughts were of herself and God. She always feared that I was trusting too much in myself—in my own good resolutions and reformation; so I have been—but that’s past. Tell her that God in His mercy has snapped that broken reed altogether, and enabled me to rest my soul on Jesus.”

As the dying man was much exhausted by his efforts to speak, his visitor refrained from asking more questions. He merely whispered a comforting text of Scripture and left him apparently sinking into a state of repose.

Then, having bandaged the finger of a man who had carelessly cut himself while using his knife aloft, Charlie returned to the cabin to continue an interrupted discussion with the first mate on the subject of astronomy.

From all which it will be seen that our hero’s tendencies inclined him to be as much as possible “all things to all men.”

Chapter Six. Disaster, Starvation, and Death

The least observant of mortals must have frequently been impressed with the fact that events and incidents of an apparently trifling description often lead to momentous—sometimes tremendous—results.

Soon after the occurrence of the incidents referred to in the last chapter, a colony of busy workers in the Pacific Ocean were drawing towards the completion of a building on which they had been engaged for a long time. Like some lighthouses this building had its foundations on a rock at the bottom of the sea. Steadily, perseveringly, and with little cessation, the workers had toiled for years. They were small insignificant creatures, each being bent on simply performing the little bit of work which he, she, or it had been created to do probably without knowing or caring what the result might be, and then ending his, her, or its modest labours with life. It was when this marine building had risen to within eight or ten feet of the surface of the sea that the *Walrus* chanced to draw near to it, but no one on board was aware of the existence of that coral-reef, for up to the period we write of it had failed to attract the attention of chart-makers.

The vessel was bowling along at a moderate rate over a calm sea, for the light breeze overhead that failed to ruffle the water filled her topsails. Had the wind been stormy a line of breakers would have indicated the dangerous reef. As it was there was nothing to tell that the good ship was rushing on her doom till she struck with a violent shock and remained fast.

Of course Captain Stride was equal to the emergency. By the quiet decision with which he went about and gave his orders he calmed the fears of such of his crew as were apt to “lose their heads” in the midst of sudden catastrophe.

“Lower away the boats, lads. We’ll get her off right a way,” he said, in a quick but quiet tone.

Charlie Brooke, being a strong believer in strict discipline, at once ran to obey the order, accompanied by the most active among the men, while others ran to slack off the sheets and lower the topsails.

In a few minutes nearly all the men were in the boats, with hawsers fixed to the stern of the vessel, doing their uttermost to pull her off.

Charlie had been ordered to remain on deck when the crew took to the boats.

“Come here, Mr Brooke, I want you,” said the Captain, leading his young friend to the taffrail. “It’s pretty clear to me that the poor old *Walrus* is done for—”

“I sincerely hope not sir,” said Charlie, with anxious looks.

“A short time will settle the question,” returned the Captain, with unwonted gravity. “If she don’t move in a few minutes, I’ll try what heaving out some o’ the cargo will do. As supercargo, you know where it’s all stowed, so, if you’ll pint out to me which is the least valooable, an’ at the same time heaviest part of it, I’ll send the mate and four men to git it on deck. But to tell you the truth even if we do git her off I don’t think she’ll float. She’s an oldish craft, not fit to have her bottom rasped on coral rocks. But we’ll soon see.”

Charlie could not help observing that there was something peculiarly sad in the tone of the old man’s voice. Whether it was that the poor captain knew the case to be utterly hopeless, or that he was overwhelmed by this calamity coming upon him so soon after the wreck of his last ship, Charlie could not tell, but he had no time to think, for after he had pointed out to the mate the bales that could be most easily spared he was again summoned aft.

“She don’t move,” said the captain, gloomily. “We must git the boats ready, for if it comes on to blow only a little harder we’ll have to take to ’em. So do you and the stooard putt your heads together

an' git up as much provisions as you think the boats will safely carry. Only necessaries, of course, an' take plenty o' water. I'll see to it that charts, compasses, canvas, and other odds and ends are ready."

Again young Brooke went off, without saying a word, to carry out his instructions. Meanwhile one of the boats was recalled, and her crew set to lighten the ship by heaving part of the cargo overboard. Still the *Walrus* remained immovable on the reef, for the force with which she struck had sent her high upon it.

"If we have to take to the boats, sir," said Charlie, when he was disengaged, "it may be well to put some medicines on board, for poor Samson will—"

"Ay, ay, do so, lad," said the captain, interrupting; "I've been thinkin' o' that, an' you may as well rig up some sort o' couch for the poor fellow in the long-boat, for I mean to take him along wi' myself."

"Are you so sure, then, that there is no chance of our getting her off?"

"Quite sure. Look there." He pointed, as he spoke, to the horizon to windward, where a line of cloud rested on the sea. "That'll not be long o' comin' here. It won't blow very hard, but it'll be hard enough to smash the old *Walrus* to bits. If you've got any valooables aboard that you'd rather not lose, you'd better stuff 'em in your pockets now. When things come to the wust mind your helm, an' look out as I used to say to my missus—"

He stopped abruptly and turned away. Evidently the thought of the "missus" was too much for him just then.

Charlie Brooke hurried off to visit the sick man, and prepare him for the sad change in his position that had now become unavoidable. But another visitor had been to see the invalid before him. Entering the berth softly, and with a quiet look, so as not to agitate the patient needlessly, he found to his regret, though not surprise, that poor Fred Samson was dead. There was a smile on the pale face, which was turned towards the port window, as if the dying man had been taking a last look of the sea and sky when Death laid a hand gently on his brow and smoothed away the wrinkles of suffering and care. A letter from his mother, held tightly in one hand and pressed upon his breast told eloquently what was the subject of his last thoughts.

Charlie cut a lock of hair from the sailor's brow with his clasp-knife, and, taking the letter gently from the dead hand, wrapped it therein.

"There's no time to bury him now. His berth must be the poor fellow's coffin," said Captain Stride, when the death was reported to him. "The swell o' the coming squall has reached us already. Look alive wi' the boats, men!"

By that time the rising swell was in truth lifting the vessel every few seconds and letting her down with a soft thud on the coral reef. It soon became evident to every one on board that the *Walrus* had not many hours to live—perhaps not many minutes—for the squall to which the Captain had referred was rapidly bearing down, and each successive thud became more violent than the previous one. Knowing their danger full well, the men worked with a will and in a few minutes three boats, well provisioned, were floating on the sea.

The need for haste soon became apparent, for the depth of water alongside was so insufficient that the long-boat—drawing as she did considerably more water than the others—touched twice when the swells let her drop into their hollows.

It was arranged that Charlie should go in the long-boat with the captain, Raywood the passenger, and ten men of the crew. The remainder were to be divided between the other two boats which were to be in charge of the first and second officers respectively.

"Jump in, Brooke," cried the Captain, as he sat in the stern-sheets looking up at our hero, who was busily engaged assisting the first mate to complete the arrangements of his boat, "we've struck twice already. I must shove off. Is Raywood ready?"

"He's in the cabin looking for something, sir; I'll run and fetch him."

“Stay! We’ve touched again!” shouted the Captain. “You an’ Raywood can come off with one o’ the other boats. I’ll take you on board when in deep water—shove off, lads.”

“Jump in with me, sir,” said the first mate, as he hastily descended the side.

“Come along, Raywood,” shouted Charlie, as he followed. “No time to lose!”

The passenger rushed on deck, scrambled down the side, and took his seat beside Charlie, just as the long threatened squall burst upon them.

The painter was cut, and they drifted into deep water with the second mate’s boat, which had already cast off.

Fortunate was it for the whole crew that Captain Stride had provided for every emergency, and that, among other safeguards, he had put several tarpaulins into each boat, for with these they were enabled to form a covering which turned off the waves and prevented their being swamped. The squall turned out to be a very severe one, and in the midst of it the three boats were so far separated that the prospect of their being able to draw together again until evening was very remote. Indeed the waves soon ran so high that it required the utmost attention of each steersman to keep his craft afloat, and when at last the light began to fade the boats were almost out of sight of each other.

“No chance, I fear, of our ever meeting again,” remarked the mate, as he cast a wistful look at the southern horizon where the sail of the long-boat could be barely seen like the wing of a sea-gull. “Your lot has been cast with us, Mr Brooke, so you’ll have to make the best of it.”

“I always try to make the best of things,” replied Charlie. “My chief regret at present is that Raywood and I, being two extra hands, will help to consume your provisions too fast.”

“Luckily my appetite is a poor one,” said Raywood, with a faint smile; “and it’s not likely to improve in the circumstances.”

“I’m not so sure o’ that sir,” returned the mate, with an air that was meant to be reassuring; “fresh air and exposure have effected wonders before now in the matter of health—so they say. Another pull on the halyards, Dick; that looks like a fresh squall. Mind your sheets, Will Ward.”

A prompt “Ay, ay, sir” from Dick Darvall and the cabin-boy showed that each was alive to the importance of the duty required of him, while the other men—of whom there were six—busied themselves in making the tarpaulin coverings more secure, or in baling out the water which, in spite of them, had found its way into the boat.

Charlie rose and seated himself on the thwart beside the fine-looking seaman Dick Darvall, so as to have a clearer view ahead under the sail.

“Long-boat nowhere to be seen now,” he murmured half to himself after a long look.

“No, sir—nor the other boat either,” said Darvall in a quiet voice. “We shall never see ’em no more.”

“I hope you are wrong,” returned Charlie; “indeed I feel sure that the weather will clear during the night, and that we shall find both boats becalmed not far off.”

“Maybe so, sir,” rejoined the sailor, in the tone of one willing to be, but not yet, convinced.

Our hero was right as to the first, but not as to the second, point. The weather did clear during the night, but when the sun arose next morning on a comparatively calm sea neither of the other boats was to be seen. In fact every object that could arrest the eye had vanished from the scene, leaving only a great circular shield of blue, of which their tiny craft formed the centre.

Chapter Seven.

Adrift on the Sea

“You are ill, Will Ward,” was Dick Darvall’s first remark when there was sufficient daylight to distinguish faces.

“You’re another!” was the cabin-boy’s quick, facetious retort, which caused Darvall to smile and had the effect of rousing the half-sleeping crew.

“But you *are* ill, my boy,” repeated the seaman earnestly.

“No, Dick, not exactly ill,” returned Will, with a faint smile, “but I’m queer.”

Each man had spent that stormy night on the particular thwart on which he had chanced to sit down when he first entered the boat, so that all were looking more or less weary, but seamen are used to uncomfortable and interrupted slumbers. They soon roused themselves and began to look about and make a few comments on the weather. Some, recurring naturally to their beloved indulgence, pulled out their pipes and filled them.

“Have ’ee a light, Jim?” asked a rugged man, in a sleepy tone, of a comrade behind him.

“No, Jack, I haven’t” answered Jim, in a less sleepy tone, slapping all his pockets and thrusting his hands into them.

“Have *you*, Dick?” asked the rugged man in some anxiety.

“No, I haven’t,” replied Darvall, in a very serious voice, as he also took to slapping his pockets; “no—nor baccy!”

It was curious to note at this point how every seaman in that boat became suddenly sympathetic and wide awake, and took to hasty, anxious examination of all his pockets—vest jacket, and trousers. The result was the discovery of a good many clay pipes, more or less blackened and shortened, with a few plugs of tobacco, but not a single match, either fusee or congreve. The men looked at each other with something akin to despair.

“Was no matches putt on board wi’ the grub an’ other things?” asked Jim in a solemn tone.

“And no tobacco?” inquired the mate.

No one could answer in the affirmative. A general sigh—like a miniature squall—burst from the sailors, and relieved them a little. Jim put his pipe between his lips, and meekly began, if we may say so, to smoke his tobacco dry. At an order from the mate the men got out the oars and began to pull, for there was barely enough wind to fill the sail.

“No rest for us, lads, ’cept when it blows,” said the mate. “The nearest land that I know of is five hundred miles off as the crow flies. We’ve got a compass by good luck, so we can make for it, but the grub on board won’t hold out for quarter o’ that distance, so, unless we fall in with a ship, or fish jump aboard of us, ye know what’s before us.”

“Have we any spirits aboard?” asked the rugged man, in a growling, somewhat sulky, voice.

“Hear—hear!” exclaimed Jim.

“No, Jack,” returned the mate; “at least not for the purpose o’ lettin’ you have a short life an’ a merry one. Now, look here, men: it has pleased Providence to putt you an’ me in something of a fix, and I shouldn’t wonder if we was to have some stiffish experiences before we see the end of it. It has also pleased Providence to putt me here in command. You know I’m not given to boastin’, but there are times when it is advisable to have plain speakin’. There *is* a small supply of spirits aboard, and I just want to tell ’ee—merely as a piece of useful information, and to prevent any chance o’ future trouble—that as I’ve got charge o’ them spirits I mean to *keep* charge of ’em.”

The mate spoke in a low, soft voice, without the slightest appearance of threat or determination in his manner, but as he concluded he unbuttoned his pilot-cloth coat and pointed to the butt of a revolver which protruded from one of his vest pockets.

The men made no reply, but instinctively glanced at the two biggest and strongest men in the boat. These were Charlie Brooke and Dick Darvall. Obviously, before committing themselves further, they wished, if possible, to read in the faces of these two what they thought of the mate's speech. They failed to read much, if anything at all, for Charlie's eyes were fixed in dreamy expressionless abstraction on the horizon, and Dick was gazing up into the clouds, with a look of intense benignity—suggesting that he was holding pleasant intercourse with any celestial creatures who might be resident there.

Without a word the whole crew bent to their oars, and resigned themselves to the inevitable. Perhaps if each man had expressed his true feelings at that moment he would have said that he was glad to know there was a firm hand at the helm. For there are few things more uncomfortable in any community, large or small, than the absence of discipline, or the presence of a weak will in a position of power.

“But I say, Will,” remarked Darvall, who pulled the stroke-oar, “you really do look ill. Is anything the matter with 'ee?”

“Nothin', Dick; 'cept that I'm tired,” answered the cabin-boy.

“Breakfast will put that right” said our hero in an encouraging tone. “Let's feel your pulse. Hm. Well, might be slower. Come, Captain,” he added, giving the mate his new title as he turned to him, “will you allow me to prescribe breakfast for this patient?”

“Certainly, Doctor,” returned the mate cheerily. “Come, lads, we'll all have breakfast together.”

In a few minutes the biscuit and salt junk barrels were opened, and the mate measured out an exactly equal proportion of food to each man. Then, following the example of a celebrated commander, and in order to prevent dissatisfaction on the part of any with his portion, he caused one of the men to turn his back on the food, and, pointing to one of the portions said, “Who shall have this?”

“The Doctor, sir,” returned the man promptly.

The portion was immediately handed to Charlie Brooke amid a general laugh.

Thus every portion was disposed of, and the men sat down to eat in good humour, in spite of the too evident fact that they had been at once placed on short allowance, for, when each had finished, he assuredly wished for more, though no one ventured to give expression to the wish.

The only exception was the little cabin-boy, who made a brave attempt to eat, but utterly failed at the second mouthful.

“Come, Will,” said Charlie in a kindly tone, pretending to misunderstand the state of matters, “don't try to deceive yourself by prolonging your breakfast. That won't make more of it. See, here, I'm not up to eating much to-day, somehow, so I'll be greatly obliged if you will dispose of half of mine as well as your own. Next time I am hungry, and you are not, I'll expect you to do the same.”

But Will Ward could not be thus induced to eat. He was really ill, and before night was in a high fever. You may be sure that Dr Brooke, as every one now called him, did his best to help the little sufferer, but, of course, he could do very little, for all the medicines which he had prepared had been put into the long-boat, and, in a small open boat with no comforts, no medicines, and on short allowance of food, little could be done, except to give the boy a space of the floor on which to lie, to shield him from spray, and to cover him with blankets.

For a week the boat was carried over the sea by a fresh, steady breeze, during which time the sun shone out frequently, so that things seemed not so wretched as one might suppose to the shipwrecked mariners. Of course the poor cabin-boy was an exception. Although his feverish attack was a slight one he felt very weak and miserable after it. His appetite began to return, however, and it was evident that the short daily allowance would be insufficient for him. When this point was reached Dick Darvall one day, when rations were being served out, ventured to deliver an opinion.

“Captain and mates all,” he said, while a sort of bashful smile played upon his sunburnt features, “it do seem to me that we should agree, each man, to give up a share of our rations to little Will Ward,

so that he may be able to feed up a bit an' git the better o' this here sickness. We won't feel the want of such a little crumb each, an' he'll be ever so much the better for it."

"Agreed," chorused the men, apparently without exception.

"All right, lads," said the mate, while a rare smile lighted up for a moment his usually stern countenance; "when the need for such self-denial comes I'll call on ye to exercise it, but it ain't called for yet, because I've been lookin' after the interests o' Will Ward while he's been ill. Justice, you see, stands first o' the virtues in my mind, an' it's my opinion that it wouldn't be justice, but something very much the reverse, if we were to rob the poor boy of his victuals just because he couldn't eat them."

"Right you are, sir," interposed Dick Darvall.

"Well, then, holdin' these views," continued the mate, "I have put aside Will Ward's share every time the rations were served, so here's what belongs to him—in this keg for the meat, and this bag for the biscuit—ready for him to fall-to whenever his twist is strong enough."

There were marks of hearty approval, mingled with laughter, among the men on hearing this, but they stopped abruptly and listened for more on observing a perplexed look on their leader's face.

"But there's something that puzzles me about it, lads," resumed the mate, "and it is this, that the grub has somehow accumulated faster than I can account for, considering the smallness o' the addition to the lot each time."

On hearing this the men were a little surprised, but Charlie Brooke burst into a short laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that the victuals have taken root and begun to grow, do you?"

"I don't mean to *say* anything," returned the mate quietly; "but I'm inclined to *think* a good deal if you've no objection, Doctor."

"How d'ee feel now, Will?" said Charlie, stooping forward at the moment, for he observed that the boy—whose bed was on the floor at his feet—had moved, and was gazing up at him with eyes that seemed to have grown enormously since their owner fell sick.

"I feel queer—and—and—I'm inclined to *think*, too," returned Will in a faint voice.

Nothing more was said at that time, for a sudden shift in the wind necessitated a shift of the sail, but Dick Darvall nodded his head significantly, and it came to be understood that "Doctor" Brooke had regularly robbed himself of part of his meagre allowance in order to increase the store of the cabin-boy. Whether they were right in this conjecture has never been distinctly ascertained. But all attempts to benefit the boy were soon after frustrated, for, while life was little more than trembling in the balance with Will Ward, a gale burst upon them which sealed his fate.

It was not the rougher motion of the boat that did it, for the boy was used to that; nor the flashing of the salt spray inboard, for his comrades guarded him to some extent from that. During the alarm caused by a wave which nearly swamped the boat two of the crew in their panic seized the first things that came to hand and flung them overboard to prevent their sinking, while the rest baled with cans and sou'-westers for their lives. The portion of lading thus sacrificed turned out to be the staff of life—the casks of biscuit and pork!

It was a terrible shock to these unfortunates when the full extent of the calamity was understood, and the firmness of the mate, with a sight of the revolvers alone prevented summary vengeance being executed on the wretched men who had acted so hastily in their blind terror.

Only a small keg of biscuit remained to them. This was soon expended, and then the process of absolute starvation began. Every nook and cranny of the boat was searched again and again in the hope of something eatable being found, but only a small pot of lard—intended probably to grease the tackling—was discovered. With a dreadful expression in their eyes some of the men glared at it, and there would, no doubt, have been a deadly struggle for it if the mate had not said, "Fetch it here," in a voice which none dared to disobey.

It formed but a mouthful to each, yet the poor fellows devoured it with the greed of ravening wolves, and carefully licked their fingers when it was done. The little cabin-boy had three portions

allotted to him, because Charlie Brooke and Dick Darvall added their allowance to his without allowing him to be aware of the fact.

But the extra allowance and kindness, although they added greatly to his comfort, could not stay the hand of Death. Slowly but surely the Destroyer came and claimed the young life. It was a sweet, calm evening when the summons came. The sea was like glass, with only that long, gentle swell which tells even in the profoundest calm of Ocean's instability. The sky was intensely blue, save on the western horizon, where the sun turned it into gold. It seemed as if all Nature were quietly indifferent to the sufferings of the shipwrecked men, some of whom had reached that terrible condition of starvation when all the softer feelings of humanity seem dead, for, although no whisper of their intention passed their lips, their looks told all too plainly that they awaited the death of the cabin-boy with impatience, that they might appease the intolerable pangs of hunger by resorting to cannibalism.

Charlie Brooke, who had been comforting the dying lad all day, and whispering to him words of consolation from God's book from time to time, knew well what those looks meant. So did the mate, who sat grim, gaunt and silent at his post, taking no notice apparently of what went on around him. Fortunately the poor boy was too far gone to observe the looks of his mates.

There was a can of paraffin oil, which had been thrown into the boat under the impression that it was something else. This had been avoided hitherto by the starving men, who deemed it to be poisonous. That evening the man called Jim lost control of himself, seized the can, and took a long draught of the oil. Whether it was the effect of that we cannot tell, but it seemed to drive him mad, for no sooner had he swallowed it than he uttered a wild shout, drew his knife, sprang up and leaped towards the place where the cabin-boy lay.

The mate, who had foreseen something of the kind, drew and levelled his revolver, but before he could fire Charlie had caught the uplifted arm, wrested the knife from the man, and thrust him violently back. Thus foiled Jim sprang up again and with a maniac's yell leaped into the sea, and swam resolutely away.

Even in their dire extremity the sailors could not see a comrade perish with indifference. They jumped up, hastily got out the oars, and pulled after him, but their arms were very weak; before they could overtake him the man had sunk to rise no more.

It was while this scene was being enacted that the spirit of the cabin-boy passed away. On ascertaining that he was dead Charlie covered him with a tarpaulin where he lay, but no word was uttered by any one, and the mate, with revolver still in hand, sat there—grim and silent—holding the tiller as if steering, and gazing sternly on the horizon. Yet it was not difficult to divine the thoughts of those unhappy and sorely tried men. Some by their savage glare at the cover that concealed the dead body showed plainly their dreadful desires. Brooke, Darvall, and the mate showed as clearly by their compressed lips and stern brows that they would resist any attempt to gratify these.

Suddenly the mate's brow cleared, and his eyes opened wide as he muttered, under his breath, "A sail!"

"A sail! a sail!" shrieked the man in the bow at the same moment, as he leaped up and tried to cheer, but he only gasped and fell back in a swoon into a comrade's arms.

It was indeed a sail, which soon grew larger, and ere long a ship was descried bearing straight towards them before a very light breeze. In less than an hour the castaways stood upon her deck—saved.

Chapter Eight. Ingratitude

A year or more passed away, and then there came a cablegram from New York to Jacob Crossley, Esquire, from Captain Stride. The old gentleman was at breakfast when he received it, and his housekeeper, Mrs Bland, was in the act of setting before him a dish of buttered toast when he opened the envelope. At the first glance he started up, overturned his cup of coffee, without paying the least attention to the fact, and exclaimed with emphasis— “As I expected. It is lost!”

“Ow could you expect it, sir, to be anythink else, w'en you've sent it all over the table-cloth?” said Mrs Bland, in some surprise.

“It is not that, Mrs Bland,” said Mr Crossley, in a hurried manner; “it is my ship the *Walrus*. Of course I knew long ago that it must have been lost,” continued the old gentleman, speaking his thoughts more to himself than to the housekeeper, who was carefully spooning up the spilt coffee, “but the best of it is that the Captain has escaped.”

“Well, I'm sure, sir,” said Mrs Bland, condescending to be interested, and to ignore, if not to forget, the coffee, “I'm very glad to 'ear it, sir, for Captain Stride is a pleasant cheery sort of man, and would be agreeable company if 'e didn't use so much sea-langwidge, and speak so much of 'is missis. An' I'm glad to 'ear it too, sir, on account o' that fine young man that sailed with 'im—Mr Book, I think, was—”

“No, Mrs Bland, it was Brooke; but that's the worst of the business,” said the old gentleman; “I'm not quite sure whether young Brooke *is* among the saved. Here is what the telegram says:—

“From Captain Stride to Jacob Crossley. Just arrived, (that's in New York, Mrs Bland); *Walrus* lost. All hands left her in three boats.

“Our boat made uninhabited island, and knocked to pieces. Eight months on the island. Rescued by American barque. Fate of other boats unknown. Will be home within a couple of weeks.”

“Why, it sounds like *Robinson Crusoe*, sir, don't it? which I read when I was quite a gurl, but I don't believe it myself though they do say it's all true. Young Mr Leather will be glad to 'ear the good noos of 'is friend—”

“But this is *not* good news of his friend; it is only uncertain news,” interrupted the old gentleman quickly. “Now I think of it, Mrs Bland, Mr Leather is to call here by appointment this very morning, so you must be particularly careful not to say a word to him about this telegram, or Captain Stride, or anything I have told you about the lost ship—you understand, Mrs Bland?”

“Certainly, sir,” said the housekeeper, somewhat hurt by the doubt thus implied as to the capacity of her understanding. “Shall I bring you some more toast, sir?” she added, with the virtuous feeling that by this question she was returning good for evil.

“No, thank you. Now, Mrs Bland, don't forget. Not a word about this to any one.”

“Ooks an' red-'ot pincers wouldn't draw a syllable out of *me*, sir,” returned the good woman, departing with an offended air, and leaving her master to understand that, in her opinion, such instruments might have a very different effect upon *him*.

“Ass that I was to speak of it to her at all,” muttered Mr Crossley, walking up and down the room with spectacles on forehead, and with both hands in his trousers-pockets creating disturbance among the keys and coppers. “I might have known that she could not hold her tongue. It would never do to let Mrs Brooke remain on the tenter-hooks till Stride comes home to clear the matter up. Poor Mrs Brooke! No wonder she is almost broken down. This hoping against hope is so wearing. And she's so lonely. To be sure, sweet May Leather runs out and in like a beam of sunshine; but it must be hard, very hard, to lose an only son in this way. It would be almost better to know that he was dead. H'm! and there's that good-for-nothing Shank. The rascal! and yet he's not absolutely good for

nothing—if he would only give up drink. Well, while there's life there's hope, thank God! I'll give him another trial.”

The old man's brow was severely wrinkled while he indulged in these mutterings, but it cleared, and a kindly look beamed on his countenance as he gave vent to the last expression.

Just then the door bell rang. Mr Crossley resumed the grave look that was habitual to him and next minute Shank Leather was ushered into the room.

The youth was considerably changed since we last met him. The year which had passed had developed him into a man, and clothed his upper lip with something visible to the naked eye. It had also lengthened his limbs, deepened his chest, and broadened his shoulders. But here the change for the better ended. In that space of time there had come over him a decided air of dissipation, and the freshness suitable to youth had disappeared.

With a look that was somewhat defiant he entered the room and looked boldly at his employer.

“Be seated, Mr Leather,” said the old gentleman in a voice so soft that the young man evidently felt abashed, but he as evidently steeled himself against better feelings, for he replied—

“Thank you, Mr Crossley, I'd rather stand.”

“As you please,” returned the other, restraining himself. “I sent for you, Mr Leather, to tell you that I have heard with sincere regret of your last outbreak, and—”

“Yes, sir,” said Shank, rudely interrupting, “and I came here not so much to hear what you have to say about my outbreak—as you are pleased to style a little jollification—as to tell you that you had better provide yourself with another clerk, for I don't intend to return to your office. I've got a better situation.”

“Oh, indeed!” exclaimed Crossley in surprise.

“Yes, indeed,” replied Shank insolently.

It was evident that the youth was, even at that moment, under the influence of his great enemy, else his better feelings would have prevented him from speaking so rudely to a man who had never shown him anything but kindness. But he was nettled by some of his bad companions having taunted him with his slavery to his besetting sin, and had responded to Mr Crossley's summons under the impression that he was going to get what he styled a “wiggling.” He was therefore taken somewhat aback when the old gentleman replied to his last remark gently.

“I congratulate you, Mr Leather, on getting a *better* situation (if it really should turn out to be better), and I sincerely hope it may—for your mother's sake as well as your own. This therefore disposes of part of my object in asking you to call—which was to say that I meant to pass over this offence and retain you in my employment. But it does not supersede the necessity of my urging you earnestly to give up drink, *not* so much on the ground that it will surely lead you to destruction as on the consideration that it grieves the loving Father who has bestowed on you the very powers of enjoyment which you are now prostituting, and who is at this moment holding out His hands to you and *waiting* to be gracious.”

The old man stopped abruptly, and Shank stood with eyes fixed on the floor and frowning brow.

“Have you anything more to say to me?” asked Mr Crossley.

“Nothing.”

“Then good-morning. As I can do nothing else to serve you, I will pray for you.”

Shank found himself in the street with feelings of surprise strong upon him.

“Pray for me!” he muttered, as he walked slowly along. “It never occurred to me before that he prayed at all! The old humbug has more need to pray for himself!”

Chapter Nine.

Shank Reveals Something More of his Character

Taking his way to the railway station Shank Leather found himself ere long at his mother's door. He entered without knocking.

"Shank!" exclaimed Mrs Leather and May in the same breath.

"Ay, mother, it's me. A bad shilling, they say, always turns up. *I* always turn up, therefore *I* am a bad shilling! Sound logic that, eh, May?"

"I'm glad to see you, dear Shank," said careworn Mrs Leather, laying her knitting-needles on the table; "you *know* I'm always glad to see you, but I'm naturally surprised, for this visit is out of your regular time."

"Has anything happened?" asked May anxiously. And May looked very sweet, almost pretty, when she was anxious. A year had refined her features, developed her mind and body, and almost converted her into a little woman. Indeed, mentally, she had become more of a woman than many girls in her neighbourhood who were much older. This was in all likelihood one of the good consequences of adversity.

"Ay, May, something has happened," answered the youth, flinging himself gaily into an arm-chair and stretching out his legs towards the fire; "I have thrown up my situation. Struck work. That's all."

"Shank!"

"Just so. Don't look so horrified, mother; you've no occasion to, for I have the offer of a better situation. Besides—ha! ha! old Crossley—close-fisted, crabbed, money-making, skin-flint old Crossley—is going to pray for me. Think o' that, mother—going to pray for me!"

"Shank, dear boy," returned his mother, "don't jest about religious things."

"You don't call old Crossley a religious thing, do you? Why, mother, I thought you had more respect for him than that comes to; you ought at least to consider his years!"

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