

**ROBERT  
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BALLANTYNE**

THE CREW OF THE WATER  
WAGTAIL

Robert Michael Ballantyne

**The Crew of the Water Wagtail**

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# R. M. Ballantyne

## The Crew of the Water Wagtail

### Chapter One.

### A Rough Beginning

It is well that mankind cannot pry into the secrets of futurity.

At all events, it is certain that if the crew of the *Water Wagtail* had known what was in store for them when they set sail from Bristol, one fine spring morning at the beginning of the sixteenth century, most of them would have remained at home—though it is not improbable that, even with full knowledge of coming events, some of the romantic among them, and a few of the reckless, might have decided to go on.

Undoubtedly Paul Burns would have scorned to draw back, for he was a “hero of romance;” an enthusiast of the deepest dye, with an inquiring mind, a sanguine disposition, and a fervent belief in all things great and good and grand. He was also a six-footer in his socks, a horse in constitution, a Hercules in frame, with a hook nose and a hawk eye and a strong jaw—and all the rest of it. Paul had a good brain, too, and was well educated—as education went in those days. Yes, there can be little doubt that even though Paul Burns had been able to see into the future, he would have deliberately chosen to go on that voyage.

So would Oliver Trench, for Oliver worshipped Paul! He loved him as if he had been an elder brother. He admired him, afar off, as a rare specimen of human perfection. He looked up to him, physically as well as mentally, for Oliver was at that time little more than a boy of medium size, but bold as a bull-dog and active as a weasel. Yes, we are safe to say that a revelation of the disasters, dangers, sufferings, etcetera, in store, would not have deterred Oliver Trench. He would have gone on that voyage simply because Paul Burns went. That was reason enough for him. The devotion of Ruth to Naomi was mild compared with that of Oliver to Paul—if words are a test of feelings—for Ruth’s beautiful language could not compare with the forcible expressions with which Oliver assured his friend that he would stick to him, neck or nothing, through thick and thin, to the latest hour of life!

As for the rest of the crew—Big Swinton, Little Stubbs, George Blazer, Squill, and the like—it was well, as we have said, that they could not see into the future.

There were forty of them, all told, including the cook and the cabin-boy. We do not include Paul Burns or Oliver Trench, because the former was naturalist to the expedition—a sort of semi-scientific freelance; and the latter, besides being the master’s, or skipper’s, son, was a free-and-easy lance, so to speak, whose duties were too numerous to mention, and too indefinite to understand. Most of the men were what is expressed by the phrase “no better than they should be.” Some of them, indeed, were even worse than that. The wars of the period had rendered it difficult to obtain good seamen at that particular time, so that merchant skippers had to content themselves with whatever they could get. The crew of the *Water Wagtail* was unusually bad, including, as it did, several burglars and a few pickpockets, besides loafers and idlers; so that, before leaving Bristol, a friend of the skipper, whose imagination was lively, styled it a crew of forty thieves.

The coast of Norway was the destination of the *Water Wagtail*. She never reached the coast of—but we must not anticipate. What her object was in reference to Norway we cannot tell. Ancient records are silent on the point.

The object of Paul Burns was to gather general information. At that period the world was not rich in general information. To discover, to dare, to do—if need were, to die—was the intention of our big hero. To be similarly circumstanced in a small way was our little hero’s ambition.

“Goin’ to blow,” remarked Skipper Trench, on the evening of the day on which he sailed, as he paced the deck with his hands in his pockets, and, as his son Oliver said, his “weather-eye” open.

It seemed as though the weather, having overheard the prophecy, was eager to fulfil it, for a squall could be seen bearing down on the ship even while the words were being uttered.

“Close reef to-o-o-p-s’ls!” roared Master Trench, with the energy of a man who means what he says.

We are not sure of the precise nautical terms used, but the result was a sudden and extensive reduction of canvas; and not a moment too soon, for the operation had scarcely been completed when the squall struck the ship, almost capsized her, and sent her careering over the billows “like a thing of life.”

This was the first of a succession of squalls, or gales, which blew the *Water Wagtail* far out upon the Atlantic Ocean, stove in her bulwarks, carried away her bowsprit and foretopmast, damaged her skylights, strained her rudder, and cleared her decks of loose hamper.

After many days the weather moderated a little and cleared up, enabling Master Trench to repair damages and shape his course for Norway. But the easterly gales returned with increased violence, undid all the repairs, carried away the compass, and compelled these ancient mariners to run westward under bare poles—little better than a wreck for winds and waves to play with.

In these adverse circumstances the skipper did what too many men are apt to do in their day of sorrow—he sought comfort in the bottle.

Love of strong drink was Master Trench’s weakest point. It was one of the few points on which he and his friend Burns disagreed.

“Now, my dear man,” said Paul, seating himself one evening at the cabin table and laying his hand impressively on his friend’s arm, “do let me lock up this bottle. You can’t navigate the ship, you know, when you’ve got so much of that stuff under your belt.”

“O yes, I can,” said the skipper, with an imbecile smile, for his friend had a winning way with him that conciliated even while he rebuked. “Don’t you fear, Paul, I—I’m all right!”

The half-offended idiotic expression of the man’s face was intensely ludicrous, but Paul could not see the ludicrous at that time. He only saw his usually sedate, manly, generous friend reduced to a state of imbecility.

“Come, now, Master Trench,” he said persuasively, taking hold of the case-bottle, “let me put it away.”

“N—no, I won’t” said the captain sharply, for he was short of temper.

The persuasive look on Paul’s face suddenly vanished. He rose, grasped the bottle firmly, went to the open hatch, and sent it whizzing up into the air with such force that it went far over the stern of the ship and dropped into the sea, to the unutterable amazement of the man at the helm, who observed the bottle’s unaccountable flight with an expression of visage all his own.

There is no accounting for the rapid transitions of thought and feeling in drunken men. The skipper sprang up, clenched his right hand, and gazed in fierce astonishment at his friend, who advanced towards him with a benignant smile, quite regardless of consequences. Even in the act of striking, the captain restrained his arm and opened his hand. Paul met it with a friendly grasp, while the faces of both men expanded in smiling goodwill.

“Y—you’re a trump, P—Paul,” said the captain. “I—I—won’t drink a—another d’op!”

And Master Trench kept his word. From that day forth, till circumstances rendered drinking impossible, he drank nothing stronger than water.

Soon after this event the weather improved, damages were again repaired, and the skipper—in whom there was much of the spirit of the old vikings—once more laid his course for Norway, resolving to steer, as the said vikings were wont to do, by the stars. But a spirit of mutiny was abroad in the forecastle by that time. If hard work, hard fare, and hard fortune are trying even to good men and true, what must they be to bad men and false?

“Here’s how it lays, men,” said Big Swinton, in a subdued voice, to a knot of friends around him. “Blowin’ hard as it has bin ever since we left England, it stands to reason that we must have pretty nigh got across the western sea to that noo land discovered by that man wi’ the queer name—I can’t remember rightly—”

“Columbus, you mean,” cried George Blazer. “Why, my father sailed with Columbus on his first voyage.”

“No, it wasn’t Columbus,” returned Swinton, in a sharp tone, “an’ you needn’t speak as if we was all deaf, Blazer. It was John Cabot I was thinkin’ of, who, with his son Sebastian, discovered land a long way to the nor’ard o’ Columbus’s track. They called it Newfoundland. Well, as I was sayin’, we must be a long way nearer to that land than to Norway, an’ it will be far easier to reach it. Moreover, the Cabots said that the natives there are friendly and peaceable, so it’s my opinion that we should carry on as we go till we reach Newfoundland, an’ see whether we can’t lead a jollier life there than we did in Old England.”

“But it’s *my* opinion,” suggested Little Stubbs, “that the skipper’s opinion on that point will have to be found out first, Swinton, for it’s of more importance than yours. You ain’t skipper *yet*, you know.”

“That’s so, Stubbs,” said Squill, with a nod.

“Let your tongues lie still,” retorted Swinton, in an undertoned growl. “Of course I know I’m not skipper yet, but if you men have the courage of rabbits I’ll be skipper before another sun rises—or whoever you choose to appoint.”

A sudden silence ensued for a few moments, for, although there had been mutinous whisperings before, no one had, up to that time, ventured to make a distinct proposal that action should be taken.

“What! steal the ship?” exclaimed a huge black-bearded fellow named Grummidge. “Nay—I’ll have no hand in that.”

“Of course not; we have no intention to *steal* the ship,” retorted Swinton, before any one else had time to express an opinion; “we are all upright honourable men here. We only mean to take the *loan* of her. After all we have suffered we are entitled surely to a pleasure-trip, and when that’s over we can return the ship to the owners—if so disposed. You’ll join us in that, Grummidge, won’t you? And we’ll make you skipper—or first mate, if you’re too modest to take command.” This sally was received with a subdued laugh, and with marks of such decided approval, that Grummidge was carried with the current—at all events, he held his tongue after that.

An earnest undertoned discussion followed, and it was finally arranged that Big Swinton should sound Master Trench about the propriety of running to Newfoundland instead of returning on their track to Norway. The seaman was not slow to act. That afternoon, while at the helm, he made the suggestion to the skipper, but met with a sharp rebuke and an order to attend to his duty.

No word did Big Swinton reply, but that very night he entered the cabin with a dozen men and seized the skipper, his son, and Paul Burns, while they slept. Of course, being greatly outnumbered, they were overcome and bound. The two officers of the vessel were also seized by another party on deck, and all the five were imprisoned in the hold.

Next morning they were brought on deck, and made to stand in a row before Big Swinton, who had, in the meantime, been appointed by the mutineers to the command of the ship.

“Now, Master Trench,” said Swinton, “we are no pirates. We have no desire to kill you, so that whether you are killed or not will depend on yourself. If you agree to navigate this ship to Newfoundland—good; if not we will heave you overboard.”

“Heave away then,” growled the skipper, his nature being such that the more he was defied the more defiant he became.

“Well, Master Trench, you shall have your way. Get the plank ready, boys,” said Swinton, turning to the men. “Now stand aside and let the first mate choose.”

The same question being put to the two mates, they returned similar answers, and were ordered to prepare to walk the plank.

“You don’t understand navigation, I fancy, Master Burns,” said Swinton to Paul, “but as you can set broken bones, and things of that sort, we will spare you if you agree to serve us.”

“Thank you,” replied Paul, with quiet urbanity. “I prefer to accompany Master Trench, if you have no objection.”

There was a slight laugh at the coolness of this reply, which enraged the new skipper.

“Say you so?” he exclaimed, jumping up. “Come, then, shove out the plank, lads, and bring them on one at a time.”

“Stop!” cried little Oliver, at this point. “You’ve forgot *me*.”

“No, my little man, I haven’t,” returned Swinton, with a cynical smile. “You shall accompany your amiable father; but first I’ll give you a fair chance,” he added, in a bantering tone: “will *you* navigate the ship?”

“Yes, I will,” answered Oliver promptly.

“Indeed!” exclaimed the new skipper, taken aback by the boy’s boldness, and at a loss for a reply.

“Yes, indeed,” retorted Oliver, “only put me in command, with an auger, and I’ll navigate the ship to the bottom of the sea, with you and all your cowardly crew on board of her!”

“Well said, little master,” cried Grummidge, while a general laugh of approval went round.

Seeing that there was a symptom of better feeling among some of the men, Master Trench was about to make an appeal to them, when—

“Land ho!” was shouted by the look-out in stentorian tones.

## Chapter Two.

### The Adventurers Land on the Island

The excitement caused by the sight of land was tremendous. Nearly every one ran to the bow or leaped on the bulwarks, and the prisoners were left unguarded.

Seeing this, Grummidge quietly cut their bonds unobserved, and then hurried forward to gaze with the rest. Even the man at the tiller left his post for a moment to get a better view of the land. On returning, he found Master Trench occupying his place, and Paul Burns standing beside him with a handspike in his grasp. Oliver had also armed himself with a marlinespike in default of a better weapon.

“Go for’ard, my man,” said the skipper, in a quiet voice, “an’ tell your mates to get ready the anchor and stand by the cable. Haste ye, if you value life.”

The man slunk away without a word.

“We seem far from land yet, Master Trench; why such haste?” asked Paul.

“Look over the stern,” was the skipper’s curt reply.

Paul and Oliver both did so, and saw that another squall was bearing down on them.

“Is it Newfoundland?” asked Paul.

“Ay, and an ugly coast to make in a squall. Hallo! there—if ye would not be food for fishes lay aloft and take in all sail!”

The skipper, as his wont was, gave the order in a stern tone of command, and resigned the tiller to Grummidge, who came aft at the moment. The men saw with surprise that a heavy squall was bearing down on them from the eastward. Mutiny flew, as it were, out at the hawseholes, while discipline re-entered by the cabin windows. Even Big Swinton was cowed for the moment. It may be that the peculiar way in which Paul Burns eyed him and toyed with the handspike had some effect on him. Possibly he was keenly alive to the danger which threatened them. At all events, he went to work like the rest!

And there was occasion for haste. Before the sails were properly secured, the squall struck them; the foremast was snapped off close to the deck; for a time the ship became unmanageable and drifted rapidly towards the land.

“Is that a small island that I see on the weather bow, Olly?” said the skipper to his son. “Look, your eyes are better than mine.”

“Yes, father. It looks like a small one.”

“Steer for that, Grummidge. We’ll take shelter in its lee.”

The sails were braced, and the direction of the vessel was changed, while the wreck of the foremast was being cleared away; but, just as they were drawing near to the island, the wind chopped round, and the hoped-for shelter they were approaching became suddenly a lee shore.

“Nothing can save us now,” muttered Grummidge, “the *Water Wagtail* is going to her doom.”

“You’re right, my man. Before another hour goes by, she will have wagged her tail for the last time,” said Master Trench, somewhat bitterly.

They were both right. In less than an hour after that the ship was hurled upon the outlying rocks of a low island. Shaken and strained as she had been during her disastrous voyage, it took but a short time to break her up, but the bow had been thrust high between two rocks and remained fast.

Circumstances do not change character, but they often bring it to the front. Heroes and poltroons may remain unknown until a sudden incident or change of condition reveals them. As the crew of the wrecked ship clustered on the fragment of the bow, and gazed on the tumultuous flood of foaming water that seethed between them and the shore, their hearts failed them for fear. Some sternly compressed their lips, and looked like men who had made up their minds to “die game.” A few

even looked defiant, as if daring Fate to do her worst, though the pallor of their countenances gave the lie to the expression of their features; but many of them, in the terror of the moment, cried aloud for mercy, and wildly promised amendment if their lives should be spared. A few were composed and grave. Brave men, though bad. Possibly some of these prayed. If so, they had the sense to do it silently to Him who knows the secrets of all hearts.

“No man can cross that and live,” said the skipper, in a low, sad tone.

“It is my intention to try, Master Trench,” said Paul Burns, grasping the end of a light line and tying it round his waist.

Little Oliver looked quickly and anxiously at his friend. His heart sank, for he saw at a glance that it was not possible to follow him. The deed, if done at all, must be done by his friend alone. Great, therefore, was the rebound of joy in the boy’s heart when Paul said—

“Now, Olly, attend to me. My life, under God, may depend on close attention to my signals and the management of the line. I can trust your father and the men to haul me back to the ship if need be, but I will trust only you to pay out and read my signals. Observe, now, let there be no *slack* to the line; keep it just taut but without any pull on it, so that you may *feel* the signals at once. One pull means *pay out faster*, two pulls mean *haul me aboard*, three pulls is *all right and fix the big hawser to the line so that I may haul it ashore*. Now, Olly, I trust to you to read my signals and act promptly.”

Oliver’s heart was too full to speak. He looked at his friend with swimming eyes and nodded his head.

“Men,” said Paul to the crew, “let me beg you to obey the boy’s orders smartly. If God wills it so, we shall all be saved.”

He leaped over the side as he concluded. Another moment and he was seen to rise and buffet the plunging waters manfully. Great as was the muscular strength of the young man, it seemed absolute feebleness to those who looked on; nevertheless he made headway towards the shore, which was strewn with great boulders with a low cliff behind them. It was among these boulders that his chief danger and difficulty lay, for his strong frame would have been as nothing if dashed against them.

Quickly he was lost to view in the hurly-burly of foam and spray.

With the utmost care did Oliver Trench perform his duty. It required both vigour of hand and delicacy of touch to keep the line right, but it was manipulated by hands whose vigour and touch were intensified by love.

“Ease off!” he cried, looking back impatiently at the strong fellows who held the slack of the line.

The men obeyed so readily that the line ran out too fast and the boy had much ado to check it. Just as he got it sufficiently taut, he felt what seemed to him like *two* pulls—“haul me in!” Could it be? He was not certain. In an agony of anxiety he held on, and was about to give the signal to haul in, when his father, who watched his every movement, instantly said, “Give him another second or two, Olly.”

Just then there was a strong single pull at the line.

“Pay out!—faster!” shouted Oliver, and, at the same moment he eased off his own feelings in a tremendous sigh of relief.

After that the line ran steadily for a few seconds, and no signals came. Then it ceased to run, and poor Oliver’s fears began to rush in upon him again, but he was speedily relieved by feeling three distinct and vigorous pulls.

“Thank God, he’s safe,” cried the boy. “Now then, pass along the hawser—quick!”

This was done, the light line was attached to a three-inch rope, and the party on the wreck waited anxiously.

“Give it a pull, Olly, by way of signal,” suggested Master Trench.

“He did not tell me to do that, father,” returned the boy, hesitating.

“No doubt he forgot it in the hurry—try it, anyhow.”

A hearty pull on the line was accordingly given, and they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the hawser move over the side and run towards the shore. When it ceased to run out they knew that Paul must have got hold of the end of it, so, making their end fast to the heel of the bowsprit, they waited, for as yet the rope lay deep in the heaving waters, and quite useless as a means of escape.

Presently the rope began to jerk, then it tightened, soon the bight of it rose out of the sea and remained there—rigid.

“Well done, Paul,” exclaimed the skipper, when this was accomplished. “Now, Olly, you go first, you’re light.”

But the boy hesitated. “No, father, you first,” he said.

“Obey orders, Olly,” returned the skipper sternly.

Without another word Oliver got upon the rope and proceeded to clamber along it. The operation was by no means easy, but the boy was strong and active, and the water not very cold. It leaped up and drenched him, however, as he passed the lowest point of the bight, and thereafter the weight of his wet garments delayed him, so that on nearing the shore he was pretty well exhausted. There, however, he found Paul up to the waist in the sea waiting for him, and the last few yards of the journey were traversed in his friend’s arms.

By means of this rope was every man of the *Water Wagtail’s* crew saved from a watery grave.

They found that the island on which they had been cast was sufficiently large to afford them shelter, and a brief survey of it proved that there was both wood and water enough to serve them, but nothing of animal or vegetable life was to be found. This was serious, because all their provisions were lost with the wrecked portion of the ship, so that starvation stared them in the face.

“If only the rum-kegs had been saved,” said one of the men, when they assembled, after searching the island, to discuss their prospects, “we might, at least, have led a merry life while it lasted.”

“Humph! Much good that would do you when you came to think over it in the next world,” said Grummidge contemptuously.

“I don’t believe in the next world,” returned the first speaker gruffly.

“A blind man says he doesn’t see the sun, and don’t believe in it,” rejoined Grummidge: “does that prove that there’s no sun?”

Here Master Trench interposed.

“My lads,” he said, “don’t you think that instead of talking rubbish it would be wise to scatter yourselves along the coast and see what you can pick up from the wreck? Depend on’t some of the provisions have been stranded among the rocks, and, as they will be smashed to pieces before long, the sooner we go about it the better. The truth is, that while you have been wastin’ your time running about the island, Master Burns and I have been doin’ this, an’ we’ve saved some things already—among them a barrel of pork. Come, rouse up and go to work—some to the shore, others to make a camp in the bush.”

This advice seemed so good that the men acted on it at once, with the result that before dark they had rescued two more barrels of pork and a barrel of flour from the grasp of the sea, besides some cases of goods which they had not taken time to examine.

Returning from the shore together, laden with various rescued articles, Paul and Oliver halted and sat down on a rock to rest for a few minutes.

“Olly,” said the former, “what was that I saw you wrapping up in a bit of tarred canvas, and stuffing so carefully under the breast of your coat, soon after the ship struck?”

“Mother’s last letter to me,” said the boy, with a flush of pleasure as he tapped his breast. “I have it safe here, and scarcely damaged at all.”

“Strange,” remarked Paul, as he pulled a well-covered packet from his own breast-pocket; “strange that your mind and mine should have been running on the same subject. See here, this is *my* mother’s last gift to me before she died—a letter, too, but it is God’s letter to fallen man.”

With great care the young man unrolled the packet and displayed a well-worn manuscript copy of a portion of the Gospel of John.

“This is copied,” he said, “from the translation of God’s Word by the great Wycliffe. It was given to my mother by an old friend, and was, as I have said, her parting gift to me.”

The friends were interrupted in their examination of this interesting M.S. by the arrival of one of the sailors, with whom they returned to the encampment in the bush.

## Chapter Three.

### First Experiences on the Island

A wonderfully picturesque appearance did these shipwrecked mariners present that night when, under the shelter of the shrubbery that crowned their small island, they kindled several camp-fires, and busied themselves in preparing supper.

As there was no law in the island—and our skipper, having lost his ship, forbore to assert any right to command—every one naturally did what seemed right in his own eyes.

As yet there had arisen no bone of contention among them. Of food they had secured enough for at least a few days. Fire they had procured by means of flint, steel, and tinder. A clear spring furnished them with water, and ships' buckets washed ashore enabled them to convey the same to their encampment. Fortunately, no rum-kegs had been found, so that evil passions were not stirred up, and, on the whole, the first night on the island was spent in a fair degree of harmony—considering the character of the men.

Those who had been kindred souls on board ship naturally drew together on shore, and kindled their several fires apart. Thus it came to pass that the skipper and his son, the two mates, and Paul Burns found themselves assembled round the same fire.

But the two mates, it is right to add, were only sympathetic in a small degree, because of their former position as officers, and their recent imprisonment together. In reality they were men of no principle and of weak character, whose tendency was always to throw in their lot with the winning side. Being a little uncertain as to which was the winning side that night, they had the wisdom to keep their own counsel.

Oliver presided over the culinary department.

“You see, I'm rather fond of cookin',” he said, apologetically, “that's why I take it in hand.”

“Ah, that comes of his bein' a good boy to his mother,” said Master Trench in explanation, and with a nod of approval. “Olly was always ready to lend her a helpin' hand in the house at anything that had to be done, which has made him a Jack-of-all-trades—cookin' among the rest, as you see.”

“A pity that the means of displaying his powers are so limited,” said Paul, who busied himself in levelling the ground beside the fire for their beds.

“Limited!” exclaimed Trench, “you are hard to please, Master Paul; I have lived on worse food than salt pork and pancakes.”

“If so, father,” said Oliver, as he deftly tossed one of the cakes into the air and neatly caught it on its other side in the pan, “you must either have had the pork without the pancakes or the pancakes without the pork.”

“Nay, Master Shallowpate, I had neither.”

“What! did you live on nothing?”

“On nothing better than boiled sheepskin—and it was uncommon tough as well as tasteless; but it is wonderful what men will eat when they're starving.”

“I think, father,” returned the boy, as he tossed and deftly caught the cake again, “that it is more wonderful what men will eat when they're *not* starving! Of all the abominations that mortal man ever put between his grinders, I think the worst is that vile stuff—”

He was interrupted by a sudden outbreak of wrath at the fire next to theirs, where Big Swinton, Grummidge, and several others were engaged, like themselves, in preparing supper.

“There will be trouble in the camp before long, I see plainly enough,” remarked Paul, looking in the direction of the disputants. “These two men, Swinton and Grummidge, are too well-matched in body and mind and self-will to live at peace, and I foresee that they will dispute your right to command.”

“They won’t do that, Paul,” returned Trench quietly, “for I have already given up a right which I no longer possess. When the *Water Wagtail* went on the rocks, my reign came to an end. For the future we have no need to concern ourselves. The man with the most powerful will and the strongest mind will naturally come to the top—and that’s how it *should* be. I think that all the troubles of mankind arise from our interfering with the laws of Nature.”

“Agreed, heartily,” replied Paul, “only I would prefer to call them the laws of God. By the way, Master Trench, I have not yet told you that I have in my possession some of these same laws in a book.”

“Have you, indeed?—in a book! That’s a rare and not altogether a safe possession now-a-days.”

“You speak the sober truth, Master Trench,” returned Paul, putting his hand into a breast-pocket and drawing forth the packet which contained the fragment of the Gospel of John. “Persecution because of our beliefs is waxing hotter and hotter just now in unfortunate England. However, we run no risk of being roasted alive in Newfoundland for reading God’s blessed Word—see, there it is. A portion of the Gospel of John in manuscript, copied from the English translation of good Master Wycliffe.”

“A good and true man, I’ve heard say,” responded the skipper, as he turned over the leaves of the precious document with a species of solemn wonder, for it was the first time he had either seen or handled a portion of the Bible. “Pity that such a friend of the people should not have lived to the age o’ that ancient fellow—what’s his name—Thoosle, something or other?”

“Methuselah,” said Paul; “you’re right there, Master Trench. What might not a good man like Wycliffe have accomplished if he had been permitted to live and teach and fight for the truth for nine hundred and sixty-nine years?”

“You don’t mean to say he lived as long as that?” exclaimed the boy, looking up from his pots and pans.

“Indeed I do.”

“Well, well! he must have been little better than a live mummy by the end of that time!” replied Oliver, resuming his interest in his pots and pans.

“But how came you to know about all that Master Paul, if this is all the Scripture you’ve had?” asked Trench.

“My mother was deeply learned in the Scriptures,” answered Paul, “and she taught me diligently from my boyhood. The way she came to be so learned is curious. I will tell you how it came about, while we are doing justice to Oliver’s cookery.”

“You must know, Master Trench,” continued Paul, after the first demands of appetite had been appeased, “that my dear mother was a true Christian from her youth. Her father was converted to Christ by one of that noble band of missionaries who were trained by the great Wycliffe, and whom he sent throughout England to preach the Gospel to the poor, carrying in their hands manuscript portions of that Gospel, translated by Wycliffe into plain English. You see, that curious invention of the German, John Gutenberg—I mean printing by movable types—was not known at that time, and even now, although half a century has passed since the Bible was printed abroad in Latin, no one with means and the power to do it has yet arisen to print an English Bible, but the day is not far distant when that work shall be done, I venture to prophesy, though I make no pretence to be among the prophets!

“Well, as I was going to say, the missionary was a hoary old man when he preached the sermon that turned my grandfather from darkness to light. My grandfather was just fifteen years old at that time. Ten years later the same missionary came to grandfather’s house, worn out with years and labours, and died there, leaving all his treasure to his host. That treasure was a small portion of the New Testament in English, copied from Wycliffe’s own translation. You may be sure that my grandfather valued the legacy very highly. When he died he left it to my mother. About that time my mother married and went to live on the banks of the Severn. Not far from our farm there dwelt a family of the name of Hutchins. The father had changed his name and taken refuge there during the

recent civil wars. This family possessed a Latin Bible, and the head of it was well acquainted with its contents. It was through him that my mother became well acquainted with the Old as well as the New Testament, and thus it was that I also came in course of time to know about Methuselah, and a good many more characters about whom I may perhaps tell you one of these days.”

“So, then, this is the manuscript the old missionary carried about, is it?” said Trench, fingering the fragment tenderly.

“Ay, and a good translation it is, I have been told by one whom most people would think too young to be a judge. You must know that this Mr Hutchins has a son named William, who is considerably younger than I am, but he is such a clever, precocious fellow, that before he left home for college I used to find him a most interesting companion. Indeed, I owe to him much of what little I have learned, for he is a wonderful linguist, being able to read Hebrew and Greek about as easily as Latin or English. He is at Oxford now—at least he was there when I last heard of him. Moreover, it was through the Hutchins’ family, in a roundabout way, that *your* mother, Olly, came to learn to write such letters as you have got so carefully stowed away there in your breast-pocket.”

“Good luck to the Hutchins’ family then, say I,” returned Olly, “for I’m glad to be able to read, though, on account of the scarcity and dearness of manuscripts, I don’t have the chance of makin’ much use of my knowledge. But you puzzle me, Paul. It was poor Lucy Wentworth who used to live with us, and who died only last year, that taught me to read, and I never heard her mention the name of Hutchins. Did you, father?”

“No, I never did, Olly. She said she had lived with a family named Tyndale before she came to us, poor thing! She was an amazin’ clever girl to teach, and made your mother good at it in a wonderful short time. She tried me too, but it was of no use, I was too tough an’ old!”

“Just so, Master Trench,” rejoined Paul. “Hutchins’ real name was Tyndale, and he had resumed the name before Lucy Wentworth went to live with the family. So, you see, Olly, you are indebted, in a roundabout way, as I said, to the Tyndales for your mother’s letter. William will make his mark pretty deeply on the generation, I think, if God spares him.”

Little did Paul Burns think, when he made this prophetic speech by the camp-fire on that distant isle of the sea, that, even while he spoke William Tyndale was laying the foundation of that minute knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages, which afterwards enabled him to give the Bible to England in her own tongue, and that so ably translated, that, after numerous revisions by the most capable of scholars, large portions of his work remain unaltered at the present day.

The night was far spent, and the other members of the camp had been long buried in slumber before Paul and Trench and Oliver could tear themselves away from the manuscript Gospel of John. The latter two, who knew comparatively little of its contents, were at first impressed chiefly with the fact that they were examining that rare and costly article—a book, and a forbidden book, too, for the reading of which many a man and woman had been burned to death in times past—but they became still more deeply impressed as Paul went on reading and commenting and pointing out the value of the Book as God’s own “Word” to fallen man.

“Here is a promise to rest upon,” said Paul, as he finally closed the book and repeated the verse from memory, “Jesus said, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

“Ay, that’s it, Paul—*free*! We’re all slaves, more or less, to something or other. What we all want is to be *free*,” said Master Trench, as he drew his blanket round him, pillowed his head on his cloak, and went to sleep.

Silently Paul and Oliver followed his example, the fires died out, and in a few minutes the slumbering camp was shrouded in the mantle of night.

Energetic action was the order of the next day, for those shipwrecked mariners knew well enough that nothing but hard and steady labour could enable them to live on an apparently desolate island.

By daybreak most of the crew had scattered themselves along the shores, or over the interior, to spy out the land. About two hours later they began to drop into camp as hungry as hawks, each carrying the result of his researches in his arms or on his shoulders.

“Well done, Squill!” said Paul, who chanced to be first back in camp, with a huge sail bundled up on his shoulder, and who, just then, was busy blowing up his fire; “got another barrel of pork, eh?”

“It’s myself as doesn’t know, sur,” answered Squill, “and it wasn’t me as found it, but Jim Heron there. I only helped to sling it on the pole, and shoulder an end. It’s aither pork or gunpowther, so if it ain’t good for a blow out it’ll be good for a blow up, anyhow.”

“Did you see little Oliver anywhere?” asked Paul.

“Ay, sur, I saw him on the shore, bringing up what seemed to me the ship’s bowsprit—anyhow, a spar o’ some sort, about as big as he could haul along.”

“Just so,” returned Paul, with a laugh, “a ridge-pole for our tent. He’s a smart boy, little Olly.”

“Sure he’s all that, sur, and more. Here he comes, blowin’ like a porpoise.”

Sure enough, Oliver appeared at the moment, dragging a heavy spar behind him. Several of the men appeared at the same time, staggering through the bushes, with various loads of wreckage, which they flung down, and noisily began discussing their experiences as they lighted the fires and prepared breakfast.

“Here comes Little Stubbs,” cried Jim Heron. “What fortune, comrade?”

“Good fortune, though my load is the lightest yet brought in.”

He flung down a small piece of wood with an air of satisfaction.

“Why, it’s only a boat’s rudder!” said Oliver.

“Ay, so it is, and the boat lies where I picked it up, but it was too heavy to bring into camp without your assistance, boy. And the best of it is that it’s not much damaged. Very little repair will make her fit for sea again.”

This was indeed a find of immense importance, and the assembled party discussed the event in all its bearings till their mouths were partially stopped by pork and pancakes.

In the midst of this they were interrupted by the arrival of Big Swinton, George Blazer, and Grummidge with another find, which afterwards cost them much trouble and regret—namely, a couple of young lads, natives, whom they led into camp with their wrists tightly bound behind their backs.

## Chapter Four.

### Strange Visitors—Dark Plots—And Evil Purposes

The youths who had been captured were simple savages, with very little clothing, and with an expression of considerable alarm on their faces. As was afterwards learned, they had been coasting along the shore of the large neighbouring island in a canoe; had observed the strange fires in the night-time, and had crossed over the channel to see what could be the cause thereof. On reaching the highest part of the island they discovered some of the sailors, and turned to fly to their canoe, but Blazer had observed them, their retreat was cut off, and they were captured—not without a severe struggle, however, in which they were very roughly handled.

Big Swinton, still smarting under the bruises and bites he had received in the scuffle, dragged them forward, and demanded angrily what was to be done to them.

“What have they done?” asked Trench.

“Done!—why, they have kicked and bitten like wildcats, and I doubt not have come over here to see what they can steal. In my opinion a thief deserves keel-hauling at the very least.”

Master Trench’s mouth expanded into a very broad smile as he looked round the group of men. “D’ye hear that, lads, what *Master Swinton* thinks ought to be done to *thieves*?”

The men broke into a loud laugh, for even the most obtuse among them could not fail to perceive the humour of the skipper’s look and question.

“You have nothing more to do wi’ the matter, Trench, than any one else has,” returned Swinton. “I claim these lads as my prisoners, and I’ll do with them what I please. No man is master now. Might is right on this island!”

The words had scarcely been uttered when Big Swinton felt his right shoulder grasped as if in a vice, and next moment he was flung violently to the ground, while Paul Burns stood over him with a huge piece of wood in his hand, and a half-stern, half-smiling look on his countenance.

The men were taken completely by surprise, for Paul had, up to this time, shown such a gentle unwarlike spirit that the crew had come to regard him as “a soft lump of a fellow.”

“Big Swinton,” he said, in the mildest of voices, “as you have laid down the law that ‘might is right,’ you cannot, of course, object to my acting on it. In virtue of that law, I claim these prisoners as mine, so you may get up and go about your business. You see, lads,” he added, turning to the men, while Swinton rose and retired, “though I have no wish to domineer over you or to usurp authority. I have a right to claim that my voice shall be heard and my reasons weighed. As Swinton truly remarked, no man is master now, but as he followed this remark by making *himself* master, and laying down a law for us, I thought it might be complimentary to him just to act, for once, under his law, and show him how well it works! Now, let me have a word with you.

“It is evident that the land over there is peopled with savages who, probably, never saw white men before. If we treat these young fellows kindly, and send them away with gifts in their hands, we shall, no doubt, make friends of the savages. If we treat them ill, or kill them, their relations will come over, mayhap in swarms, and drive us into the sea. I drop the Swinton law of might being right, and ask you who are now the law-makers—which is it to be—kindness or cruelty?”

“Kindness!” shouted by far the greater number of the audience, for even bad men are ready enough to see and admit the beauty of truth and justice when they are not themselves unpleasantly affected by these principles.

The decision being thus made, Paul took the arm of one of the young Indians and led him gently towards his fire, while the men scattered to their several camps. Master Trench led the other youth in the same kindly way, and little Oliver, motioning to them to sit down, set before them two platters of pork and pancakes. This he did with such a benignant smile that the poor youths were

obviously relieved from the dread of immediate and personal violence. After some glances of timid uncertainty they began to eat.

“That’s right,” said Oliver, patting the bigger of the two on the shoulder, “you’ll find the victuals pretty good, though you’re not much used to ’em, mayhap.”

Of course the youths did not understand the words, but they understood and fully appreciated the feeling with which they were expressed. They also appreciated most powerfully the viands. At first they were greatly perplexed by the offer of knives and forks; but, after looking at these implements gravely for a few moments, they laid them gently down, and went to work in the natural way with fingers and teeth.

After they had finished the food, and licked the platters clean, they were presented with several bright brass buttons, an old clasp-knife, a comb, and a kerchief or two, with which inestimable gifts they embarked in their canoe, and returned to the opposite shore.

That day a most important discovery was made among the wreckage, namely, a case containing fish-hooks of various sizes and a number of lines. With these, and the boat repaired, Master Trench saw his way to prolonged existence on the island.

“To tell ye the plain truth,” he remarked to Little Stubbs, with whom he fell in while searching on the shore, “before this case of tackle was found, I had no hope at all of surviving here, for a few barrels of pork and flour could not last long among so many, and our end would have bin something awful; but now, with God’s blessing, we may do well enough until we have time to think and plan for our escape.”

“But d’ye think, master,” said Stubbs, “that we shall find fish in them waters?”

“Find ’em! Ay, I make no doubt o’ that, but we shall soon put it to the test, for the boat will be ready by to-morrow or next day at furthest, and then we shall see what the fish hereabouts think o’ salt pork. If they take to it as kindly as the Indians did, we shall soon have grub enough and to spare.”

The natural tendency of man to bow to the best leader was shown immediately after the incident of the capture of the Indians, for Paul Burns was thence-forward quietly appealed to by most of the crew in all circumstances which required much consideration. Paul, being a law-respecting man, naturally turned to the skipper, whose decision was usually final, and thus Master Trench dropped, by general consent, into his old position of commander.

But it must not be supposed that all the party acquiesced in this arrangement. There were men among that crew—such as Swinton, Blazer, Garnet, and others—who, either from false training, bad example, or warped spirits, had come to the condition of believing that the world was made for their special behoof; that they possessed that “divine right” to rule which is sometimes claimed by kings, and that whoever chanced to differ from them was guilty of arrogance, and required to be put down! These men were not only bad, like most of the others, but revengeful and resolute. They submitted, in the meantime, to the “might” of Paul Burns, backed as he was by numbers, but they nursed their wrath to keep it warm, and, under the leadership of Big Swinton, plotted the downfall of their rivals.

Meanwhile, being unquestionably “in power,” Master Trench, Paul, Oliver, Grummidge, Stubbs, and several of the well-affected, took possession of the boat when ready, and, inviting Swinton to join them—as a stroke of policy—pushed off, with hooks and lines, to make the first essay in the way of fishing on the now famous Banks of Newfoundland.

Anchoring the boat in what they deemed a suitable spot, they went to work.

“I wonder if they’ll take to pork,” remarked Stubbs, as he baited a large hook.

“If they take to it as you do, we shall soon run short o’ that article,” said Swinton, dropping his hook into the water.

“I have brought off some shellfish,” remarked Master Trench. “They may prefer that.”

“So have I, father,” said Oliver, whose bait was already at the bottom, “and if—hallo! hold on! hi! Oh! I say!”

While the boy was thus ejaculating, in a state of blazing excitement, his arms, and indeed his body, to say nothing of his spirit, were being jerked violently by his line in a way that suggested something awful at the other end!

“Have a care, Olly!” “Gently, lad!” “Hold on, boy!” “Let ’im run!” were among the contradictory pieces of advice given in various tones of warning, remonstrance, or simple recommendation; but Oliver heeded them not. Acting on his own judgment he drew his fish, or whatever it might be, gradually and carefully from the deep.

“A mermaid it must be, to tug so hard,” muttered Stubbs, as he and the others looked on with eager interest.

“A merman if it’s anything,” said Squill; “sure there was never a maid in the say, or out of it, as would tug like that.”

“That depends,” said Grummidge. “I’ve had ’em tuggin’ at my heart-strings worse than that many a time.”

“Look out! Here it comes,” cried Oliver, as something huge and white was seen to flash wildly in the green depths. “Have the cleek ready.”

“All ready, my boy,” said his father, in a low voice, leaning over the side with a stick, at the end of which was a large iron hook.

“Now then, father! Quick! Missed it? No! Hurrah!”

For a moment it seemed as if Master Trench had got Neptune himself on his cleek, so severely did his stout frame quiver. Then he gave a tremendous heave—“ya-hoy!” and up came a magnificent cod—the first of a grand hecatomb of cod-fish which have since that day enriched the world, nauseated the sick with “liver oil,” and placed Newfoundland among the most important islands of the British Empire.

“Well done, Olly!” exclaimed the delighted father; but he had barely time to open his mouth for the next remark, when Squill uttered an Irish yell, and was seen holding on to his line with desperate resolve stamped on every feature.

“That’s the merman this time,” cried Stubbs.

“His gran’mother, no less,” muttered Squill, in a strongly suppressed voice, while he anxiously hauled in the line.

A shout from the other side of the boat here diverted attention.

“Attacked front and rear!” cried Paul, with a hilarious laugh, “I shouldn’t wonder if—hallo! N—no, it was only a nib—ha! there he is!”

And, truly, there he was in a few minutes, another splendid cod in the bottom of the boat.

To make a long story short, the boat was nearly filled with cod before the sun set, and that night was spent in general rejoicing and feasting on fish—with a second course of pork and pancakes for those who were insatiable.

But the state of contentment did not last long. The very next day there was quarrelling as to who should go in the boat. To allay the contention, Trench and Paul volunteered to stay in camp and help the party that should be left to split and clean the fish, and erect tents and booths. Again the fishing was successful, but dissensions about the use of the boat soon became more violent than ever.

Of course, in all this Master Trench and his friend Paul took a prominent part in trying to smooth matters, to the intense jealousy of Big Swinton and his sympathisers. In short, the camp ere long was divided into two hostile bands—the moderately bad and the immoderately wicked, if we may so put it. The first, who were few in number, sided with Trench and his friends; the second declared for Swinton. But the resolute bearing of Paul and the skipper, and the fact that the whole party was destitute of weapons (except clubs cut out of the bush, and a few clasp-knives), kept the larger and more vicious party in check.

Swinton and his friends, therefore, had recourse to secret plotting; but, plot as they would, they had not sufficient brain-power among them to devise a method by which to free themselves of the men they envied.

At last circumstances favoured them. It was found necessary to send men to the other side of the island to cut and fetch over some small trees that grew there, in order to make stages on which to dry their fish. As the operation would require part of two days, it was proposed to spend the night there. Swinton was to command the party, and Master Trench said, jestingly, that he and Master Burns, with Olly, would stay to guard the camp! The wood-cutting party was to start early the next day.

Then a plan of revenge flashed into Big Swinton's mind. That night he revealed it to those of his friends whom he could trust, and who were necessary to his purpose. The night following—while the men around them should be sleeping at the other side of the island, and their enemies were alone in the camp—was fixed on for the execution of their purpose.

## Chapter Five.

### Turned Adrift in a Foreign Land

It was a calm but very dark night when Swinton, Blazer, Garnet, Heron, Taylor, and several other men of kindred spirit, rose from their couches at the further end of the island, and, stealthily quitting the place, hastened back to their original camp.

They reached it about midnight, and, as they had expected, found all quiet, for the so-called “guard” of the camp had been hard at work all day and were at that moment fast asleep. Paul and the captain, with Oliver, lay side by side under a tent which they had constructed out of broken spars and a piece of sailcloth.

Their foes drew together not far from the spot.

“Now, men,” said Swinton, “this is a tough job we have in hand, for they are strong men, and the boy, albeit not big, is a very tiger-cat to fight. You see, if our plan was murder we could easily settle their business while they slept but that’s not our plan. We are *not* murderers—by no means!”

“Certainly not,” growled Blazer, with virtuous solemnity.

“Well, that bein’ so, we must take them alive. I will creep into the tent with you, Jim Heron, for you’re big and strong enough. You will fall on Trench and hold ’im down. I’ll do the same to Burns. Garnet will manage the boy. The moment the rest of you hear the row begin, you will jump in and lend a hand wi’ the ropes. After we’ve got ’em all safe into the boat, we will pull to the big island—land them there, an’ bid them a tender farewell!”

“But surely you won’t land them without a morsel to eat?” said Taylor.

“Why not? They’re sure to fall in wi’ their *dear* friends the savages, who will, doubtless, be very grateful to ’em, an’ supply grub gratis! Now, lads, you understand what you’ve got to do?”

“Ay, ay,” was the response, in a low tone, as they moved cautiously away, like evil spirits, to carry out their wicked plans.

“Fortune,” it is said, “favours the brave,” but in this case she did not thus bestow her favours, for the cowardly plan was successfully carried out. Before the sleepers were well awake, they were overwhelmed by numbers, secured and bound. They were not gagged, however, as no one was near to hear even if they shouted their loudest, which they knew it was useless to do. In a few minutes the three prisoners were hurried into the boat and rowed across the wide channel that separated the islet from the opposite shore.

At that time it was not supposed, either by the original discoverers or those who immediately followed them, that Newfoundland was one large island—considerably larger than Ireland. Not till many a year afterwards did explorers ascertain that it was an island of about three hundred and seventeen miles in length, by about the same in breadth; but so cut up by deep bays, inlets, and fords as to have much the appearance of a group of islands.

During their passage across the channel both Trench and Paul attempted to reason with Swinton, but that hardened villain refused to utter a word till their prisoners were marched up the shingly beach, and told to sit down on a ledge of rock under the steep cliffs, where innumerable sea-birds were screaming a clamorous welcome, or, perchance, a noisy remonstrance.

“Now, my friends,” said their foe, “as you are fond of commanding, you may take command o’ them there sea-birds—they won’t object!—and if ye fall in wi’ your friends the savages, you may give them my love an’ good wishes.”

“But surely you don’t mean to leave us here without food, and with our hands tied behind us?” fiercely exclaimed Master Trench, whose wrath at any thing like injustice was always prone to get the better of his wisdom.

“As to grub,” answered Swinton, “there’s plenty of that around, if you only exert yourself to find it. I won’t cut your lashin’s, however, till we are fairly in the boat, for we can’t trust you. Come along, lads; and, Garnet, you bring the boy with ye.”

Under the impression that he was to be separated from his father and friend, and taken back again to the islet, poor Oliver, whom they had not thought it worth while to bind, struggled with a ferocity that would have done credit to the wildcats with which he had been compared; but Garnet was a strong man, and held him fast.

“Take it easy, my boy,” said Paul, who, being helpless, could only look on with intense pity. “Submit to God’s will—we will pray for you.”

But Olly’s spirit could by no means reach the submitting point until he was fairly exhausted. While they dragged him towards the boat, Taylor turned back and flung a small canvas bag at the captain’s feet.

“There, Master Trench,” he said, “you’ll find a lump o’ pork in that bag to keep you goin’ till ye get hold o’ somethin’ else. An’ don’t take on about the boy. *We* don’t want ’im, bless you. Why, we only want to prevent him settin’ you free before we gets fairly away.”

This was true. When the boat was reached and the men were on board, ready to shove off, Garnet, still holding Olly fast by the arm, said, “Keep still, will you, and hear what Master Swinton has got to say?”

“Now, you fiery polecat,” said Swinton, “you may go and cut their lashin’s, and take *that* as a parting gift.”

The gift was a sounding box on the ear; but Olly minded it not, for while Garnet was speaking, as he stood knee-deep in the water close to the boat, he had observed an axe lying on one of the thwarts near to him. The instant he was set free, therefore, he seized the axe, and, flourishing it close past Garnet’s nose, with a cheer of defiance he sprang towards the beach. Garnet leaped after him, but he was no match for the agile boy, who in another minute had severed Paul’s bonds and placed the weapon in his hands.

“Hallo! hi, you’ve forgot *me*. Cut my—ho!”

But there was no occasion for Master Trench to cry out and struggle with the cords that bound him. A furious rush of Paul with the axe caused Garnet to double with the neatness of a hunted hare. He bounded into the boat which was immediately shoved off, and the sailors rowed away, leaving Paul to return and liberate the captain at leisure.

Silently the trio stood and watched the receding boat, until it was lost in the darkness of the night. Then they looked at each other solemnly. Their case was certainly a grave one.

“Cast away on an unknown shore,” murmured the captain, in a low tone; as if he communed with his own spirit rather than with his companions, “without food, without a ship or boat—without hope!”

“Nay, Master Trench,” said Paul, “not without hope; for ‘God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble,’ so says His own Word, as my mother has often read to me.”

“It is well for you, Paul,” returned the captain, “that you can find comfort in such words—I can find none. Stern realities and facts are too strong for me. How can I take comfort in unfulfilled promises? Here we are in trouble enough, surely. In what sense is God a ‘refuge’ to us—or ‘strength,’ or a ‘present help’? Why, we are left absolutely destitute here, without so much as a bite of food to keep our bodies and souls together.”

He spoke with some bitterness, for he was still chafing under the sense of the wrong which he had suffered at the hands of men to whom he had been invariably kind and forbearing. As he turned from Paul with a gesture of impatience his foot struck against the canvas bag of pork which the man Taylor had flung to him on leaving, and which had been forgotten. He stopped suddenly and gazed at it; so did Paul.

“Looks like as if God had already helped us—at least to food—does it not?” said the latter.

“It was Taylor helped us to that,” objected Trench.

“And who put it into Taylor’s heart to help us?” asked Paul. “He is one of the worst men of our crew, so we can hardly say it was his own tenderness, and certainly it was not the devil who moved him to it. Am I wrong in holding that it was ‘Our Father’?”

“I believe you are right, Paul. Anyhow, I have neither the capacity nor the inclination to dispute the point now. Pick up the bag, Olly, and come along. We must try to find some sort of shelter in which to spend the rest o’ the night and consider our future plans.”

With a lighter heart and firmer faith, Paul Burns followed his leader, silently thanking God as he went along for thus far, and so opportunely, demonstrating His own faithfulness.

They had to wander some time before a suitable camping spot was found, for that part of the Newfoundland coast on which they had been landed was almost inaccessible. The cliffs in many places rose sheer out of the water to a height of full three hundred feet. Only in a few places little strips of shingly beach lay between the base of the cliffs and the sea, so that the finding of an opening in those stupendous ramparts of rock was no easy matter in a dark night.

At last they came to a place where the cliffs appeared to rise less precipitously. After careful clambering for some minutes they discovered a sort of gap in the rampart, up which they climbed, amid rugged and broken masses, until they reached a somewhat level plateau, or shelf, covered with small bushes. Here they resolved to encamp.

“Whether it’s the top o’ the cliffs or not, there’s no findin’ out,” remarked Trench, as he tried to survey the ground; “but whether or not don’t matter, for it looks level enough to lie on, an’ we’re as like as not to break our necks if we try to go further.”

“Agreed,” said Paul; “but now it occurs to me that our pork may be raw, and that we shall want fire to cook it. Have you got flint and steel in your pocket, Master Trench?”

“Ay—never travel without it; but by ill-luck I’ve got no tinder. Flint and steel are useless, you know, without that.”

“If ill-luck troubles *you*,” returned Paul, “good luck favours *me*, for I have got a bit of tinder, and—”

“The pork’s raw,” exclaimed Oliver, who had been hastily investigating the contents of the canvas bag; “but, I say, there’s more than pork here. There’s a lot o’ the little flour-cakes our cook was so fond of makin’.”

“Good. Now then let us have a search for wood,” said Paul. “If we find that, we shall get along well enough till morning. But have a care, Olly, keep from the edge of the cliff. The ledge is not broad. Have an eye too, or rather an ear, for water as you go along.”

Success attended their search, for in a few minutes Paul and the captain returned with loads of dry branches, and Olly came back reporting water close at hand, trickling from a crevice in the cliffs.

“Your shirt-front tells the tale, Olly. You’ve been drinking,” said Paul, who was busy striking a light at the time.

“Indeed I have; and we shall all be obliged to drink under difficulties, for we have neither cup nor mug with us.”

“Neither is wanted, boy, as I’ll soon show you,” said Paul. “Why, a bit of birch-bark, even a piece of paper, forms a good drinking vessel if you only know how to use it. Ha! caught at last,” he added, referring to some dry grasses and twigs which burst into flame as he spoke.

Another moment and a ruddy glare lit up the spot, giving to things near at hand a cosy, red-hot appearance, and to more distant objects a spectral aspect, while, strangely enough, it seemed to deepen to profounder darkness all else around. Heaping on fresh fuel and pressing it down, for it consisted chiefly of small branches, they soon had a glowing furnace, in front of which the pork ere long sputtered pleasantly, sending up a smell that might have charmed a gourmand.

“Now, then, while this is getting ready let us examine our possessions,” said the captain, “for we shall greatly need all that we have. It is quite clear that we could not return to our shipmates even if we would—”

“No, and I would not even if I could,” interrupted Oliver, while busy with the pork chops.

“And,” continued his father, regardless of the interruption, “it is equally clear that we shall have to earn our own livelihood somehow.”

Upon careful examination it was found that their entire possessions consisted of two large clasp-knives; a sheath hunting-knife; flint, steel, and tinder; the captain’s watch; a small axe; a large note-book, belonging to Paul; three pencils; bit of indiarubber; several fish-hooks; a long piece of twine, and three brass buttons, the property of Oliver, besides the manuscript Gospel of John, and Olly’s treasured letter from his mother. These articles, with the garments in which they stood, constituted the small fortune of our wanderers, and it became a matter of profound speculation, during the progress of the supper, as to whether it was possible to exist in an unknown wilderness on such very slender means.

Olly thought it was—as a matter of course.

Master Trench doubted, and shook his head with an air of much sagacity, a method of expressing an opinion which is eminently unassailable. Paul Burns condescended on reasons for his belief—which, like Olly’s, was favourable.

“You see,” he said, wiping his uncommonly greasy fingers on the grass, “we have enough of pork and cakes here for several days—on short allowance. Then it is likely that we shall find some wild fruits, and manage to kill something or other with stones, and it cannot be long till we fall in with natives, who will be sure to be friendly—if not, we will make them so—and where *they* can live, *we* can live. So I am going to turn in and dream about it. Luckily the weather is warm. Good-night.”

Thus did our three adventurers, turning in on that giddy ledge, spend their first night in Newfoundland.

## Chapter Six.

### Difficulties met and Overcome

The position in which the trio found themselves next morning, when daylight revealed it, was, we might almost say, tremendously romantic.

The ledge on which they had passed the night was much narrower than they had supposed it to be, and their beds, if we may so call them, had been dangerously near to the edge of a frightful precipice which descended sheer down to a strip of sand that looked like a yellow thread two hundred feet below. The cliff behind them rose almost perpendicularly another hundred feet or more, and the narrow path or gully by which they had gained their eyrie was so steep and rugged that their reaching the spot at all in safety seemed little short of a miracle. The sun was brightening with its first beams an absolutely tranquil sea when the sleepers opened their eyes, and beheld what seemed to them a great universe of liquid light. Their ears at the same time drank in the soft sound of murmuring ripples far below, and the occasional cry of sportive sea-birds.

“Grand! glorious!” exclaimed Trench, as he sat up and gazed with enthusiasm on the scene.

Paul did not speak. His thoughts were too deep for utterance, but his mind reverted irresistibly to some of the verses in that manuscript Gospel which he carried so carefully in his bosom.

As for Oliver, his flushed young face and glittering eyes told their own tale. At first he felt inclined to shout for joy, but his feelings choked him; so he, too, remained speechless. The silence was broken at last by a commonplace remark from Paul, as he pointed to the horizon—“The home of our shipmates is further off than I thought it was.”

“The rascals!” exclaimed the captain, thinking of the shipmates, not of the home; “the place is too good for ’em.”

“But all of them are not equally bad,” suggested Paul gently.

“Humph!” replied Trench, for kind and good-natured though he was he always found it difficult to restrain his indignation at anything that savoured of injustice. In occasionally giving way to this temper, he failed to perceive at first that he was himself sometimes guilty of injustice. It is only fair to add, however, that in his cooler moments our captain freely condemned himself.

“Humph! is a very expressive word,” observed Paul, “and in some sense satisfactory to those who utter it, but it is ambiguous. Do you mean to deny, Master Trench, that some of your late crew were very good fellows? and don’t you admit that Little Stubbs and Squill and Grummidge were first-rate specimens of—”

“I don’t admit or deny anything!” said the captain, rising, with a light laugh, “and I have no intention of engaging in a controversy with you before breakfast. Come, Olly, blow up the fire, and go to work with your pork and cakes. I’ll fetch some more wood, and Paul will help me, no doubt.”

With a good grace Paul dropped the discussion and went to work. In a few minutes breakfast was not only ready, but consumed; for a certain measure of anxiety as to the probability of there being an available path to the top of the cliffs tended to hasten their proceedings.

The question was soon settled, for after ascending a few yards above their encampment they found an indentation or crevice in the cliff which led into an open spot—a sort of broader shelf—which sloped upwards, and finally conducted them to the summit.

Here, to their surprise, they discovered that their new home, instead of being, as they had supposed it, one of a series of large islands, was in truth a territory of vast, apparently boundless, extent, covered with dense forests. Far as the eye could reach, interminable woods presented themselves, merging, in the far distance, into what appeared to be a range of low hills.

“Newfoundland is bigger than we have been led to believe,” said Paul Burns, surveying the prospect with great satisfaction.

“Ay is it,” responded Trench. “The fact is that discoverers of new lands, bein’ naturally in ships, have not much chance to go far inland. In a country like this, with such a wild seaboard, it’s no wonder they have made mistakes. We will find out the truth about it now, however, for we’ll undertake a land voyage of discovery.”

“What! without arms or provisions, father?” asked Oliver.

“What d’ye call the two things dangling from your shoulders, boy?” returned the captain, with some severity; “are these not ‘arms’? and have not woods—generally got lakes in ’em and rivers which usually swarm with provisions?”

“That’s so, father,” returned the lad, somewhat abashed; “but I did not raise the question as a difficulty, only I’ve heard you sometimes say that a ship is not fit for sea till she is well-armed and provisioned, so I thought that it might be the same with land expeditions.”

Before the skipper could reply, Paul drew attention to an opening in the woods not far from them, where an animal of some kind was seen to emerge into an open space, gaze for a moment around it, and then trot quietly away.

“Some of our provisions—uncooked as yet,” remarked Oliver.

“More of them,” returned his father, pointing to a covey of birds resembling grouse, which flashed past them at the moment on whirring wings. “How we are to get hold of ’em, however, remains, of course, to be seen.”

“There are many ways of getting hold of them, and with some of these I am familiar,” said Paul. “For instance, I can use the long-bow with some skill—at least I could do so when at school. And I have no doubt, captain, that you know how to use the cross-bow?”

“That I do,” returned Trench, with a broad grin.

“I was noted at school as bein’ out o’ sight the worst shot in the neighbourhood where I lived. Indeed, I’ve bin known to miss a barn-door at twenty yards!”

“Well, well, you must learn to shoot, that’s all,” said Paul, “and you may, perchance, turn out better with the sling. That weapon did great execution, as no doubt you know, in the hands of King David.”

“But where are we to get long-bows and cross-bows and slings?” asked Oliver eagerly.

“Why, Olly, my boy, excitement seems to have confused your brain, or the air of Newfoundland disagrees with you,” said Paul. “We shall make them, of course. But come,” he added, in a more serious tone, “we have reached a point—I may say a crisis—in our lives, for we must now decide definitely what we shall do, and I pray God to direct us so that we may do only that which is right and wise. Are you prepared, captain, to give up all hope of returning to our shipmates?”

“Of course I am,” returned Trench firmly, while a slight frown gathered on his brow. “The few who are on our side could not make the rest friendly. They may now fight it out amongst themselves as best they can, for all that I care. We did not forsake *them*. They sent *us* away. Besides, we could not return, if we wished it ever so much. No; a grand new country has been opened up to us, and I mean to have a cruise of exploration. What say *you*, Olly?”

“I’m with ’ee, father!” answered the boy, with a nod of the head that was even more emphatic than the tone of his voice.

With a laugh at Oliver’s enthusiasm, Paul declared himself to be of much the same mind, and added that, as they had no boxes to pack or friends to bid farewell to, they should commence the journey there and then.

“I don’t agree with that,” said the captain.

“Why not, Master Trench?”

“Because we have not yet made our weapons, and it may be that we shall have some good chances of getting supplies at the very beginning of our travels. My opinion is that we should arm ourselves before starting, for the pork and cakes cannot last long.”

This being at once recognised as sound advice, they entered the forest, which was not so thick at that place as it at first appeared to be. They went just far enough to enable them to obtain a species of hardwood, which the experienced eye of Paul Burns told them was suitable for bow-making. Here they pitched their camp. Paul took the axe and cut down several small trees; the captain gathered firewood, and Oliver set about the fabrication of a hut or booth, with poles, bark, turf, and leaves, which was to shelter them from rain if it should *fall*, though there was little chance of that, the weather being fine and settled at the time.

The work which they had undertaken was by no means as easy as they had anticipated. Paul had indeed made bows and arrows in former years, but then all the materials had been furnished “in the rough” to his hands, whereas he had now not only to select the tree best adapted to his purpose, but had to choose the best part of it, and to reduce that portion from a massive trunk to suitably slender proportions. It was much the same with the arrows and cross-bow bolts. However, there was resolution and perseverance in each member of the party far more than sufficient to overcome such little difficulties; only, as we have said, they were slower about it than had been expected, and the work was far from completed when the descent of night obliged them to seek repose.

“Not a bad little bower,” remarked Paul, as they sat down to supper in the primitive edifice which Oliver had erected.

The said bower was about four feet high, eight wide, and five deep, of irregular form, with three sides and a roof; walls and roof being of the same material—branchy, leafy, and turfy. The fourth side was an open space in which the inhabitants sat, facing the fire. The latter, being large enough to roast a sheep whole, was built outside.

“Why, Olly, you’re a selfish fellow,” said the captain, during a pause in the meal; “you’ve thought only of yourself in building this bower. Just look at Paul’s feet. They are sticking out ten or twelve inches beyond our shelter!”

“That comes of his being so tall, daddy. But it does not matter much. If it should come on to rain he can draw his feet inside; there’s room enough to double up. Don’t you think so, Paul?”

But Paul replied not, save by a gentle snore, for he was a healthy man, and child-like in many respects, especially in the matter of going off to the land of Nod the moment his head touched his pillow. Possibly the fresh air, the excitement, the energy with which he had wrought, and the relish with which he had supped, intensified this tendency on the present occasion. Oliver very soon followed his friend’s example, and so Captain Trench was left to meditate beside the fire. He gazed into its glowing embers, or sometimes glanced beyond it towards an open space where a tiny rivulet glittered in the moonlight, and a little cascade sent its purling music into the still air.

Ere long he passed from the meditative to the blinking stage. Then he turned his eyes on the sleepers, smiled meekly once or twice and nodded to them—quite inadvertently! After that he stretched his bulky frame beside them, and resigned himself to repose.

Now, it is probable that we should have had nothing more to record in reference to that first night in Newfoundland if Captain Trench had been in the habit of taking his rest like ordinary mortals, but such was not his habit. He bounced in his sleep! Why he did so no one could ever find out. He himself denied the “soft impeachment,” and, in his waking moments, was wont to express disbelief as well as profound ignorance in regard to the subject. Several broken beds, however, had, in the course of his career, testified against him; but, like the man who blamed “the salmon,” not “the whisky,” for his headaches, Trench blamed “the beds,” not “the bouncing,” for his misfortunes.

One might have counted him safe with the solid earth of Newfoundland for his bed, but danger often lurks where least expected. Oliver Trench was not an architect either by nature or training. His bower had been erected on several false principles. The bouncing of a big man inside was too much for its infirm constitution. Its weak points were discovered by the captain. A bounce into one of its salient supports proved fatal, and the structure finally collapsed, burying its family in a compost of earth and herbage.

With a roar that would have done credit to a native walrus, the captain struggled to free himself, under the impression that a band of savages had attacked them. All three quickly threw off the comparatively light material that covered them, and stood in warlike attitudes for a few seconds, glancing around for foes who did not exist! Then the roar of alarm was transformed into shouts of laughter, but these were quickly checked by a real foe who crept up insidiously and leaped on them unexpectedly. The half-extinguished fire, having been replenished by the falling structure—much of which was dry and inflammable—caught on the roof and flashed down into the interior.

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