

Cobbold Richard

The History of Margaret Catchpole, a Suffolk Girl



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INTRODUCTION

Three personalities interest us in reading the novel of *Margaret Catchpole*— the author, the heroine, and the author's mother, in whose service the real Margaret Catchpole was employed. Neither the author nor his mother has been the subject of much biographical effort, although Richard Cobbold was an industrious novelist, poet, and essayist for a long period of years, and wrote this one book that will always, I think, be read. His mother, Elizabeth Cobbold, made some reputation as a writer of verse, and is immortalized for us in Charles Dickens's Mrs. Leo Hunter. Fortunately we have a sketch of her by one Laetitia Jermyn, dated 1825, and attached to a volume of *Poems*, published at Ipswich in that year.¹ Laetitia Jermyn tells us that Elizabeth's maiden name was Knipe, and that she was born in Watling Street, London, about 1764, her father being Robert Knipe of Liverpool. In 1787 she published a little volume of verse entitled *Six Narrative Poems*, which she dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds, evidently by permission. It is clear that in girlhood she had made the acquaintance of the great painter. Her biographer says nothing about her being an actress, but it is a tradition in Ipswich that this was for a time her profession. In 1790 she was married at Liverpool to William Clarke, a Portman of the borough and Comptroller of the Customs of Ipswich, who was apparently about sixty years of age and in very delicate health. The sprightly young wife wrote the following lines to her husband on St. Valentine's Day, soon after their marriage: —

Eliza to William this Valentine sends,
While ev'ry good wish on the present attends;
And freely she writes, undisturb'd by a fear,
Tho' prudes may look scornful, and libertines sneer.
Tho' tatlers and tale-bearers smiling may say,
"Your Geniuses always are out of the way,"
Sure none but herself would such levities mix,
With the seriousness suited to grave twenty-six.
A Wife send a Valentine! Lord, what a whim!
And then of all people to send it to him!
Make love to her husband! my stars, how romantic!
The Girl must be certainly foolish or frantic;
But I always have thought so, else what could engage
Her to marry a man who is twice her own age?
While the tabbies are thus on my motives enlarging,
My sentiments William may read in the margin.

On the wings of old Time have three months past away
Since I promis'd "to honour, to love, and obey,"
And surely my William's own heart will allow
That my conduct has ne'er disagreed with my vow.

¹ *Poems by Mrs. Elizabeth Cobbold, with a Memoir of the Author.* Ipswich: Printed and sold by J. Raw in the Butter Market, 1825.

Would health spread her wings round my husband and lord,
To his cheeks could the smiles of delight be restor'd;
The blessing with gratitude I should receive,
As the greatest that Mercy benignant could give;
And heedless of all that conjecture may say,
With praise would remember St. Valentine's day.

I quote this valentine at length because it is a fair sample of the quality of our poet's efforts. At the end of the eighteenth century, and far into the nineteenth, a rhyming faculty of this kind was quite sufficient to make a literary reputation in an English provincial town, and in the case of Mrs. Clarke it was followed up by the writing of a novel, *The Sword*, published at Liverpool in 1791. It is interesting to find the name of Roscoe the historian among the subscribers for this book. In the same year – within six months of her marriage – the writer lost her husband.

The interest of Elizabeth Knipe's life, however, begins for us when very shortly after this she became the wife of John Cobbold, of the Cliff Brewery, Ipswich. Cobbold was a widower. He had already had sixteen children, of whom fourteen were then living. When it is remembered that by his second wife he had six more children it will be seen that there was a large family, and it is not surprising therefore that the Cobbold name is still very much in evidence in Norfolk and Suffolk, and particularly in Ipswich. "Placed in the bosom of this numerous family", writes her biographer, "and indulged in the means of gratifying her benevolent and liberal spirit, 'The Cliff' became the home of her dearest affections, the residence of taste, and the scene of hospitality." One need not complain of the lady that she was not very much of a poet, for she had otherwise a versatile character. In addition to being, as we are assured, a good housekeeper, she was, if her self-portraiture be accepted, a worker in many fields: —

A botanist one day, or grave antiquarian,
Next morning a sempstress, or abecedarian;
Now making a frock, and now marring a picture,
Next conning a deep, philosophical lecture;
At night at the play, or assisting to kill
The time of the idlers with whist or quadrille;
In cares or amusements still taking a part,
Though science and friendship are nearest my heart.

Laetitia Jermyn tells us much about her charity and kindness of heart, her zeal in behalf of many movements to help the poor, and she dwells with enthusiasm upon her friend's literary achievements.² But the scope of this Introduction to her son's book does not justify devoting more attention to the mother, although her frequent appearance in Margaret Catchpole's partially true story demands that something be said about her "mistress". Elizabeth Cobbold died in 1824. Her husband outlived her for eleven years. John Cobbold (1746-1835) traced back his family in the direct line as landowners in Suffolk to a Robert Cobbold, who died in 1603. He was a banker as well as a brewer, and lived first at "The Cliff" and afterwards at "Holywells", which has ever since been the seat of the head of the family. It was the fourteenth child of his first marriage – Henry Gallant Cobbold – who was saved from drowning by Margaret Catchpole.

² The three most talked of books by Elizabeth Cobbold were: —*The Mince Pye*, an Heroic Epistle, humbly addressed to the Sovereign Dainty of a British Feast, by Caroline Petty Pasty, 1800. *Cliff Valentines*, 1813. *An Ode to the Victory of Waterloo*, 1815. The suggestion is made in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that she was descended on the mother's side from Edmund Waller the poet, but this is exceedingly improbable.

It was Richard Cobbold, one of the six sons of the second marriage of John Cobbold, who was the author of this story. When he was born he had ten nephews and nieces awaiting him, the children of his brothers and sisters of the first family, and he was at school with his own nephew, who was just a fortnight younger than himself. The nephew was John Chevallier Cobbold, who for twenty-one years represented Ipswich in Parliament. For this information I am indebted to a grandson³, who also sends me the following anecdotes: —

When John Cobbold – the father of twenty-two children – was High Sheriff, he once persuaded the Judge to come to dine with him on condition that there should be no one to meet him except his (J. C.'s) own family. When the Judge was shown into a drawing-room full of people, he was very angry, and said loudly before the company, “Mr. Cobbold, you have deceived me.” Explanations followed, and the Judge was introduced to the various members of the family.

Elizabeth Cobbold was in the habit of saying that when she married her husband she found no books in the house except Bibles and account-books.

Brewing was such good business in those days that John Cobbold was able to give to each of his two youngest sons (twenty-first and twenty-second children) a University education, and to buy for each of them a church living worth £1,000 a year.

Richard Cobbold was educated at Bury St. Edmunds and at Caius College, Cambridge, was destined for the Church, and when he married he was a curate in Ipswich⁴, but his father obtained for him the living of Wortham, near Diss, where he was Rector from 1825 until his death in 1877. He was also rural dean of Hartismere. Several years after celebrating his golden wedding – Dr. Spencer Cobbold informs me – he and his wife died within a day or two of each other; the survivor did not know the other was gone; both were buried at the same time. Of the three sons who survived, one became Rector of Hollesley, another was the father of the well-known amateur footballer, W. N. Cobbold, and the third was the Fellow of the Royal Society, to whom I have already referred, and to whose son I am indebted for so many interesting facts.

That Richard Cobbold was not particularly honoured in his own country may be gathered from many quarters. One writer speaks of his “little vanities, his amusing egotisms, and his good natured pomposity”. It was clearly not Suffolk that helped to make his fame, if we may accept one of the few printed references to him that I have been able to find: —

I confess I never knew a Suffolk man at home or abroad who would take any pride in being the fellow countryman of this clerical novel-writer; but in different parts of England I have seen reason to believe that our division of the eastern counties has a place in the minds of many thousands of people only by reason of the Rev. Richard Cobbold and his works, that the ancient town of Ipswich, which we hail from as if it were a niche in the temple of fame, has never been heard of except as the scene of some of the chief adventures of Margaret Catchpole.⁵

Other books are assigned to our author in the catalogues, but I doubt if one of them survives other than *Margaret Catchpole*, which not only survives, but is really a classic in its way. One story, indeed, *Freston Tower*, held the public for a time almost as well as the present book, but I imagine it has ceased to command the attention even of the most remote village library, where indeed it

³ Dr. Spencer Cobbold, of Batheston, Somerset, a grandson of Richard Cobbold, and the son of T. Spencer Cobbold, M.D. (1828-1886), the distinguished helminthologist, who was the youngest F.R.S. of his day. He had made some original investigations concerning Entozoa, and was the author of many books on “Parasites” and kindred subjects.

⁴ At the Tower Church. He lived at St. Margaret's Green.

⁵ *Public Men of Ipswich and East Suffolk*, by Richard Gowing. Ipswich: W. J. Scopes, 1875.

was long ago worn threadbare.⁶ Essentially our author is a man of one book, and many adventitious circumstances helped him here. It was no small thing that the heroine should actually have been a native of the very district in which the writer lived. She was not merely a vivid tradition of his boyhood, but had been in the service of his mother and had stolen from his father the horse that gave her so unpleasant a notoriety. Here was a romance ready to hand, which needed but to be set down in passably good writing to attract attention. It might have been worse written than it was by this worthy clergyman and would still have secured readers. How much is truth and how much is fiction in the story will never be known. If Mr. Cobbold had an abundance of documents about this girl Margaret Catchpole and her affairs, inherited from his parents, he must have destroyed them. He claims in the course of the story that, as Margaret three times saved the life of a member of Mr. Cobbold's family, it is not surprising that the records of her life should be so strictly preserved among them. But these records do not appear to exist any longer. It is doubtful if they ever did exist. The author probably worked from family traditions rather than from documents. He possessed, in addition, a genuine imaginative faculty.

Such documents as do exist do not amount to enough to justify the author's declaration that here is "a perfectly true narrative". Mr. Frank Woolnough, of Ipswich⁷, courteously informs me that a letter by Margaret Catchpole, written only a few days before she sailed to Australia, and the lyre bird that she sent to her mistress about a year after her arrival, are the two curiosities of the Museum most eagerly inquired after by strangers. Here is the letter in question: —

ipswich May 25th 1801
honred madam

i am sorrey i have to inform you this Bad newes that i am going away on wednesday next or thursday at the Longest so i hav taken the Liberty my good Ladey of trobling you with a few Lines as it will Be the Larst time i ever shall trobell you in this sorrofol Confinement my sorrows are very grat to think i must Be Banished out of my owen Countreay and from all my Dearest friendes for ever it is very hard inded for any one to think on it and much moor for me to enduer the hardship of it honred madam i should Be very happy to see you on tuesday Befor i Leve englent if it is not to much trobell for you for i am in grat confushon my self now my sorrowes are dobbled i must humbly Beg on your Goodness to Consider me a Littell trifell of monney it wold Be a very Grat Comfort to your poor

unhappy searvent
Margreat Catchpole

How small a matter a sentence of death for horse-stealing was counted in the closing years of the eighteenth century may be gathered from the fact that the contemporary newspaper report of 1797 runs only to five lines, as follows: —

"Margaret Catchpole, for stealing a coach horse, belonging to John Cobbold, Esq., of Ipswich (with whom she formerly lived as a servant), which she rode from thence to London in about 10 hours, dressed in man's apparel, and having there offered it for sale was detected."

Undoubtedly one of the characteristics of the book that give it so permanent a place in literature is the circumstance that it preserves for us a glimpse of the cruel criminal law of the eighteenth century. Hanging for small offences went on for years after this, until, indeed, public opinion was revolted by the case of the young married woman who in Ludgate Hill lifted a piece of cloth from

⁶ The following books by Richard Cobbold are in the British Museum Library: —

⁷ The Secretary of the Borough of Ipswich Museum and Free Library.

the counter. She hesitated and then put it down again. But she had been seen, and was arrested, tried, condemned, and hanged, although it was clearly proved that her husband had been seized by a press-gang and that her babe cried for bread. After this time came a reaction against the death penalty for theft. Margaret, then, was more fortunate than that unhappy woman and than the more celebrated Deacon Brodie, who was hanged in Edinburgh, the city which he had adorned as a Councillor, for a house-breaking theft which brought him four pounds or less. She doubtless owed her escape to the powerful influence of the Cobbolds.⁸

Margaret Catchpole is the classic novel of Suffolk. That county of soothing landscape and bracing sea has produced greater books; it has given us more interesting authors than Richard Cobbold. Within its borders were written the many fine poems of George Crabbe, the many attractive letters of Edward Fitz Gerald. The remarkable paraphrase from the Persian known to all the English speaking world as *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* was composed here. But, although many latter-day novelists have laid their scenes in these pleasant places, made memorable by the art of Constable, not one has secured so fascinating a topic or so world-wide an audience. *Margaret Catchpole* is one of the few heroines of fiction of whom one loves to remember that she was real flesh and blood.

CLEMENT SHORTER.

⁸ The punishment of death for horse-stealing was abolished in 1832, but in 1833 a little boy of nine who pushed a stick through a cracked window and pulled out some painters' colours worth twopence was sentenced to death. Since 1838 no person has been hanged in England for any offence other than murder. See Spencer Walpole's *History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815*.

TO THE MARCHIONESS OF CORNWALLIS

Most Noble Lady,

Assured that this simple narrative, the most remarkable events of which are still fresh in your Ladyship's memory, will be found far more interesting to the public than many highly-wrought works of fiction, and that to none will it prove more acceptable than to your Ladyship, who for many years resided in this county, beloved and respected by all who knew you, for the encouragement you afforded to every amiable virtue; to you it is dedicated, with sincere respect, by your Ladyship's humble and devoted servant,

RICHARD COBBOLD.

Rectory, Wortham, near Diss, Suffolk.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Independently of this simple history being a relation of facts, well known to many persons of the highest respectability still living in the county of Suffolk, it is hoped that an instructive lesson may be conveyed by it to many, who may not yet have seen the necessity of early and religious instruction.

These pages will prove, in a remarkable manner, that, however great may be the natural endowments of the human mind, yet, without the culture of religious principles, and the constant discipline of the Holy Spirit, they will never enable their possessor to resist the temptations of passion, but will be as likely to lead to great crimes as to great virtues.

It will be seen that, from the want alone of the early impressions of religion, the heroine of these pages fell into errors of temper and passion, which led to the violation of the laws of God and man; but that, after the inculcation of Christian faith and virtue, she became conspicuous for the sincerity of her reformation and for an exemplary life: that, though it pleased God to grant her 'a place of repentance', yet it was through such bitter sorrows and sufferings of mind and body as she most devoutly desired others might be spared.

The public may depend upon the truth of the main features of this narrative: indeed, most of the facts recorded were matters of public notoriety at the time of their occurrence. The author who here details them is a son of the lady with whom this extraordinary female lived, and from whose hands he received the letters and the facts here given. He is persuaded that much will be found in the history of Margaret Catchpole highly worthy of praise and imitation; and, if that which is unworthy shall only be taken as a warning example, he humbly hopes that the public will be both gratified and benefited by the publication.

Rectory, Wortham.

CHAPTER I EARLY SCENES

The heroine of this romantic but perfectly true narrative was born in the year 1773. There was a large tract of extra-parochial land toward the north of the bounds of the parish of Nacton, Suffolk, reaching from Rushmere Heath down to the banks of the beautiful river Orwell. This tract was known by the name of Wolfkettel, and commenced at the Seven Hills, and terminated on the south side of Alneshbourne Priory.

The spot called the Seven Hills, though originally there were sixteen, was, in all probability, the site of the famous battle of Arwell, fought between the Earl of Ulfkettel and the Danes, in A.D. 1010. It was a wild waste, and a great part of it to this day remains much in the same state, fit only for sheepwalks or a warren, or as a preserve for game. The tract lying nearest to the Orwell was very early brought into cultivation; and at the time this narrative commences, was famous for the production of the best barley in the county. In a cottage on these lands lived Jonathan Catchpole, an industrious labourer, and father of six children, of whom Margaret was the second daughter, and youngest child but one.

The farm upon which the father and his sons worked was then held by Mr. Denton, who was well known for his famous Suffolk cart-horses – strong bone, short joints, clean legs, stout chests, high crests, light chestnut, with silvery manes, and tails that ought to have swept the ground, but for a barbarous custom of docking them at that period, one of the most insane fashions of the day.

Jonathan Catchpole had a team of these horses to look after, and was the head ploughman on the estate. His boys were engaged in various parts of the farm.

The youngest daughter was made a sort of pet by the rest of the family; and, as the eldest girl was always of a sickly constitution, it fell to the lot of Margaret to carry her father's and brothers' meals to them in the field.

Who has not seen the healthy face of childhood in those ever interesting years when activity commences? And what philanthropist, delighting in scenes of genuine simplicity and nature, could fail to admire the ruddy glow of youth, and the elastic step of confidence, with which the young female peasant bounds to meet a parent or a brother, at the welcome hour of noon, bearing the frugal dinner of bread and cheese, or it may sometimes chance to be bread and pork?

The child becomes of some consequence, entrusted with the basket of provision; and, as she stands against the bank of the hedgerow, watching the progressive march of the horses as they come toward her, drawing the plough and turning over the soil, guided as they are by the steady hand of her father, she presents a picture worthy of observation.

On these occasions, Margaret was as punctual to her hour as the sun. On reaching the field she would set her basket down and jump into her father's arms, and kiss his warm forehead, and receive in return a reward, which even in infancy gave her the utmost delight, viz. a seat upon one of the horses' backs, and there she would remain until she was taken off by the same hands which placed her there, and gave her the empty basket to carry home.

"May I come in the evening, father?" she used to say, as she looked wistfully round the horizon, to see if any appearance of rain forebode an unfavourable answer; for this request "to come in the evening" contained an imaginative delight, exceeding in its kind the prospect of the fox hunter for a coming run. For Margaret, when she did "come in the evening," used to have the privilege of riding home one of the plough-horses.

This was a singular *penchant* for a female child to imbibe, but with it mingled the pleasure of her father's and brothers' smiles; and this, after a day of toil, seemed to give elasticity to their spirits, and formed an agreeable change to the unvarying monotony of ploughing straight lines, the clinking of chains, and their rural "*wooah come ather, woree, wooo, jeh!*" sounds as unintelligible to some readers as the language of the savages of the Caribbee islands, when first discovered.

Sometimes the crack of the whip would make the horses start, and the young men, her brothers, who would try to frighten their sister, found, instead of so doing, that it only increased the pleasure of her ride. At length, she began to trot the leading horse home.

After a time, this privilege was extended to riding the farm-horses down to water; and this appears to have been the very summit of Margaret's delight. She used to take her brother's whip in her tiny hand, drive the whole team before her into the water, keep them in order while there, and then drive them out again, up the sandy lane, into the stable-yard.

It is well known that at such times it is no easy task to sit a cart-horse; for they will kick, and plunge, and exhibit that rough kind of amusement known by the name of "horse-play," which has as much of shrieking and biting as it has of gambolling in it.

In going out to, and coming home from, water, horses accustomed to the heaviest labour, if at all well fed, will exhibit no mean share of this species of spirit; and woe be to the lad without a whip in his hand, or who has not a very steady seat!

Gainsborough and Constable were both lovers of the scenery around Ipswich; and many are the sketches in the possession of their Suffolk friends, which speak their admiration of the beautiful landscapes which surround the river Orwell.

Had these artists seen Margaret in her equestrian character, they would have immortalized her; for nothing could have been more appropriate to the spirit of their works.

Margaret was fearless as a Newmarket jockey; and never was known to have had a single fall. She kept her seat as well as any of the tutored children of the celebrated but unfortunate Ducrow: indeed, it may be fairly questioned if any one of his troop could have managed to sit a Suffolk cart-horse with the same composure.

The fame of our young heroine's exploits reached but little farther than the sequestered farm-house to which her parents belonged, excepting now and then at the Ipswich races, when some of the lads saw an awkward rider, they would exclaim to each other, "Margaret would beat him hollow."

Time flew swiftly on, producing no farther change in the family of the Catchpoles than what may be usually seen in the habitations of the labouring class. Those are generally the most stationary race of all people in a parish, who have constant employment on a large farm: the owners of lands change their places of abode – sell their estates – and leave the country; the tenants frequently change their occupations; but the labourer remains to cultivate the soil, and is always found a resident among those "*poor who shall never perish out of the land.*" They have their friends and fellow-labourers, and feel as much interest in each other's welfare as the members of richer or wider-spread fraternities.

The Catchpoles and the Cracknells were two families that principally worked upon the lands of Mr. Denton. Their houses were indeed widely separated; but as their labours were in the same field, their occasions of meeting were frequent, their intimacy became strict, and they were of mutual assistance to each other. One lived near the street at Nacton, and the other upon the farm; so that whenever there was any occasion to go to Nacton, the Catchpoles always had a friend's house to call at, and the Cracknells were as constantly using the Catchpoles' cottage at the entrance of the lane leading down to the farm-house.

This intimacy was productive of especial accommodation on the Sabbath-day; for the Catchpoles, being at a great distance from church, they made use of the Cracknells' cottage, near the street, and used to carry their meals there, with the view of attending the church service twice on that day.

At that time, education was not so widely spread as it is now; and the particular spot in which this labourer's cottage stood being extra-parochial, they had to seek what little instruction they could obtain from the neighbouring parish of Nacton. The Reverend Mr. Hewitt was as attentive to his people as he could be, and was much assisted in his duties by the family of Admiral Vernon, who at that time lived at Orwell Park, and by Philip Broke, Esq., the great landlord of that district, and the father of our deeply-lamented and gallant Suffolk hero, Sir Philip Broke. But education was not

considered then so great a desideratum as it is now, though the pious wish of England's patriarchal sovereign, George III, "that every cottager might have a Bible, and be able to read it," was nobly responded to through every densely-peopled district in his kingdom.

The Catchpoles were not an irreligious family, though they could none of them read or write. They were not ignorant, though they were uneducated. The father always repeated aloud the Lord's Prayer every night before his family retired to rest, and the first thing before they went to their work in the morning. They were generally respected by their master and mistress, their friends and acquaintance. They were a well-conducted, orderly family, and were united in love as dearly as those who had the greater zest of education and cultivation to heighten their domestic affections.

Margaret grew up to her thirteenth year, a fine, active, intelligent girl. She had a brother younger than herself by five or six years, of whom she was very fond, from having nursed him during the occasional absence of her mother. Her elder sister was always, as we have stated, of a sickly constitution, and very delicate: she had very little bodily strength, but she had learned to knit and to sew, and in these things she excelled, and was the sempstress of the whole family. She was of a sweet temper, so gentle, so affectionate, and so quiet, that, though a complete contrast to her sister, she nevertheless maintained a just ascendancy over the high spirit of Margaret, which was always curbed by any quiet reproof from the calm wisdom of the invalid.

We have seen something of Margaret's infant spirit: we must now record a simple fact of her childhood, which exhibits a singular instance of intrepidity and presence of mind in a child not yet fourteen years old.

It chanced that her mother one day sent her down to the farm-house to ask for a little broth, which had been promised by Mrs. Denton, her mistress, for poor Susan. Her father and her brothers were all at work on a distant part of the farm; and, being harvest-time, master and man were every one engaged. When Margaret arrived at the gate, she heard a shriek from a female in the house, and in another minute she was in the kitchen, where the mistress of the house had suddenly fallen down in a fit. In one moment the girl of fourteen exhibited a character which showed the powerful impetus of a strong mind. The two girls in the house were shrieking with fright over their fallen mistress, and were incapable of rendering the least assistance. They stood wringing their hands and stamping their feet, and exclaiming, "Oh, my mistress is dead! – Oh, my mistress is dead!"

"She is not dead!" said Margaret; "she is not dead! Don't stand blubbering there, but get some cold water; lift up her head, untie her cap, loose her gown, and raise her into the chair." Not waiting to see how her words were taken, she did the work herself, and caused the others to help her. She used the water freely, and gave the chest full play, dragged the chair toward the door, sent one of the girls for some vinegar, and made the other rub her hands and feet; and did not slacken her attention until she saw some symptoms of returning animation. When the breathing became more composed, and the extremities more sensitive, she sent off one of the girls to the harvest-field for help; and telling the servant-girl that she was going for Dr. Stebbing, she went to the stable, unslipped the knot by which the pony was tied to the rack; and, with only the halter in her hand, without saddle or bridle, she sprang upon the fiery little Suffolk Punch, snapped her fingers instead of a whip, and was up the sandy lane, and on to the high road to Ipswich, before the other girl was fairly across the first field towards her master. She did not stop even to tell her mother where she was going, but dashed past the cottage.

On she went, and well had she her own wishes answered by the fiery little animal she bestrode. Her heart was up, and so was the pony's, who, feeling a light weight upon his back, and a tight seat over his ribs, gave full play to his lungs and legs, and answered to her heart's content the snap of the finger for expedition. Those who beheld the animal would be astonished, and ask where all the speed could be. But speed there was in his strong and well-knit limbs. So close was he put together, that his action was almost like a ball bounding down the side of Malvern hills. Nothing seemed to check the speed of Margaret or her steed. She passed every cart jogging on to Ipswich market, without taking any notice of the drivers, though she knew many of them well. Her mistress and the doctor were the

only things in her mind's eye at this time, and they were four miles asunder, and the sooner she could bring them together the better. She even met Admiral Vernon's carriage just as she turned on to the Ipswich race-course, at the part now called Nacton Corner. The Admiral's attention was called to the extraordinary sight of a female child astride a pony at full speed, with nothing but a halter over his head, and that held as loosely as if the rider wished to go at full speed. The servants called to the child, even the Admiral was sufficiently excited to do the same; but he might as well have attempted to stop a vessel in full sail, with a strong and favourable wind.

Away she dashed, regardless of any impediment. She passed one young farmer from Stratton Hall, who rode what might be termed a high-bred horse. It was a noble turf, and an open course; and the young man, as much astonished as if it were an apparition before him, though convinced that it was flesh and blood, stuck his spurs into his charger's side, and gave him his rein with the full determination to overtake her. But this was not so easy a task as he anticipated. The little nag, hearing the clank of heels behind him, turned his head first on one side, then on the other; and, lifting up his nose like a stag, darted onward with redoubled speed. Not Mazeppa with more sudden bound could have sprung forward with more spirit than this wild little home-bred nag did down the wide turf of the race-course. The youth called aloud to know what was the matter, but Margaret heeded him not; and long before she reached the stewards' stand, she had fairly distanced the young squire of Stratton Hall. At length she reached the end of the race-course, and came on to the common of Bishop's Hill. It is a very deep descent down that hill to the town of Ipswich, which from its summit seems to lie at the very bottom of an extensive pit. But it is a noble expanse that lies before the spectator upon that eminence. The beautiful river flowing to the left, and forming an expanded semicircle bordering the town, and the distant country rising with amphitheatric grandeur beyond the barracks, and above the towers of twelve churches, might induce even a hasty traveller to pause and look upon that sight. But Margaret did not pause. Down she dashed from the verge of the hill into the very thickest part of the back hamlet of St. Clement's. It was market-day, and scores of pig-carts, and carriers' vans, and waggons, stood on one side of the road, taking up nearly half the street. But on through them all at full speed dashed the intrepid girl. From every house people rushed to see the sight – a girl, with her bonnet hanging down behind her, and going like lightning through the crowded thoroughfare, was an extraordinary sight.

People gave way as she rode fearlessly on, and followed her up St. Clement's Fore Street, over the stone pavement across the wash into Orwell Place, where lived the ever humane though eccentric surgeon, Mr. George Stebbing. But not until she reached his very door did Margaret give the first check to the pony.

A passing spectator, who was at the moment opposite the surgeon's door, with an instinctive thought of her errand, gave a violent ring at the surgery-bell, and received such a joyous "Thank you, sir," from the child, that he stopped to see the result.

By this time the street was full of spectators, all anxious to know what was the matter; but Margaret's eye was fixed upon the door, and the very moment it was opened and the doctor himself appeared, she exclaimed, "Oh, come to my mistress, sir, directly! – come to my mistress!"

The gentleman who had rung the bell was Mr. Nathaniel Southgate, of Great Bealings, a rich and excellent agriculturist, and an acquaintance of the doctor's. Having followed him into the surgery, and there learnt the feat the child had performed, he at once resolved to take her into his own service; and he gave her a crown as a present, telling her, if she was a good girl she should come and live with him. With the former communication, Margaret, as might be supposed, was not a little pleased; but upon the latter she put a very grave face.

The doctor's gig being by this time ready at the door, he placed Margaret beside him, and started for the farm, chatting by the way about her poor sister Susan, whom she asked the doctor to visit as he returned from the farm. Once only did she seem to reflect in an unfavourable manner upon

the act she had done, and said to the doctor, "I hope, sir, if my master should be angry at my taking the pony, you will beg of him to forgive me."

On arriving at the farm, the doctor found that the mistress of the house was much better; and he then learned from the servant-girls, that, but for little Margaret's presence of mind and activity, the apoplectic fit might have terminated fatally.

Having given the needful instructions as to the treatment of the invalid, the doctor once more took Margaret in his gig, and drove to the cottage; where having visited and prescribed for poor Susan, he took leave of the grateful family by telling Margaret, that if ever she stood in need of a friend to help her, she had only to "post off again for the doctor."

Numerous were the inquiries concerning Margaret and her expedition, and she found herself, much to her surprise and chagrin, extolled for her horsemanship. She began, therefore, to be shy of riding the horses at the farm; and modesty told her, now that her fame began to spread, there was something bold and conspicuous in her former pleasures of this kind. So sensitive was she upon this point, that she avoided as much as possible all allusion to her past habits, and for the future carefully avoided the horse-yard and the horses. Her father and brothers observed this, and would sometimes say, "Peggy, you will soon forget how to ride."

"The sooner the better," she would reply, "if I am to have people staring at me as they now do."

Susan perceived with satisfaction that Margaret, instead of being vain, and puffed up with the notice of the world, was quite the reverse. Numbers might have risen in their own opinion, and have been giddy from the continual praises of one and another; but in this case it became a subject of annoyance rather than of congratulation, and her sister began to fear, from finding her so much more occupied in the house, and especially for herself, that Margaret's health would suffer.

It was with some degree of satisfaction that an opportunity was soon afforded for a change of place and action for her sister. Her uncle Catchpole came expressly from Mr. Nathaniel Southgate, of Great Bealings, to treat with her parents about Margaret's going to service; and matters were so speedily arranged, agreeably to all parties, that she was to accompany her uncle on his return home. All seemed to think it a good thing for the girl; even she herself, though quite new to the work of a dairymaid, thought she should thus escape the unpleasant observation she had been subject to. This accounted for the readiness with which she complied with her uncle's advice.

When, however, the hour of departure came, never perhaps did a cottage-girl leave home with a heavier heart: tears, unrestrained tears, ran in an honest current over her young face. Oh, how Margaret loved her poor sick sister! how deeply she felt the grief of leaving her! nor would she consent to leave her, except under the faithful promise that her father, or one of her brothers, would frequently come and see her, and bring her word of Susan's health.

"Dear sister," she said to Susan, "dear sister, if you should be worse, oh, do let me come and nurse you! I love to wait upon you, I feel so happy to see you smile."

"God bless you, dear little Peggy!" was the reply. "God bless you! Mind and be a good girl, and take pains to do your duty well. Charles, or John, and sometimes little Ned, will walk over to Bealings. I will send for you if I am worse, for I too love to have you near me; but it is best for us both that we should be parted for a time, and especially for you, as you can learn nothing more at home."

The kiss of filial and parental and brotherly and sisterly love was given through many tears, and the little Margaret departed for her first place.

She went with a high character from home, and to a place where that good character had preceded her, in the estimation of the gentleman who so promptly rang the bell for her at the doctor's door. She stayed a day or two with her uncle in the cottage in which she was born, and then entered into the service of Mr. Nathaniel Southgate. At her very first interview with her new master, she begged of him never to talk about her riding the pony, and as much as possible to prevent others speaking of it. This very much raised her in the good opinion of her master and mistress, for they had some fears lest she might be too fond of riding to mind her work. They found her, however,

completely cured of this propensity, nor could she be induced, in a new and strange place, ever to mount a horse or pony.

How seldom does public praise make mortals shy! yet where true modesty prevails this is found to be the case. It speaks highly for this young girl, who, from an innate distaste to notoriety, shunned a habit which had once been a prevailing pleasure, and in which, till the world spoke loudly of her merit, she felt no degree of shame. How singular that such a being should ever become so conspicuous, as she afterwards did, in that very line which she now so sedulously avoided! Well may we all say, "We know not what manner of spirit we are of."

In the situation which Margaret first occupied, her mistress found her all that she required – she was very apt at learning to do her work, very diligent in the performance of it, and always gave satisfaction. She had plenty of employment, and was stirring with the lark; soon understood the accustomed duties of a dairywoman, and was always praised for cleanliness and good conduct.

A year passed away rapidly. Margaret, at fifteen years of age, was as tall as she was afterwards at twenty; she was strong, too, though slim. One year makes a great difference in a female at that age – some are almost women at sixteen, when boys are, generally speaking, awkward clowns. She went to service before she had completed her fourteenth year.

Margaret remained a year and a half at Bealings, remarkable for the strict propriety of her behaviour, and for the cheerfulness of her disposition. She had stipulated with her mistress that, in case of her sister's death, or of her requiring her aid at the near approach thereto, she should have full permission to leave. It was on this account that, in the Whitsuntide following, she left her situation, and went to attend her poor sister.

Susan, who was then in her twentieth year, had lingered on, gradually getting weaker and weaker, until she was quite unable to rise from her bed. Her heart always yearned towards her sister; and, as she had promised to let her be with her during her few last days, and she herself thought those days were almost numbered, she now sought her assistance. Margaret's affection answered the sister's call, and she was ready to place all her earnings and all her labours at that sick sister's service. She hesitated not; but, taking a respectful and grateful leave of the family at Bealings, she was, at Whitsuntide, again an inmate of her father's house.

It has been stated, some few pages back, that between the Catchpoles and Cracknells, as labourers upon the same farm, there existed a close intimacy: it was Whitsuntide, and Mrs. Cracknell's baby was to be christened. Poor Susan was to have been one of the sponsors, and the child to be named after her; but "poor Susan was laid on her pillow," and could not answer to the call of her neighbour in any other way than by her prayers. Margaret was therefore asked to take Susan's place, which she consented to do, and went early to Nacton, to render what assistance she might be able to give in the celebration of this event.

Neighbour Cracknell kept a little shop of such goods as might be obtained at the large, red-bricked, coffin-shaped house of Mr. Simon Baker, grocer, St. Clement's Street, Ipswich. This shop divided the fore and back hamlets of St. Clement's, and was the first from the Nacton Road, entering upon the pavement of the town. Master Cracknell and his boys spared what they could for the thrifty wife at home, who had fitted up her closet window with shelves, and placed thereupon a stock of threads, pins, needles, soap, starch, tape, and such like small and least perishable articles, as might make some return in the shape of home profit, instead of working in the fields.

This cottage stood at the entrance of the village, and the shop, if such it might be called, had frequent customers among the poor. A single candle, a small loaf, half an ounce of tea, a halfpennyworth of cheese, a pennyworth of butter, or sugar, or snuff, or tobacco, could here be obtained. Thus Dame Cracknell managed to turn a penny in her own way; contented with small gains, she provided for her rapidly increasing family in a decent and honest manner, and looked forward with hope for more custom. She made no outward show to create opposition, and, had she always done so, might have gone on prosperously; but this joyful Whitsuntide, which found her and her friends so

quietly happy, was fraught with untoward circumstances, which neither she nor her neighbours could foresee. She had invited a few friends to partake of her christening fare, and expected her relative, Stephen Laud, from Felixstowe Ferry, to stand with Margaret Catchpole and herself as sponsors for the little Susan.

This Stephen Laud was a famous boatman, and for many years plied at the ferry-boat between Harwich and Langer Fort, now called Landguard Fort. That it required a skilful pilot to manage a ferry-boat, which had nearly two miles to run from the Suffolk to the Essex side, will be easily imagined. As government letters were always conveyed from Harwich to the fort, at that time, the ferryman was in the receipt of government pay, and it was considered a good situation for an active man. Such was Stephen Laud – and not only active, but a man of no common intelligence. He had been left a widower, with one son, William, whose uncle, a boat-builder at Aldborough, had taken a great liking to him. He had bound him apprentice to Mr. Turner, the ship-builder, at Harwich, where the boy had acquired no mean tact at his employment, and grew up a good workman, though somewhat too free a spirit for a settled character. He was very fond of the sea, and, from the joyous buoyancy of his disposition, the captains of the traders to Aldborough used frequently to give him a run.

Mr. Crabbe, a brother of the celebrated poet, with whom young Laud studied navigation, used to say he was the quickest lad as a mathematician he ever knew. He was a merry, high-spirited sailor, rather than a boat-builder. He was very intimate with one Captain Bargood, a master and owner of several ships then trading along the coast, and over to Holland.

So taken was the captain with Will Laud, that he would have persuaded him at once to join service with him. Will was generally liked; and though his uncle wished him to stick to the boat-building, he could not but confess that he would make a far better sailor. He knew, however, that his old father, the pilot, would not approve of his going to sea for a permanency, without his having a voice in the matter; and as Captain Bargood offered to give young Laud a fair share of profits without loss, and Will had such a turn for the sea, he had sent him over to his father, to ask his consent to this change in his course. This was the subject of their conversation, as, upon the Whitsuntide mentioned, they journeyed on foot from Felixstowe Ferry to Nacton, a distance of six miles.

“You speak famously, boy, of this captain: he may be all right, and his offers to you seem to be good. I have heard it hinted, however, that he is not over-nice; and that though, as times go, he may be an honest trader, yet that he can find friends to help him over with a cargo of moonshine, and get a good run too into the country.”

“I never heard a word of any such traffic, father, and whenever I have been with him I have never seen him in any suspicious company. He would never persuade me to this work, father. I am the son of a government man, and I hope I shall always prove myself an honest tar.”

“I hope so too, my boy; I hope so, too; but when once the block runs, down fall the sails. Take care, my lad; keep your eye ahead.”

“Don’t be afraid, father; only you give consent, and I shall sail with fair wind and weather.”

“I can but wish you well, boy; I can give you but little help. You are now entering your twentieth year, and seem to me determined to go to sea. I shall not persuade you against your own inclinations; so, go; and may the great Pilot above keep you in safety from the dangers of the breakers! I will do what I can for you.”

This consent seemed to animate young Laud with most fervent thankfulness, and his elastic spring carried him over every stile he came to. As they neared the village of Nacton he was chatty upon many subjects, but more especially upon the object of his journey.

“I never was at a christening party,” said the young man; “whom shall we meet there, father?”

“Your relatives on the mother’s side are all poor, William, but honest people. I have long promised to be godfather to one of the Cracknells, and now I am called upon to make good my promise. You will meet their friends the Catchpoles, and one or two others. Perhaps Margaret Catchpole may be there, as her sister Susan, I hear, will never be likely to get out again.”

“Margaret Catchpole! Margaret Catchpole! I wonder whether that is the girl whose name I heard so much about two years ago. I was with Captain Bargood at the Neptune, near the quay, as all the people in the street were talking about a spirited girl riding a pony full speed from Nacton to Ipswich for the doctor. The name I heard mentioned was the same you speak of.”

“And was the very person we shall perhaps see among the party to-day.”

“I am glad of it, for I can easily conceive she must be an enterprising girl; I shall like to see her much. She must be very young still.”

“About sixteen. I have heard that she is a very respectable young woman.”

Conversation of this kind served to entertain the youth and his father, and to divert the current of their thoughts from the sea, until they arrived at Nacton Street. They descended that ravine-looking village, and, passing the blacksmith’s shop at the bottom of the valley, ascended the hill near Admiral Vernon’s, passed the church towards the Ipswich road, and arrived at Master Cracknell’s cottage. The ever-ready Margaret had been before them to assist, and had made herself useful in many ways. The humble holiday party consisted of the Catchpoles, father and two sons, – the two Calthorpes, Stephen and William Laud, and the no small family of the Cracknells; and last, not least, the heroine of the day, Margaret Catchpole.

The cottage, as the reader may suppose, was full; but welcome were they all to the christening, and joyful that day were all the party. Between the young men and Will Laud a quick intimacy commenced. His character seemed formed for a holiday, – all buoyancy, life, and animation; he could at one time have his fun with the children, another have feats of bodily strength with the young men; tell a good story for the old people, and sing a good song for the whole party.

Laud was greatly prepossessed in Margaret’s favour; he had heard much of her at Ipswich, and had been long anxious to see her. When he did see her, she more than answered all his expectations. He thought to see a lively, spirited child, with whom he might joke of her childish but noble act, or romp; but he beheld a very respectable, decent young woman, who, though active and intelligent, was far from having any childish manners, lively, agreeable, and unaffected, with a quickness and spirit well answering to his own.

As for Margaret, such a bright vision of pleasure had never before entered her thoughts or heart, as stole upon her that day. In short, both William and Margaret may be said to have imbibed a partiality for each other on this day, which ripened into such an attachment as has seldom been recorded among all the host of love-stories which fill the pages of romance. But these pages record no romance of unreal life; they tell a plain, unvarnished tale, – a tale which, having been continually related in private circles, is now given to the world at large, as a remarkable series of events in

The short and simple annals of the poor

The merry christening passed away, and the friends parted, but not for a long period. Charles Catchpole, who had been mightily taken with young Laud, agreed to accompany him to his father’s. They all left the cottage of Cracknell together, and all arrived in safety at their respective homes; but not without Will Laud having walked double distance, to show a devotion to our heroine which he, at that time, most sincerely felt.

But they, like all lovers and friends, must and did part. Young William had a long and agreeable soliloquy with himself, as he traversed again that road by night which he had gone in the morning with his father. How different the current of his thoughts! In the morning he was all raging for the sea, but what a comparative calm as to that desired object now ensued. There was tumult stirring of another kind, which seemed to engross the whole of his thoughts, and centre them upon the land, not upon the ocean.

It is unnecessary to follow this youth through his every day’s journey to and from Margaret’s cottage. His uncle began to think that his father had succeeded in making a landsman of him; for

Time, which flies swiftly on the wings of Love, goes slower and more mechanically with those who have to work hard every day, and whose bread depends upon the sweat of their brow.

Charles Catchpole, though he caught infection from the roving spirit of young Laud, and found in him a love of enterprise which charmed him, did not seem so fond of the sea as to be induced to leave for it his more peaceful occupation. The young men were so far pleased with each other, because Laud endeavoured to entertain Charles, and Charles was only too happy to be so entertained. Yet the young landsman wanted to know more of distant countries than young Laud, who had only been a coasting trader, could tell him. He had once, indeed, been over to Holland, but did not go far into the country; so that all the information he could give related to simply the seaport towns on the coast.

Whence arose this inquiring spirit on the part of Charles Catchpole, no one could determine. The lad had once expressed a wish to be a soldier; and it was the old clerk and sexton of the parish of Nacton who used to read and explain to him that there were strange people in the world; and these notions, which had for some time slumbered, seemed to be awakened by young Laud's company.

Will Laud had idle time to spare, and he devoted a great portion of it to Margaret, and was a constant attendant at Nacton. All the family knew of the attachment, and it was no secret with any neighbour who chanced to come in, all of whom were well pleased with Will Laud, and congratulated their respective friends on the future happiness of the young people. Even the master and mistress, for whom the family worked, were satisfied with appearances; and the maids at the farm, who had never quite forgiven Margaret for her good offices, were not a little jealous at the early prepossession of the young sailor for "the girl," as they called her.

Poor Susan, the sick sister, was the only one of the whole family who did not like Will Laud. There frequently dwells in the sickliest forms the purest love. Susan felt more interested for Margaret's future happiness than did any one else in the family. Through all that weakness of body, there was a strength of mind and of judgement, which those who have for a long time had the prospect of dissolution before them frequently possess. She looked with penetrating eyes upon the young man. She weighed well his spirit, listened to his free conversation, and formed her idea of the young man's character, not from outward appearance, but from the tone of sentiment which came from his heart. She was shocked to find that there was, through all his attentions and general desire to please every one, a levity of expression upon the most serious subjects. She did not say much to Margaret upon this point; but her manner towards her lover was colder, and, in some measure, more repulsive than her sister liked. It is said, that "we can always tell those who love us." It is equally true "that we can always tell those who dislike us."

Poor Susan did not openly rebuke Will Laud. Yet he perceived that she did not approve of him, and said to Margaret – "I do not think your sister Susan likes me." Why should he think this? He had never heard Susan utter a word of rebuke to him. But sometimes, in the midst of his wild vagaries, a glance of that bright eye which flashed, searching into his spirit, would make the young sailor pause and finish his story in a tamer way than he intended. Susan's affectionate disposition would not allow her, in that apparently happy period of the two lovers' intercourse, to speak anything harshly, but the more than usual warmth of her interest was not to be mistaken. That pressure of the hand; that kiss, with a starting tear in the eye, that hope expressed that she might be happy, though a fixed tearfulness of doubt seemed to hover over her mind, whilst she so often prayed for her sister, made Margaret almost tremble, as if Susan foreboded evil.

"Dear sister," said Margaret to her one day; "dear sister, you look so gloomily on my lover and me!"

"No, Margaret. I look only with love upon you, and am only, perhaps, too anxious for your future happiness. I am not gloomy. I love you so dearly, Margaret, that I pray that you may live in happiness all your days. I do not like to lose any of your love."

"Nor I any of yours, dear Susan; but sometimes I fear I either have so done, or may so do. Laud fancies you do not like him."

“It is only that I love you so dearly, that if any one loves you less than I do, it makes me feel unhappy. I like Laud very well as a visitor, and he appears very fond of you, Margaret; but he seems to me to think too much of himself to be exactly what I wish him to be, for your sake.”

“May you not be mistaken, Susan? I am very young, and it must be years before we marry. Do not you think he may be likely to improve with his years?”

“I should have thought so, had I not observed that vanity prompts him to boast of his own successes over his uncle and his father. He has got his own will of both, and appears to me to forget the sacrifices they have made for his humour, which he fancies to be for his benefit. But I do not speak against him, Margaret. I only wish him all that can be good, for your sake.”

This conversation might have extended much farther but for the entrance of Laud, who came rather in haste to say that he was sent for by Captain Bargood to Felixstowe Ferry. He had been into the field with young Charles Catchpole, and a sailor brought to him an urgent and special message that he would come to the captain, as he wished to see him upon very particular business.

“Margaret,” he said, “I must take my leave of you for a short time. I suspect the captain wants me to go a voyage; but it will not be a long one. I am assured of good pay, in a share, probably, of his profits, without having to sustain the risk of loss.”

Whatever present grief Margaret might feel at the departure of her betrothed, she did not give way to any deep lamentation. She knew that Laud must work for his living, as well as she for hers, but she did not despair of success; they were both young, both enjoying health and strength. Regret she might feel, but Hope was ever the bright beacon of Margaret’s days. She could only express her hope that they might soon meet again; and as her father and brothers came in from their labour, Laud shook them all by the hand, told them he was going again to sea, and wished them “all health and hearty cheer.”

It was with much regret that the old man and his sons found that Laud must leave them, and their honest nature failed not in expressing every good wish for a pleasant voyage. Laud turned to the sick-bed upon which poor Susan lay, and approached to bid her good-bye. He was surprised to see her in tears, and greatly agitated: so much so, indeed, that the bed-clothes shook with such a tremulous motion, that they showed the extent of her agitation.

“Good-bye, Susan,” said Laud, and extended his hand.

Susan turned her piercing eye upon him, took his warm hand in her cold, transparent, bloodless fingers, and with great effort spoke to him.

“William, I want to say a word before you go.” Here she paused to take breath, and every one who loved her crowded round her bed. “I have observed, William, much in your character that requires alteration, before you can be either happy yourself or can make my sister so. You have a lightness of thought, which you do not blush to express, which appears to me bordering upon infidelity. There is a God, William, Who observes us all, and knows every secret of our hearts, and in His sight piety, parental love, and duty, are qualities which meet His approbation, and the contrary provoke his displeasure. I have observed with pain that you sometimes speak with levity of those whom you ought to love. You may not intend to be wicked, but your language, with respect to the guardians of your youth, is not good. You will forgive my speaking my mind to you now, as I am sure I shall never see you again in this world: but if ever we do meet in another and a better world, you must alter greatly in the sentiments of your heart. We shall never meet if you do not. You want steadiness of principle and firmness of purpose. You may lead those who look up to you; but I can see that you may be very easily led by others, who have only to exercise determination, and they may tempt you to anything. You want, I repeat it, steadiness of principle and stability of purpose. I love my dear sister, and I can foresee that you will make her very unhappy if you do not alter in this respect. Take what I say in good part, and forget it not. I can only pray for your welfare. If ever you are unkind to Margaret, you and I shall never meet in another world. Good-bye, William, good-bye!”

The effort had been too much for her weak state, and she sank back exhausted, hiding her tears upon her pillow.

Youth and health do not dwell long upon the words of sickness, though love cannot fail to produce a powerful effect for the time. Laud returned to Felixstowe, leaving our cottagers to lament his departure, and Margaret to the exercise of those duties to which her nature and inclination made her then, and ever after, so well adapted – the nursing of an invalid. Had she not had these duties to perform, she might have felt more keenly the loss of her lover. She was never of a desponding disposition. She knew that Laud must work hard; and she hoped that his love for her would make him prudent and careful, though it might be years before they both saved a sufficiency to furnish a cottage.

Her duties to poor Susan became every day more urgent, for every day seemed to bring her slowly to her end. Her attentions to this sick sister were of the gentlest and most affectionate kind. Softly, gently, noiselessly, she made every one go in and out of the apartment. Susan wished that all whom she knew and loved should pray with her, and her good mistress frequently came up from the farm to read to her. Oh, how eagerly does the mind of the sufferer devour the word of God! – the more humble, the more sweet that precious fruit to the palate of the sick! How does she desire more and more of the living waters of life, and lift her eyes to Heaven, and turn them in upon her heart, to see whence her help might come!

Poor Susan had been too long a sufferer not to have learned the duties of patience; she had too humble a spirit to think anything of herself; but when she thought of her father, mother, brothers, and sister, her whole soul seemed absorbed in their present and future welfare.

Oh! what instructive lessons may be learned at the sick-bed! How wise are the reflections then made upon life and immortality! Could men only be as wise at all hours, how happy might they be!

But Susan's hours were numbered, and her end drew nigh. Scarcely three weeks after the departure of Laud, she was called away; but her end was so characteristic of piety and love, that, despite of the impatience of the hasty reader, it must be recorded. On Saturday, the 24th of June, not long before the family were about to retire to rest, Susan said to Margaret, "Lift me up, dear, lift me up – I feel myself going." As might be expected, a word of this sort called them all around her. The poor, weak, wasted, emaciated girl, with an eye as brilliant as the purest crystal, and a countenance expressive of the calm spirit within, looked upon the mother bathing her thin hand with tears, and the affectionate father and brothers a little more composed, but not less afflicted. Edward, the youngest, knelt close by her side; whilst the affectionate Margaret, with her arm and part of her chest supporting the raised pillow, against which the sufferer leant, held with her left hand the other transparent one of her dying sister.

Who shall paint the silver locks of age, and that calm eye, watching the waning light of a dear daughter's life? "Let us pray," said the dying girl; "let us pray." Around the bed knelt six of her relatives, and in deep humility heard Susan's prayer for them all, whilst they could only answer, with a sob, "God bless you!"

But now came an effort, which seemed to agitate the sufferer beyond all former exertions: the clothes around her poor chest seemed to shake with excess of emotion, as, with a most earnest and impressive look, she half turned herself round, and uttered the name of her sister.

"Margaret," she said, "Margaret, you will never marry William Laud – he will cause you all much sorrow; but do not forsake the right and honest path, and you will find peace at the last. Margaret, my dear sister, never suffer him to lead you astray! Promise me, promise me never to be his, except he marry you amidst your friends."

"I never will, dear Susan – I never will."

"Bless you! God bless you all!" And with one look up, as if she would pierce the skies, she raised both her hands to heaven, and said, "O blessed Saviour!" and with those words her spirit took its flight to eternity.

What a thrill, a holy thrill, ran through the hearts of all, as they witnessed this solemn but cheerful end of her they so dearly loved! That night was, indeed, one of serious reflection among them all: they thought and talked of her, and blessed her, and resolved to follow her advice, and keep the honest path.

CHAPTER II THE TEMPTATION

Laud reached Felixstowe Ferry: he had seen his parent, and then went to the shore to meet the captain. There they stand under the cliff, by the shore, opposite the harbour and town of Harwich, whilst the light gleams upon the distant beacon of Walton-on-the-Naze. There is a boat a short distance on the calm wave, and not far ahead a brig is seen standing off and on. The captain is pointing to the brig, and seems very earnest in his conversation; whilst a sort of cool composure is settled upon the firm attitude of Will Laud, as he listens and seems to remain immovable.

Oh! would that he had so remained! Many an afterpang, which the birth of that day's sorrow occasioned, would have been spared.

"Well, Laud, I make you a fair offer," said this artful captain; "I make you a fair offer of the command of the brig: there she is, as tight a vessel as ever cut a wave. I will venture to say, that when you helped to lay her keel with Turner, you little dreamt of commanding on board of her."

"I have no objection to the craft, captain; but I do not like the job."

"No: I suppose you would like to live at home along with the old ferryman, your father; or, perhaps, knock away at boat-building on the Alde. Pshaw, Will, pshaw! this is a tame kind of life. I took you for a fellow of more spirit, or I never should have taken you for my messmate."

"When you took me for such, you took me as an honest man, and all your dealings were above-board. Now you want to make me a smuggler. This is the work, captain, I do not like. My father is an honest man, and under Government – why should I bring disgrace upon him?"

"And does it follow, Will, that I am what you call a smuggler, because I do a little in a free trade? Where's the disgrace you speak of? – and who is to bring it upon us? Come, Will, there are two sides of a question, and we may hit upon the right as well as the wrong."

"But we shall be cheating the Government of our country."

"As to that, Will, look from the highest to the lowest, and see if they do not all do so as long as they can with impunity."

"I do not see that."

"No, Will, no; because you shut your eyes. But who pays more tax than he can help, or as much as is strictly due, either for his horses, servants, powder, malt, hops, windows, silk, woollen, or any commodity whatever, upon which a wholesale tax is imposed for the good of the country? Don't talk, then, of cheating Government. I call mine only a little free trade; and if I choose to employ a few free hands and pay them well, what is that to anybody?"

"You may employ them with more freedom in an honest way, than running such risk of life, liberty, and property, as you do. I almost as much grieve that I ever knew you, captain, as I do now at being compelled to leave your service. I have been obliged to you hitherto, but you want now to lay me under an obligation to which I have no stomach."

"This is only since you came to the ferry, and went to the christening. Go back, my boy, go back and turn ploughman. You will like that better than ploughing the waves. You will only be, after all, a lubberly landsman. But I must hail my fellows, and be off. What a pity such a brig should go a-begging for a captain! Your own work, too, Will. Well, well, I did not think you such a fool. Here, with a silver spoon in your mouth, you would throw it away, and take up with a wooden one. Go, eat your bread sopped in warm water, in a wooden bowl, and leave your old messmates and friends to good fare, an active life, and cheerful company. Good-bye, Will; good-bye."

And the captain turned round to give the signal to his boatmen to pull to shore; but without the least intention of giving up his prey. It was only as a cat would pretend to let her victim escape to a little distance, under the idea of having more play.

"Go to your girl, boy; go to your girl," said he, as he took a step toward the beach. "She will be glad to see you without employment, and sick of the sea for her sake."

“I’ll tell you what, captain, my girl’s an honest one, and if you were to make her a disloyal offer, she would be the first to heave up her anchor, or cut her cable, and haul to windward and be off.”

“I don’t make her any offer; I have nothing to do with any of her sex, and the less you have to do with them the better, Will. But if you must have her in your eye, why not for her sake try to get a comfortable berth for her? In a very short time, you will be able to secure enough to make her happy. After a few runs, you may have a snug cot, near this very cove, and be as comfortable as you wish to be. But if you have made up your mind, and are determined not to accept my offer, why then I must find another who will; and I warrant, that I need not go far before I meet with one who will jump at the chance.”

“I say, captain, how many voyages shall I go, before that time comes you speak of?”

“That depends upon our luck. The quicker work we make, the sooner we shall keep our harbour. One year, perhaps two. At all events, three, and your berth is sure.”

“Well, captain, but how shall it be for share?”

“Why, there’s the brig, and look ye, Will, she’s all right and tight, and everything well provided aboard her. She is under your command; your first trip to Holland; your cargo, gin; and as to other goods, snuff, tobacco, linen, and such things, I let you barter with for yourself. Only secure me the main chance. As to risk, that’s all mine. You shall receive, say one-sixth of the profit for the first year, one-third for the second; and an equal share after. Now, my boy, but that I know your pluck, and your tact, I should never make you such an offer. There you have it.”

“Captain, I’m your man! – I’m your man!”

And so he sold himself to as artful, desperate, and bold a rover, as ever crossed the Channel. How true were poor Susan’s last words to him – “You want steadiness of principle and stability of purpose!” From that hour, Will entered upon a course of life which led to his own ruin, and the ruin of others. He was caught in the toils of a smuggler, from which, though he once escaped, he never had sufficient stability to entirely emancipate himself.

Captain Bargood, to whom Will thus sold himself, was a clever as well as a desperate adventurer. He contrived to keep up appearances as a steady trader, and had vessels as regularly chartered as any of England’s noblest merchants. His sails visited with proper invoices all the ports along the coast, and he had connexions in every town of the first class of dealers. Yet this man managed to have withal an under-current in the contraband trade, which paid him far greater profits than his regular account.

So well did he arrange his plans, that if a vessel of his was taken by the coastguard, he had always a captain or a mate to father her, and as he always paid them well, his own fair fame was suspected by none but those who occasionally bought goods of him at a price so far below the market, that they were content to let their suspicions subside in their own profits. He was a good judge of men, both of sailors, landmen, gentry, and men of business. He knew how far to trust them, and how soon to shorten his sail. His ships, captains, and crews, were as well known to him as anything in his own unostentatious cottages at Aldborough, Hollesley, Harwich, or Ipswich; in which he occasionally took up his abode, as business or inclination prompted. But he equally well knew Will Laud, and foresaw in him the very commander who should bring him in many a good prize in the shape of spirits or tobacco, furs or linen. He cared for no man’s success but his own. He could be rough, smooth, hot, or cool, just as he thought best to gain his end. Money was his idol, and, as a quick return and enormous profit for a small outlay, the smuggler’s trade seemed to him the most promising. Laud would, and as the sequel will show, did prove a valuable servant or slave to him. This man outlived every one of his captains, and died about four years ago: namely, in the year 1841.

But the young sailor is arm-in-arm with the captain, the boat is hailed, the crew, four oars and a steersman, approach the shore, and the captain calls out —

“Now, Jack, high and dry for your new commander!”

The boat grounds, and Laud and his future master are seated in the stern.

“Long time bringing-to, captain?” said the gruff and surly-looking John Luff, a fellow who seemed formed of such materials as compose a cannon-ball. He looked like what he was, an iron-hearted and iron-fisted desperado, whose only pleasure was to serve a bad man, and to rule every one in the ship who had a little more feeling than himself.

They were soon on board the brig, and Laud was duly introduced to the crew, and appointed their captain.

“Yes, master, yes,” said the mate, “we understand. You need not spin us a long yarn; business, say I, and the sooner the better. I will take care of him, trust me. He’s a smart boy. He’ll do, captain, he’ll do.”

The mate, John Luff, and the master, seemed to understand each other. The captain shook hands with Laud, and bidding him take care of his own craft, he left them outward bound, and came ashore at Woodbridge Haven.

Let it suffice, for the reader’s information, that Laud was successful in his new career. He made his voyage pay well, and contrived to send some handsome presents to Margaret, too handsome to be acceptable. Alas! how little did that desperate youth think that he was giving pain instead of pleasure to all those who had any interest in his welfare! How little did he think he was laying the foundation of misery and woe to his father, to the Catchpoles, to the Cracknells, and to every one who knew him!

His first present was received by Margaret at a time when the heart of a true lover is most open to the kind acts of friendship. Poor Margaret and the family had just returned from the funeral of Susan, and were seated in the cottage, talking over the good qualities of their dear departed and beloved friend. Her sayings and doings, her affectionate advice, her patience and resignation, were all topics of conversation, and each had some kind act to record, not one a single fault to mention. One or two of the Cracknells, and a workman or two on the farm, who helped to carry the corpse, were all of the party who were not relatives. The good mother had prepared the mournful meal, some cake, bread and butter, a cup of tea, and a pint of beer each for the men. They were partaking of this humble meal in a very subdued and quiet spirit, as there came a rap at the door, and young Edward opened it.

“Come in,” said the father, and in walked a weatherbeaten man, who from his dress might be taken for some honest ploughman, but whose countenance betrayed a very different expression – none of that openness and simplicity which good labourers and countrymen wear, but a shaggy brow, and matted thick black hair. His eyebrows half covered the sockets of his eyes, which peeped from under them with an inquisitive glance, to see if all was safe.

“Does one Margaret Catchpole live here?” said the man.

“Yes, she does,” was Margaret’s quick reply; “what do you want with her? I am she.”

“Oh! you be she, be you? Then I be commissioned to deliver this here parcel into your hands;” and, easing his shoulder of a heavy bale of goods, they came with some weight upon the chair which Edward had vacated for the guest.

“From whom does this come?” said she.

“I don’t know who he is. I was at work on the marshes at Bawdsey Ferry, when a young sailor came up to me, and asked me if I knew where Nacton was. I told him I knew whereabouts it was. He then asked me if I would take this here bundle to one Margaret Catchpole, a labourer’s daughter, living, as he described, in just this place, which I have found.”

“Did he give his name?”

“No; he said he couldn’t come himself, but that this here would remind you of him.”

All immediately concluded who he was, and Margaret asked Edward to bring the packet into the sleeping-room, whilst the countryman was asked to sit down and take a draught of beer.

The parcel was unpacked. There were silks and shawls, caps and lace, ribbons and stuffs, and gloves; parcels of tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff; together with curious-headed and silver-tipped pipes; in short, enough to stock a small shop. But there was nothing to give pleasure to Margaret. That poor girl’s heart sank within her at a sight which she at once perceived was far too costly to be honestly

procured. She called to Edward to assist her in tying up the bale again, and removing it into the room where the pretended countryman was seated. As she entered, the fellow roughly accosted her —

“Well! you find summut there, I dare say, to tempt you soon to put aside these dark-looking dresses which you all wear. I must be going: can I take anything back for you?”

“Yes,” said Margaret — “yes; you may take the whole bundle back the same way you brought it, and tell the young man who gave it you that I should have valued one single pair of honestly purchased gloves more than all the valuables he has sent me.”

There was a twinkle of that small grey eye, and a twitch of the muscles of that sun-burnt face, which showed that even the hardy, rough-looking countryman was startled at such an honest spirit as then addressed him. This person was none other than John Luff, the mate of the *Alde*, who had undertaken to perform this duty for Captain Laud, from a motive, without much love in it, simply because he feared that the captain might be persuaded by his girl to leave off a smuggler’s life. He saw in an instant that such would have been the case, had young Laud come with him, or brought the load himself. He had assumed the countryman’s dress to avoid any notice from the coastguard, and, until he came to the lane leading to the farm, he had brought the bale of goods in a sack slung over his shoulder, as if it were corn, or chaff, or flour. He was not very easily put out, nor long in giving his answer.

“No, young woman, I have had lug enough to bring it here, and I got a crown for my job; mayhap, if I were to take it back to the youngster, I might lose half my crown, and so be paid for my trouble. I’m not fond of broken heads for a love-ditty. You may find some one else to take it back: I’ve done my duty.”

“No, you have not,” said Margaret; “you are no landsman, I am sure: your duty is not that of an honest labourer. You are — I am sure you are — connected with the smugglers on the coast. You may take this parcel for yourself. I give it to you, to do what you like with; but do tell the young man, when you see him, that I hate his presents, though not himself.”

“I won’t have anything to do with what’s not my own,” said the man, “although you tell me I’m not an honest man. I’m off. I was to meet the young chap again to-morrow at the same time and place. If you had any small love-token now, or any words which might not anger the young fellow, why, I shouldn’t mind taking ’em; but if you haven’t any, why then I’ll tell him you didn’t care anything about him or his present. So good-bye to you.”

The fellow took up his hat and stick to depart.

“Hold!” said Margaret — “hold!” and taking her father’s hat down from its peg, she tore off the crape, and folding it up, she approached the disguised seaman, saying — “Give him this — do give him this — and tell him, I’d rather we all wore the like for him, than the rich things he has sent us. Will you tell him this?”

“No doubt he’ll be much obliged to you: but you won’t be long in this mind. So, good-bye to you all.” And the man departed, leaving that spirited girl to think with pain of the dreaded words of Susan — “Margaret, you will never marry William Laud!”

CHAPTER III MISFORTUNES

Well would it have been for the Catchpoles and the Cracknells, had they burnt every bit of valuable stuff which the smuggler had that day brought. What years of anguish would it have spared them! – what miseries! what agonies! Nothing unlawful can long prosper. Sorrow and bitterness follow the days of unjust gain, and whosoever thinks to be happy by the sudden influx of ill-gotten wealth, will find himself grievously mistaken. Wealth gotten by honest industry and fair dealing may enable a good man to soothe the sufferings of others, but even when obtained, men find that it is not the being rich, but the regular employment in a prosperous line of life, that gives the pleasure. Sudden prosperity is too often destructive of a man's peace of mind; but sudden prosperity, by evil means, is sure to bring its own ruin. Had but that first bale of goods been burnt, Margaret might have continued the happy, cheerful child of Nature, respected and received as the honest, good-hearted girl she really was.

It may fairly be said of Margaret, that she had no covetous hankering after any of the goods which were that day presented to her eye. She told all her friends what they were, and consulted with them what should be done with them. She would have given them up to the government officers, but she saw that it would involve her lover. She would have sent them to Laud's father, but again the idea of causing him distress deterred her. Oh! that she had cast them upon the broad sea, and let who would have caught them! But they were goodly things to look upon; they were costly – too good to throw away. And as Mrs. Cracknell said they might all be serviceable, and it was a sin to waste them, she persuaded Margaret to let her have them.

"Let my good man take them home; we may by degrees get rid of them. I can do the smaller packages up in smaller parcels, in my way; and as to the silks and lace, I can find perhaps a distant customer to take them off my hands."

"You may do what you like with them," said Margaret, "only do not let me know anything more about them."

"You know, Mr. Catchpole," said Mrs. Cracknell, "that we may all want a little help one day, and these things may provide against a stormy hour. At all events, you shall lose nothing by them, though they now bring you no profit."

It did not take much time to persuade these simple-minded people to part with things for which they had no demand and no taste.

Mrs. Cracknell had them conveyed to her cottage, where she had them sorted out, and, as prudently as possible, disposed of them according to the means of her humbler customers.

After a time, she found herself gradually improving in circumstances, and, had she been content, might have gone on improving for years. Her profits were too rapid, however, not to excite a stronger mind than she possessed. She made, of course, handsome presents to the young Catchpoles, and Margaret had the mortification of seeing a smart pipe, and of smelling the fumes of rich tobacco, even in her own cottage, well knowing they were the fruits of her lover's misdoings.

Meantime, that lover's name began to be notorious along the coast. Margaret heard no good of him. The coastguard had set a mark upon him, and it became known throughout the country that Will Laud was the ringleader of as desperate a gang as ever infested the shores of Great Britain.

So frequent were the inroads made at this period upon the commerce of the country, that government had to employ a very active force to stay, though she could not put down, so discreditable a feature upon her coasts.

At this time the shores of Norfolk and Suffolk were most conspicuous for contraband trade. Severe and deadly were the continual actions between the preventive-service men and the smugglers; lives were continually lost on both sides; and dreadful animosities sprang up between the parties upon the sea-shore.

Will Laud and his associates had great luck; and Captain Bargood found in him as bold and profitable a fellow as he could wish. Many were the hairbreadth escapes, however, which he, in conjunction with his crew, experienced. Laud was a tool in the hands of his mate, though he himself was not aware of it; for whilst that fellow had his own way, he always managed to get it through the medium of the captain's permission. He would, in his bluff way, suggest, with all becoming subordination, such and such a scheme, and generally succeeded in the enterprise.

They had observed for a long time a scout upon the beach under Bawdsey Cliffs, and knew that he was one of the Irish cruisers, who had been transplanted to watch their craft: Laud proposed to nab him when he could. He had been ashore one day to meet his employer, and had met this merry-hearted Irishman at the Sun Inn, in a street of that long, sandy village of Bawdsey. Pat was a loquacious, whisky-loving, light-hearted fellow, who, without fear, and with ready wit, made himself agreeable to everybody. He frequented the various inns along the border, and was generally liked for his dash of gallantry, his love of drinking, and his generous spirit; he was a brave fellow, too, and watchful for his honour. He had seen along the beach a man roaming about, and had concealed himself, not far from the fisherman's cottage, on purpose to watch him; but all he could make out was, that the man went to the back of the cottage, and there he lost him. Pat went to the fisherman's cot, found the man and his wife at their meals, searched about the premises, but could spy nothing. Pat had seen this thing several times, and was fully convinced that the man he saw was a smuggler.

In Bawdsey Cliff the smugglers had a cave of no small dimensions. It had formerly been a hollow ravine in the earth, formed by the whirling of a stream of water, which had passed quickly through a gravelly bed, and met with opposition in this mass of clay. It had made for itself a large crater, and then had issued again at the same place, and ran through a sand-gall and gravelly passage down to the sea. This was discovered by a tenant of the Earl of Dysart, who, in sinking a well near his shepherd's cottage, suddenly struck into the opening of this cave. As the springs were low at this season, the cave was almost empty of water, and formed a most curious appearance. It was even then called the Robbers' Cave, and curiosity was greatly excited in the country to visit it. It was so smoothly and regularly formed by the eddies of the whirlpool, that the nicest art could not have made it so uniform. The proprietor sank his well some feet lower, until he came to a good stream; but in making the well, he formed an archway into this curious place, and left it so for the gratification of public curiosity. Time swept on, and the cave became less frequented, and at last forgotten.

A few years, however, previously to this narration, some smugglers had been disappointed of their run, and had thrown their tubs down the well, with the consent of their agent the fisherman, probably a descendant of the old shepherd's, who dwelt in the cottage. This led to the re-discovery and improvement of this famous dépôt of arms, ammunition, stock-in-trade, and place of retreat, which was then occupied by Will Laud and his associates, and to which very spot John Luff was at that time bound.

These men had contrived to make the cave as comfortable a berth as a subterraneous place could be. They had ingeniously tapped the land stream below the cave, and laid it perfectly dry, and with much labour and ingenuity had contrived to perforate the clay into the very chimney of the cottage; so that a current of air passed through the archway directly up the chimney, and carried away the smoke, without the least suspicion being awakened. This place was furnished with tables, mats, stools, and every requisite for a place of retreat and rendezvous. The descent was by a bucket well-rope, which a sailor well knew how to handle; whilst the bucket itself served to convey provisions or goods of any kind.

Such was the place into which vanished the choice spirits which poor Pat had seen, and into which Pat himself, *nolens, volens*, was shortly to be introduced. It would be needless to add, that the fisherman and his wife were accomplices of the smugglers.

Some short time after, Pat had an opportunity of discovering the use of the well as an inlet and outlet of the smugglers, and conceived the idea that contraband goods were stowed away at the

bottom of it. He had seen a man, after talking to the woman at the spot, descend, and then come up again, and depart.

“Now’s my turn,” says Pat to himself, as he came out from his hiding-place, and went to the well. As every sailor could let himself down by a rope, and ascend by it likewise, Pat was soon at the bottom of the well, but found nothing. He began his ascent, working away with his hands and feet in a manner which a sailor only understands. He was gaining more daylight, and hoping that he should get out before the woman (whom he concluded had gone for help) should return. He had gained the very part where the archway into the cave was formed, and there found a sort of stay, or bar, at the opposite side, to rest his leg upon. He was taking advantage of this post to get breath, and had just swung off again to ascend, when he felt his ankles grasped by a powerful pair of pincers, as it seemed, and in another instant such a jerk as compelled him instantly to let go the rope, and he came with all his weight against the side of the well. Stunned he was, but not a bone was broken, for his tormentors had taken the precaution to have a well-stuffed hammock ready to break his fall. He was in a moment in the cave, and when reviving, heard such a burst of unearthly merriment, he could think of nothing but that he had arrived at that dreaded purgatory, to escape which he had paid so much to his priest.

In a faint, feeble voice, Pat was heard to exclaim – “O, Father O’Gharty; O, Father O’Gharty, deliver me!”

This caused such another burst, and such a roar of “O, Father O’Gharty! O, Father O’Gharty!” from so many voices, that the poor fellow groaned aloud. But a voice, which he fancied he had heard when on earth, addressed him, as he lay with his eyes just opening to a red glare of burning torches.

“Patrick O’Brien! Patrick O’Brien! welcome to the shades below.”

Pat blinked a little, and opened his eyes wider, and saw, as he thought, twenty or thirty ghosts of smugglers, whom he supposed had been shot by the coastguard, and were answering for their sins in purgatory.

“Come, Pat, take a drop of moonshine, my hearty, to qualify the water you have taken into your stomach: this liquid flame will warm the cold draught.”

Pat had need of something to warm him, but had no idea of drinking flame.

“I hope,” he said, “your majesty will excuse a poor Irishman.”

“No excuse! no excuse! By the saint, your namesake, you shall swallow this gill, or maybe you’ll have a little more water to simmer in.”

Pat made no further opposition; and one of the uncouth, black-bearded demons, handed him a cup of as bright, shining liquid as any which the sons of whisky ever saw.

“Drink, Pat, drink,” said the fellow; “a short life and a merry one.”

“Och!” sighed Pat, and the next moment the burning liquid ran down his throat, warming his inside with such a glow, as made the blood circulate rapidly through every vein of his body. Whether it was the pure gin he had drunk, or the naturally aspiring disposition of the man, he began to look around him, and to note the habitation in which they dwelt. Pikes and guns were slung here and there; cables and casks lay about the room; swords and pistols – weapons which seemed more adapted to fleshly men than disembodied spirits – made the reviving spirit of this son of the Emerald Isle bethink him that he had fallen into the hands of mortals. He now looked a little more wise, and began to give a good guess at the truth, when the one who seemed to be the captain of the band soon dissipated all his doubts by saying, “Patrick O’Brien, here’s to Lieutenant Barry and the preventive service. Come, Pat, drink to your commander, ’tis the last time you will ever be in such good company.”

These words convinced him that he was in the smugglers’ cave; and as he knew them to be most desperate fellows, his own lot did not appear much more happy than when he thought himself in the company of evil spirits.

“Come, Pat, drink. You need a little comfort.”

Pat drank, and though he foresaw that no good could come to him, yet as the spirit poured in, and his heart grew warm, he thought he would not seem afraid, so he drank "Success to Lieutenant Barry and the coastguard!"

"Now, Pat, one more glass, and we part for ever."

Ominous words – "part for ever!" He heartily wished himself again in his own dear island, ere he had ventured a peep at the bottom of the well. The smugglers – for such he found they were – grinned upon him most unceremoniously, as if they had some horrid purpose in view, and seemed to enjoy the natural timidity which began to creep over his frame.

Pat drank his last glass: John Luff arose, commanded silence, and, in as gentle a voice as such a fellow could assume, said, "Mr. Patrick O'Brien, you are welcome now to your choice of departure."

"Thank ye, gemmen, thank ye, and I shall not forget your hospitality."

Pat rose, as if to depart.

"Mr. Patrick O'Brien, the choice of departure we give you is the choice of death!"

Pat's heart sank within him, but he did not lose all his courage or presence of mind; and the latter quality suggested to him that he would try a little blarney.

"Why, gemmen, you wouldn't kill a poor fellow in cold blood, would you?"

"No, Pat, no; and for that reason we have made you welcome to a drop, that you may not die a cold-blooded death. Draw swords!"

In an instant twenty sharp blades were unsheathed.

"Now, Mr. O'Brien, take your choice: shall every man have a cut at you – first a leg, then a hand, then an arm, and so on, until your head only shall remain – or will you be rolled up in a hammock for a sack, as your winding-sheet, and, well shot, sink as a sailor to the bottom of those waters we have just quitted?"

"Thank your honour," said the poor victim of their cruelty, "thank your honour; and of the two I had rather have neither."

There was no smile upon any of the ferocious countenances around him, and Pat's hopes of anything but cruelty forsook him. Just at this moment the bucket descended the well, and in came Will Laud, or Captain Laud, as he was called, who, acquainted with the fact of the Irishman's descent (for he was the very person whom Pat had seen to make his exit, and had been informed by the woman of his being drowned), was a little relieved to see the man standing in the midst of his men unscathed.

He soon understood the position in which he was placed, and, after a few words with his Lieutenant, John Luff, himself repeated the already determined sentence of his crew.

So calm was his voice, so fixed his manner, that the bold Irishman perceived at once that his doom was at hand. Assuming, therefore, his wonted courage, making up his mind to death, he looked the commander in the face, and with the composure of a mind comparatively at ease, said —

"Since I must die, let me die dacently. My choice is made – the hammock for my winding-sheet, the water for my grave, and God forgive you all."

Not a word more did the brave fellow utter, but stood like a hero, or a martyr, ready for execution.

Now to the credit of Laud be it recorded, that in his soul he admired the intrepidity of the man's spirit; and murder, base murder of a bold man, never was his intention.

He whispered to his mate, though in a moment after he exclaimed to his crew, "Do your duty."

Pat was tripped up, rolled up in the hammock, swung upon the chain, heard the whistle, and in an instant found himself, as he thought, descending to the shades below. In fact, however, he was ascending, though consciousness for a time forsook him, and the swoon of anticipated suffocation bereft him of his senses. When he did recover, he found himself at the bottom of a boat, bounding over the billows, and was soon on board a ship. Here he revived, and was treated by the crew with kindness; but after many days he was put ashore on the eastern coast of his own dear isle, with this gentle admonition: —

“Patrick O’Brien, ‘all’s well that ends well.’ Let well alone for the future, and now farewell.”

So ended this spree, which may serve to show the mind and habits of those men with whom Will Laud had to deal.

At times these desperate men would be mutinous, but their common interest kept them together. The persons of several were known along the coast, and farmers found it to their interest to wink at their peccadilloes.

It was no uncommon thing for them to have their horses taken out of the fields, or even out of their stables, for a run at night; but they were sure of a handsome present being left upon their premises – casks of gin, real Hollands, packets of linen; and, sometimes learning the thing most wanted by a particular farmer, he would be surprised to find it directed to him by an unknown hand, and delivered, without charge, at his door.

The handsomest saddles and bridles which could be procured, whips, lamps, lanterns, handsome pairs of candlesticks, guns, pistols, walking-sticks, pipes, &c., were, at various houses, left as presents. Such was the state of the traffic, that the best spirits could be always had at the farm-houses on the coast (for all knew where it might be had without difficulty), only let the money be left for it with the order. In this manner was the revenue defrauded; and there were men in high authority who used to defend the practice by calling it England’s best nursery for seamen. Seldom, however, were good men secured from these sources. The generality of smugglers were not such as England wanted to defend her liberty and laws.

About this time so many presents were sent to Margaret, and left in such a clandestine manner at or near the cottage, that although she herself was never corrupted by any one of these temptations, yet the effects of them began to show themselves in her family. Charles, the elder brother, used to find the presents, and dispose of them to Mrs. Cracknell, and he found his own gains so rapidly increase that he began to be idle; would not go to plough; disliked working on the land; took to carpentering at the old sexton’s at Nacton; learned to read and write; and again encouraged his old *penchant* for soldiering. At length he left his parents and friends, and enlisted in the 33rd regiment of foot, under the fictitious name of Jacob Dedham, at the Black Horse public-house, St. Mary Elm’s, Ipswich. He passed himself off as belonging to that parish; and but for the accidental circumstance of a Nacton lad, of the name of Calthorpe, seeing him at the inn, his friends and relatives would have been ignorant of his departure. His regiment soon after his enlistment sailed for the East Indies; and the history of Charles Catchpole, alias Jacob Dedham, would of itself form no uninteresting narrative. He rose in his regiment by great steadiness and assiduity. He became a singular adept at learning Eastern languages and customs. He was taken great notice of by Sir William Jones, the great Oriental linguist, who recommended him to a very important charge under Lord Cornwallis, who employed him in a confidential duty, as a spy, upon the frontiers of Persia. We shall have occasion to contemplate him in a future part of this history. For the present we pass on to some further fruits of the smuggler’s intimacy with the Catchpoles.

Robert, another son, in consequence of the unwholesome introduction of rapid profits, took to drinking, smoking, and idle company, and very soon brought himself to an early grave; giving the deepest pangs to his parents, and creating sorrow and suffering to all. He died of delirium tremens, in the year 1791.

James became a poacher, and was shot in a desperate affray with the gamekeepers of Admiral Vernon. He lingered on his brother’s bed until December 15th, 1792, and expired in deep distress, and with a declaration to poor Margaret, that it was her acquaintance with Laud that brought him to ruin. The youngest son alone preserved any steady fixed principles, and was the prop of his parents’ hopes.

The whole family now fell into disrepute, and the bitterest days of adversity followed. Tales began to be circulated of Margaret’s connexion with the smuggler. Sailors were seen to come and go from the cottage; and if they went but to ask for information, the lying tongue of slander was sure to propagate some infamous story. It was true that presents were left about the cottage, and that agents

of the Cracknells were ready to receive them; but Margaret never touched a single thing that was so found. She was not insensible to all she saw, and she felt the full weight of Laud's misconduct; but she never forgot to pray for him, and hoped, with that fondness which true love only can know, that he would one day be converted. But she partook of the ignominy which now visited her family, though she assuredly did not deserve it. She recommended her father to take another cottage, and even to seek work under another master. Anything she considered would be better than a place where he met with such continual misfortunes.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Denton was unkind to Margaret, though her own servants took every opportunity to persuade her that she was a very worthless person – she seemed to think a removal would be best. Accordingly Jonathan Catchpole changed his abode, and, from a regular workman on that farm, became a jobbing labourer wherever he could find employment. He and his family lived at a lone cottage on the borders of Nacton Heath. Edward became a shepherd's boy, and Margaret had serious thoughts of once more going out to service; but where? Alas! she remembered how happy she had been in her first place, and the very remembrance of that happiness made her shrink from having to relate to her former benefactor the then miserable consequences of her first attachment.

Laud's father shared in the general stigma attached to his son's name – he was accused of conniving at the youth's excesses, and lost his situation as ferryman of the government packets from Harwich to Languard Fort. What miseries, heaped one upon the other, now fell with blighting force upon poor Margaret!

But a greater trial just now awaited her – a dreadful conflict took place below Felixstowe beach between the coastguard and Laud's crew. A run was planned and put in execution from the Walton Marshes for Woodbridge – carts were brought to the cliff, the coastguard, as was thought, being attracted to Sizewell Gap, and everything being open before the smugglers. The cargo was landed, and the run began, when the preventive-service men, who had been secretly informed of the intended *ruse* at Sizewell Gap, came out of their hiding-place in a double band, headed by Lieutenant Edward Barry, a brave young sailor, second son of Mr. Henry Barry, a miller and farmer, of Levington Hill. The onset was tremendous, and the resistance deadly; but might and right were on one side, and bore down the stalwart forms of the violent smugglers.

Three of the crew were killed, and the others, unable to stand against the assault, fled as well as they were able. Young Barry and Laud had a severe personal encounter, in which the death of one or the other seemed the determination of both. Laud was the most powerful man, but Barry was the most expert swordsman; but what was the experience of the sword-arm in so dark a night? The two commanders seemed to know each other even in the darkness, for they fought with voices of encouragement to their men. The smugglers had fled, and Laud began to fear he was alone; but the pursuers, too, had gone, and still the two captains were contending. At this moment the contest was most deadly – Laud had wounded young Barry by a thrust. Though it was slight it was felt by the officer, and he determined neither to ask nor to give quarter. Laud had driven him up the side of a bank, and was in the act of giving a thrust at his heart, as Barry, with the advantage of his situation, like lightning gave a cut at his head, which at once went through his hat, and descended upon his forehead. Down fell the smuggler like a thunderbolt, and another moment the sword would have been buried in his side, had not Barry been compelled to act on the defensive by the opposition of John Luff.

Finding a new antagonist, and being himself wounded, this young man thought best to gather up his strength for a defensive retreat. He was not pursued. Hearing some of his own men he called to them, and, recognizing him, they advanced with him to the spot where, as Barry supposed, Captain Laud lay dead. But Luff had thrown him over his shoulder, and, being well acquainted with the marshes, had carried him over some planks, and so escaped.

CHAPTER IV DECEIT

Margaret was seated in her father's cottage, now no longer that happy spot it used to be to her, but a change of abode had brought no rest from the troubles and anxieties of her mind: that very day she had heard of the dreadful encounter between the coastguard and the smugglers, and the report of the death of Will Laud, the notorious commander.

Margaret heard of her lover's death, as may be supposed, with the deepest emotion; but she was not satisfied that the accounts she received were correct, and had serious intentions of going to the ferryman's house to make inquiries for herself, when a rap came at their lone door, and who should come in but the ferryman himself, the father of Laud. The old man seemed to observe the altered state of the family upon whom he intruded himself, and could not help saying, at once, —

"I bring you bad news, Margaret, very bad, and of my poor boy." The old man paused, and Margaret's heart quailed, but in the next moment it revived. "But he would have me bring it!"

"Is he not dead then?" exclaimed the poor girl, as with a bound, she seized the aged ferryman by the arm; "is he not dead?"

"No, not yet — at least he was not when I left him two hours ago, and he would make me come to you, and tell you he wished earnestly to see you before he died."

"Where is he? where is he?" exclaimed Margaret.

"At my poor cot on Walton Cliff; but oh, Margaret, so altered, so dreadfully marked, and so unhappy, that if you do see him I question much if you will know him. But will you come and see him?"

"Will I? — that I will! Only you sit down and eat a bit, and I will soon be ready."

It took but a short space of time for Margaret to make preparation for her journey. Laud was alive, though ill, dangerously ill; still she might be the means of restoring him, if not to health of body, at least to a more healthy state of mind. She is ready, and the old man and Margaret depart together.

"Is he much hurt?" was Margaret's first question, after they had advanced beyond the heath on to the high-road; "is he much wounded?"

"I fear he is. At times he is like a madman, raving at everything, cursing all smugglers and his own misfortunes. The fever is high upon him; he glares wildly at the old woman I have got to do for him — calls her a smuggler's hag; and then he mentions you, Margaret, and the tears roll down his face, and he finds relief. His wound is on the forehead — a deep gash, through the bone; and the pain he suffers from the dressing is dreadful."

"Have you had a surgeon?"

"No, Margaret, no — I dare not: I fear lest he should betray himself. His life would be forfeit to his country's outraged laws, and he would die a more bitter death than now awaits him in my cot."

There ran a sensitive shudder through poor Margaret's frame as she thought of the situation of her lover. Parental affection had been more cautious than she would have been, and she secretly rejoiced. She thought likewise of her own situation; but selfishness had no portion in her soul. Laud might die! The thought was agonizing; but he would die, perhaps, a true penitent. This was surely better than being suddenly sent out of the world with all his sins upon his head. She felt thankful for so much mercy.

"Does he ever seem sorry for his crimes?" she inquired of the old man.

"I cannot exactly say he does," was the reply, "though he speaks so vehemently against his captain. I wish he saw his situation in a more forcible light."

"Time may be given him for that yet, Mr. Laud; at least, I pray God it may be so."

"Amen, say I; amen!"

"How did he find you out? How did he reach home?"

“He was brought here upon a comrade’s back, a stout sailor, who came accompanied by old Dame Mitchel, who, if report speaks truth, is well acquainted with the smugglers. She says that John Luff, the captain’s mate, brought poor Will to her house; and when he learned that I was living only half a mile off, he persuaded her to come and help me to do for him. He brought him to me at night.”

With conversation of this kind, the father and the maiden pursued their course till they arrived at a very sequestered cottage, near the ruins of Walton Castle, close to that celebrated spot where the Earl of Leicester landed with his Flemings in A.D. 1173. “It stood upon a high cliff, about the distance of a mile from the mouth of the Woodbridge haven, two miles from the Orwell. At this time but few stones mark the spot. There is little doubt that it was a Roman fortification, as a great many urns, rings, coins, and torques, have been found in that neighbourhood. It is supposed to have been built by Constantine the Great when he withdrew his legions from the frontier towns in the east of Britain, and built forts or castles to supply the want of them.” So says the old *Suffolk Traveller*.

Our travellers arrived at this lone cottage, where a faint, glimmering light from the low window told that the watch was still kept at the sick man’s bed. The father entered first, and soon returned, telling Margaret that she might come in, as sleep, for the first time since the night he had been brought home, had overpowered Laud’s senses.

By the faint gleam of that miserable light, Margaret perceived how dreadfully altered were the features of her lover. He lay in a heavy, hard-breathing, lethargic sleep, and the convulsive movements of his limbs, and a restless changing of the position of his arms, told that, however weary the body, the spirit was in a very agitated state; and, oh! how deadly, how livid was his countenance! Scarcely could Margaret think it the same she had been accustomed to look upon with so much pleasure: the brow was distorted with pain, the lips scorched with fever – a stiff white moisture exuded from his closed eyelids. A painful moan escaped his heaving chest, and at last he surprised the listeners by a sudden painful cry.

“Margaret, ahoy! Margaret, ahoy! Hullo! hullo! Don’t run away. Here, here! I want you!”

And then his limbs moved, just as if he was in the act of running after some one.

The fever was evidently high upon him, and poor Margaret was herself greatly afflicted at seeing his extreme suffering. She gave way to tears, which affected the poor father so much that the old man could not refrain from weeping. The woman alone seemed composed; as if she had been accustomed to scenes of horror, she exhibited no signs of tenderness or concern. She continued to mumble a piece of brown bread which she held in her hand, lifting up her brows from time to time, and darting her sharp grey eyes, first at the smuggler, then at the girl, and then at the old man, but without uttering or seeming to hear a word, or to feel a single human emotion.

As she looked upon her, a thought shot through Margaret’s brain of no very friendly nature toward the singular being before her – she could not help thinking that this Moggy Mitchel was a sort of spy upon her lover. How keen, how quick, how apprehensive is true love!

To prove that Margaret’s suspicion was not altogether groundless, that very night the old woman went out of the house, under pretence of seeing what sort of night it was; and as Margaret sat watching by the bedside of Laud, the moon, which was just rising above the summit of the cliff, showed her, through the lattice, two dark figures standing together. She could not, of course, distinguish their features, but the outlines of their forms were very strong, and not to be mistaken – she was sure it was John Luff and Dame Mitchel, and that they were in close conversation on the verge of the cliff.

The old woman shortly returned to the room, and it was evident to Margaret that something had excited her.

“We must get him well as soon as we can,” were the first words she uttered; and had not her former coolness and her late meeting upon the cliff awakened in Margaret’s mind some sinister motive prompting this speech, she might have been deceived by it.

Margaret had the deepest and purest motives for desiring the young man’s restoration to health: she loved him, and she hoped to re-establish his character, and to recover him not only from his

sick-bed, but from his state of degradation. But in all her efforts she found herself frustrated by the interference of this beldame, who, as William progressed towards recovery, was constantly keeping alive within him some reports of the successes of the crew, of their kind inquiries after his health, and the hopes they had of soon seeing him among them. Independently of this, there came presents and compliments from Captain Bargood, and these increased as Laud recovered.

Nothing so much stung Margaret's heart as to find that all her attentions, prayers, entreaties, and admonitions, were counteracted by the secret influences of these agencies; but her object was a righteous one, and she did not slacken in her endeavours to attain it. She found, as Laud gradually recovered, that he was fully sensible of his past folly, and quite alive to the devoted affection she had shown to him; but she found also that no touch of religious feeling blended with his regret for his past conduct.

This gave her the deepest pang, for she would rather have heard him offer one thanksgiving to the Being to whom all thanks are due, than find herself the object of his praise and gratitude.

It was at this time that Margaret wished she had been a scholar. There was a Bible in the cottage, an old black-letter edition, containing the Book of Common Prayer, the genealogies recorded in the sacred Scriptures, together with the Psalms of David, in metre, by Sternhold and Hopkins, with curious old diamond-headed notes of the tunes to each psalm.

Margaret would gladly have read the holy book to her lover, but she might as well have had a Hebrew edition before her, for not a word could she decipher. He could read, and her only way of inducing him so to do was by expressing her desire to hear him read. She found this, however, a difficult and dangerous task, for, independently of the distaste which the old woman had to the Bible, she found her lover very restless and feverish after any exertion of the kind. Where the spirit is unwilling, how irksome is the task!

"How plain is that description you read to me this morning of our first parents' fall," said Margaret one day, when the enemy was absent: "how plainly it shows us the necessity of our denying ourselves anything and everything which God has forbidden us!"

"It does, indeed, Margaret; but no man can help sinning!"

"I doubt that – I think Adam could have done so."

"Then why did he sin, Margaret?"

"You read to me, that the woman tempted him or persuaded him, and that the serpent beguiled her into sin: so that the serpent was the author of sin."

"Yes: and the woman was first deceived, and then deceived her husband. You must admit that she was the worst of the two."

"I own that she was, and is the weakest; but her sorrows appear to have been the greater, and she has been little better than a slave to man ever since."

"Well, Margaret, well, you have been very kind to me, and I know now that you are a good girl, and wish me to be good. I wish I may be better."

"Do not only wish it, dear William, but pray to God to make you so, and I do think that He will."

"Well, well, I will be better – yes, I will, if I get over this blow on the head; but oh, how it aches! You must not bewilder me too much."

So did this interesting conversation cease, by the man's appeal to his want of strength, when he was asserting a will of his own, which, though bold in words, was but fickle in actions.

Every day, as her patient advanced towards recovery, was poor Margaret more and more convinced that Laud wanted stability of purpose to resist evil, – he was, like every passionate man, self-willed and wicked. Margaret, though at this time uneducated, had been a very attentive listener to all good instruction – she was far from being ignorant of right and wrong. Her principles were good, and through her most eventful years she exhibited but one great error, which was her blind passion for the unhappy man whom she would have made, if she could, a better being; and every day she found a more persevering enemy in Mrs. Mitchel, who counteracted all her salutary influence

with Laud. Silent and morose as this woman was at times, she could be loquacious enough when it suited her own purpose.

“I have,” said she, one day, “just left a choice set of fellows upon the beach, as merry a set, Will, as I ever saw, and all rejoicing in your improvement. Luff holds your office until you join them again. They have had fine success lately, since young Barry is laid by the leg. I have brought you a box of raisins, and such a choice can of sweetmeats, as a present from the captain.”

“Ah! they are all good fellows, but I do not think that I shall ever join them again.”

“Pshaw, my lad! this is only a love-fit for the moment.” (Margaret was absent upon an errand.) “If that girl does not know what it is to have a high-spirited young fellow like yourself for a lover, without making him a poor, tame, milk-and-water poodle, why then she ought to make herself always as scarce as she is at this moment. I have no patience with the girl – she does not know her own interest. I suppose she would have you stick to the plough’s tail, or toil all day at the spade, and bring her home a hard-earned pittance at the week’s-end. Pshaw! Will, you are formed for better things.”

“But she’s a good girl, Moggy,” said Will.

“Oh, aye! the girl is well enough, and decent too. I don’t mean to say she would not make a chap a good sort of wife either, but she’s not the sort of girl for you, Will. She’s no spirit about her. She don’t see how a young fellow like you can do better by her, in a bold, dashing way, than by such tame, dull, plodding industry as her family use.”

“No; but then she wishes to see me happy, and I might be popped off the next skirmish.”

“You always look on the black side of things. Here are your fellows making their fortunes rapidly, and you talking of drudging on, in a quiet, stupid way, with the chance of being informed against and executed for your past doings. Young Barry won’t easily forgive you.”

“Nor I him, either,” was the significant reply, with a clenching of the fist and a grinding of the teeth, which proved how artfully the hag had worked upon Laud’s worst feelings.

Margaret, on her return, could perceive that her absence had been taken advantage of to effect a purpose adverse to all her hopes.

Against all these disadvantages, however, Margaret combated with some success, and by degrees had the happiness of seeing her patient get the better of his sufferings. The wound would have healed sooner and better, had Laud’s mind been kept free from feverish excitement. It did heal up, though not so well as Margaret wished – a frightful scar extended over the *os frontis*, directly to the high cheek-bone. For a long time the eye seemed as if it had perished, but as the fever abated its sight returned.

It will be sufficient to record, that in due time Laud perfectly recovered, and the services of his nurses became no longer necessary.

If at this time any situation had offered itself by which Laud could have gained an honest livelihood, he would, probably, have accepted it, and become an honest man; and in talking with Margaret of his future life, he promised that she should never again hear of anything against him. He would go to sea, and earn an honest livelihood, even if he was obliged to serve a foreigner.

“Well, Laud, I will trust you again,” said Margaret, on the day she took her leave of him: “I will trust you again, William, though my heart aches bitterly at parting with you, whilst you have no regular employment, but I shall pray for you wherever I am. I shall probably go to service soon, for I do not like to be a burden to my friends.”

They parted affectionately, for Laud felt that he owed his life to her care; and she, that all her hopes of future comfort in this life were centred in his welfare. Yet that very night did William Laud meet his former comrades, and was persuaded to join their crew at the Bawdsey Cave, to assume the name of Hudson, and to become again neither more nor less than a desperate smuggler.

We will not follow him through his career of guilt: suffice it to say, that he contrived to send word to Margaret that he had entered into the service of a Dutch trader, and was promised a future share of his ship. He pretended to have quitted the society of the smugglers, who at that time so

infested the eastern coasts of this country; and as she heard no more of his name, and received no more suspicious presents, she suffered her heart to cherish the fond hope of his reformation.

The anticipation of days to come, and the promised pleasure of those days, are always greater than are ever realized by mortals. It is, however, one of the greatest blessings of life to anticipate good. The hope, too, of another's welfare, and of being the humble instrument of promoting the interest of another, is the sweetest bond of woman's cherished affection. Truly may such be termed man's helpmate, who would do him good, and not evil, all the days of his life.

Poor Margaret found, that the more she hoped for Laud's amendment, the more constant became her attachment, the more she excused his past life, and the more deeply her heart became engaged to him.

CHAPTER V WILD SCENES

Margaret, true to her intentions of going to service, found a kind friend in Mrs. Denton, who recommended her to Mrs. Wake, of the Priory Farm, Downham Reach. Here, in September, 1792, she took up her abode as servant-of-all-work. The whole farm-house was formerly the priory of a small body of Augustine Monks, and was known by the name of the Alneshbourne Priory. It is surrounded by a moat of considerable depth and breadth, and was formerly approached by a drawbridge from the southern side.

The site of this old house is still a most romantic and sequestered spot. In front of it, along a pleasant green slope to the shore, runs a rippling stream, which having passed through the moat, meanders along the meadow down to the Orwell, whose broad waters look here like a magnificent lake.

On either side of the valley rise the rich woods of Downham Reach; and behind the house, in the green meadows, may still be seen, though now covered in with a roof and used as a barn, the chapel of this sequestered fraternity.

Lofty elms overshadow the summit of this ancient house, though they grow upon the open space beyond the moat; and the woods of the owner of the present house and the district, Sir Philip Broke, stand conspicuously towering on the sides of the hills. The lover of peaceful nature could not fail to be struck with the tranquil yet picturesque scenery around this spot. Here Gainsborough, who, in his younger days, was much encouraged by Dr. Coyte of Ipswich, loved to roam, and catch the ever-varying tints of spring and autumn. Here Constable, – the enthusiastic, amiable, but pensive John Constable, one of the best of England's landscape-painters, – indulged himself in all the hopes of his aspiring genius; and Frost, a native of Ipswich, one of the best imitators of Gainsborough's style, and whose sketches are at this day most highly esteemed, used to indulge himself in the full enjoyment of his art.

At the period we write of – the year 1792 – the Orwell's waves went boldly up to the port, as new and briny as in the days of the Danish invasion. Now they no longer wash the town. A wet-dock, with its embankments and its locks, shuts out the ebb and flow of waters, and may be convenient to the inhabitants of the place; but sadly interferes with the early associations and recollections of those who, like the writer of this narrative, passed their boyish years upon the banks of the Orwell.

But we must no longer wander from our narrative. Margaret, as servant at the Priory Farm, conducted herself in so exemplary a manner, that she soon gained the good will of her master and mistress, and the good word of all the labourers upon the farm. Amongst these latter was a young man who was particularly acquainted with Margaret's history, and whose name has occurred in a previous chapter. This was no other than John Barry, the elder brother of young Edward Barry, who so gallantly led the attack upon the smugglers on the night in which Will Laud was supposed to have been killed. John was well aware of Margaret's attachment and engagement to Will Laud; and he knew the part his brother had taken in the conflict; and believed, as Edward told him, that he had slain Margaret's lover. Whether it was the sympathy which arose toward the poor girl under these circumstances, or the real pleasure which he felt in her society, it is certain that he became so deeply enamoured as never to be able to root out of his mind this his first and last attachment.

This young man was a contrast in every respect to Will Laud. John Barry was the elder son of a small farmer and miller at Levington, who, having a numerous family, was anxious they should all be employed. John, as was customary in that day, sought employment away from his parents' house. He had asked their permission to let him turn his hand to farming for a year; and as he was already a good ploughman, and understood the various methods of culture, he readily found an employer. He was also as good a scholar for that period as could be found in any of the adjoining parishes. Added to this, he was a good-principled, steady, persevering, industrious young man. His father was

not badly off in the world for his station. He it was who first discovered the use of crag-shells for manure. His man, Edmund Edwards, finding a load or two of manure was wanted to complete the fertilization of a field which Mr. Barry cultivated, carried a load or two of the crag, which lay near the mill, to make it up. He observed, that in the very place which he thought would prove the worst crop, on account of the seeming poverty of the soil carted, there arose the most luxuriant produce. Next year Mr. Barry used it more freely, and found a more abundant recompense. He then opened immense crag-pits, supplied the country around, and shipped a large quantity at Levington Creek. By these means he became known as an enterprising man. His second son took to the sea, and became active in the service of his native coast. Another son went out to America, and did remarkably well.

John went as head man to Mr. Wake, of the Priory Farm. When he left his father's house, the worthy miller gave him one guinea, with this advice —

"Many a man, John, has entered into the world with less than that, and by industry, integrity, and good behaviour, has risen to usefulness and respectability; and many a man, John, who has entered upon life with thousands and thousands of those shining coins, has sunk to worthlessness and degradation. Go, boy; be honest, sober, steady, and diligent. Keep your church and God's commandments, John, and you will prosper. But should misfortune ever visit you, remember that whilst your mother and I live you will always find a welcome home. God bless you, boy! God bless you!"

John left home, with a guinea in his pocket and with love in his heart. He did well, even in his first situation. He lived in the farm-house with Mr. and Mrs. Wake, about seven miles from his father's house. He did not then dream that he should ever visit any distant shore connected with his native country. His dreams were of home, industry, and peace. He had enough — was contented — was well respected; had good health and full employment, and was a burden to no one. From his constant habit of witnessing the energy, and activity, and good disposition of the youthful Margaret, and from a certain knowledge of her past misfortunes, he imbibed a delicacy of interest in her behalf, which was shown to her by repeated acts of respect, which others on the farm less delicate did not care to show. Margaret herself perceived these attentions, and felt grateful to him for them. Whilst some would now and then relate what they heard of the wild adventures of Hudson the smuggler, John Barry always carefully concealed any mention of matters which he could see gave her pain. So cautious had been his advances towards a more intimate acquaintance with Margaret, that no one on the farm suspected that John Barry, the son of the well-to-do Mr. Barry, of Levington, was in the least captivated by the humble maid of the Priory. Margaret, however, suspected and dreaded that such might be the case; and she avoided him as pointedly as she could, without offence to one whom she so much respected. Barry, however, was too honest to conceal his feelings from the only person he wished to know them. Returning one evening from work along Gainsborough's Lane, he met Margaret, who had been to Sawyer's farm upon an errand for her mistress.

"Margaret, you know I love you," said the young man, "though I do not believe that any one upon the farm besides yourself has any idea of it."

"I feared you did, John, and it grieves me very much to hear you say so."

"But why should it grieve you? I love you honestly, and will always do my best to make you happy."

"Yes, John, I do not doubt you in anything you say, and I feel very grateful to you for your kindness; but I cannot return your love."

"Why not, Margaret? Why should you not learn to like me? I am not indeed like your former lover, but I think I love you quite as well."

"That may be also, John; but when I tell you that it is impossible for me to suffer you to cherish such feelings, you will, I hope, not be angry with me."

"I am not angry: I know your past attachment; but I hope that you do not intend to live and die single because Laud is dead."

“No; but whilst he lives, John, I neither can nor ought to give encouragement to any other.”

“But he is dead!”

“I would let any one else but yourself suppose so.”

“My brother Edward told me himself that he saw him fall.”

“Yes, John, and your brother Edward thought that he gave him his death-blow; but I am happy, for his sake and for Laud’s, that it was not so.”

“Are you sure of this?” sighed the youth, as if he half regretted that his brother had not done so. “Are you sure of this?”

“Quite so – quite so! To no one else would I speak it, but I am sure of your goodness. I know you will not betray me.”

“Never, Margaret, never!”

“Well, then, these very hands healed the wound which your brother gave him. I myself nursed him through his dangerous illness; and I know at this time that he is in a respectable foreign merchant’s service, and as well as ever he was.”

This was a tremendous blow to the young man’s prospects; an answer which he did not in the least expect, and from which he could find no encouragement. He begged Margaret’s pardon for what he had said, which was freely given, and a promise made on both sides never to divulge that day’s secret. Alas! this promise was broken by both, as we shall presently see, at the very same moment.

But where is Laud, and what is he doing at this time? While the honest-hearted girl is denying all attachment to any but himself, and living upon the hope of his future welfare and well-doing, what is *he* about?

He is standing at the Green Cottage, as it was called, on account of the green shutters which used to shade its casements, close to Butley Abbey. The dark-frowning ruin of this seat of the black canons of St. Austin, formerly so grand and extensive, was then in a state of crumbling desolation. Here, close against that magnificent old gateway, seemingly in mock grandeur, was a very fine arch, surmounted with the arms of Michael de la Pole, the third Lord Wingfield, Earl of Suffolk, who was slain at the battle of Agincourt with Edward Plantagenet, Duke of York.

Not far from these ruins, with a mind somewhat partaking of the darkness of that desolation, stood Laud and Luff in close conversation; the subject of which was no other than Margaret Catchpole!

Luff had found out Laud’s deep-rooted fancy for the maiden, and, villain as he was, was proposing a deep-laid scheme for the destruction of the poor girl, who at that very time was undergoing a severe trial of her affection.

“I’ll tell you what, Laud, the thing is easily to be done. We have nothing to do but to run the cutter, at the beginning of our next voyage, into Harwich Harbour, at the fall of the evening, when the mists hide us from the shore; you and I can run up the Orwell in the gig, and soon carry off the prize. Once on board, and she is yours as long as you like.”

“I think I shall leave the service and marry.”

“And get a halter for your pains! No, Will; no, my boy; you are made of sterner stuff than that. What! for the sake of a girl whom you may have for many a cruise, and who will like you all the better for your spirit, would you consent to run the land-robber’s risk of being hanged? You will soon have a new cutter, and your old crew; and though we may have a long voyage, surely it will be far better to have your damsel with you, though she may be unwilling at first, than to be living ashore in continual fear of the officers of justice.”

“But Margaret supposes me at this moment in a foreign ship, and in an honest trader.”

“Let her think so still. Only once get her on board the *Stour*, and never trust me if we don’t quickly run over to Holland, get you decently married, and you may settle with her on shore in a short time.”

“Well, Luff, I think it might be done, and fairly, too; and if it be, you shall have half my share of the prize upon the next run.”

“’Tis a bargain – ’tis a bargain! and when we next meet in Bawdsey Cave, our first trip shall be for the harbour. In the meantime, let us enjoy ourselves as we can.”

The Green Cottage just mentioned, was one of those places hired by Captain Bargood, on the eastern coast, which was always kept neat, and ready for his occupation, by a dame whom he permitted to live in it rent-free, and paid her something extra too for housekeeping. This was a place of resort for his captains when out of immediate employ, when his ships were repairing or building, at home or abroad. The method he took to secure their services, and to keep them in readiness for the sea, was to initiate them into the mysteries of poaching when on land.

So well did this bold fellow play his cards, that his men seldom wanted employment.

Game they always had, in season or out of season – no matter – they stuck at nothing! If they wished for a good custard at Whitsuntide, and made of the richest eggs, they would have pheasants’ and partridges’ eggs by hundreds. In fact these smugglers were as well known for poachers by many of the people on the coast, as they were for dealers in contraband goods. They, too, enjoyed the keen zest of the sportsman in a tenfold manner, if the excitement of the field, the danger of the enterprise, and the success of the sport, be any criterion by which the pleasure of such things may be estimated.

Tame, indeed, they considered the turn-out of the Marquis of Hertford, with his green-brogued keepers, and their double-barrelled guns and brushes, for a walk, or rather a stand, at the end of a plantation, where the pheasants rose in a shower, and were killed like barn-door fowls. They often saw the noble sportsmen turn into those coverts, against which they knew they had been such successful poachers the very night before.

If hairbreadth escapes, contests with keepers, making nets, snares, and gins, were amusements to these fellows, they had enough of them. They could, upon occasion, bribe an unsteady keeper, or make him drunk, and go his beat for him. All manner of desperate adventures were their pleasures. Sometimes their society was courted by farmers and others, who chanced to know, and would occasionally entertain them. Their knowledge of all that was going on in and out of the country made them welcome visitors to others; and in a very dangerous period of our struggle at Flushing, when an order from the coast was to be carried in spite of danger and difficulty, the intelligence and spirit of these men were made use of by some in power, who could never countenance them openly.

One instance of a singular kind of frolic may here be mentioned, which might have been of serious consequence to a young man of fortune.

This gentleman resided in his own house, and upon his own estate, not far from Hollesley Bay; and though possessed of many broad acres, abundantly supplied with every species of game common to that country, yet, singularly enough, he was an exception to that prevalent habit of all country gentlemen – the being a sportsman. The writer of these pages has often heard him narrate the following facts: —

Laud, or rather Hudson, as he was then called (for Laud was generally supposed to be dead), met this young man at the Boyton Alms-houses, when the following conversation arose: —

“Good morning to you, captain. But little stirring at sea, I suppose?”

“We’re ashore awhile upon a cruise.”

“So I suppose. What tack do you go upon tonight?”

“That I know not, sir; but not hereabouts. We shall probably run down to Orford.”

“I know you are all good hands. I never went sporting in my life, and never saw any poaching. Now, captain, it’s no use being qualmish upon the subject, but upon my word I should like to see how you poachers manage to take your game. You need not fear that I should inform against you, or take advantage of your secrets – for I am no sportsman, as you know, and care as little about game as any man; but I have heard so much of your adroitness, and of the methodical manner in which you proceed, that I really should like to see it. Come, what shall I give you to take me with you to-night?”

The smuggler looked at him with a very significant countenance, as much as to say, “Are you in earnest? May I trust you?” It was very few he thought he could trust; but there was a simplicity and honesty, a straight-forward singleness of mind, and such a real, truthful heartiness of character about the young man, that a far less shrewd man than Laud could see there was no danger in him. So far from ever intending evil to any one, he was kind even to a fault: witness his very treatment of such a man as Laud. He had often seen him about his marshes, or along the river’s side, or in the village, or upon the heath. He knew what Hudson was; and like many others in that retired country, became an occasional talker with him, even upon the subject of smuggling. He knew that his own horses came in for a share of night-work, as well as his neighbours’; but he always found himself well treated by the smugglers, and frequently acknowledged the receipt of some acceptable present. He knew the habits of poaching which these seamen enjoyed ashore, and he never interrupted them. His own lands were always abounding in game for his friends, and he never knew that they were poached.

“Well, captain, what say you? Will you take me?”

“That I will, with all my heart. Where will you meet me?”

“Where you like. Where shall it be?”

“Suppose my messmate and I call you at eleven o’clock? We can take a glass of grog with you, and perhaps use your own cart and horse. We shall most likely go to Iken or Orford. But I will see my mate, and have everything arranged, and be with you by eleven.”

The honest bachelor who had made this appointment with Laud and Luff, had no idea of his temerity and of the danger of the deed. He saw only, for the time, a certain mystery, which he wished to see unravelled, and forgot all the penalties the law attached to it.

Our worthy bachelor received his two promising visitors at eleven o’clock, having first sent every servant to bed, and parted with an aged mother, who was ignorant, blessedly ignorant, of her son’s movements at such a time of night; Laud and Luff were let into the house; they came, partook of his good cheer, and then opened upon the subject of their campaign.

They told him their intention to have a drag over some of the stubbles of the Marquis of Hertford’s estate, between Iken and Orford, and they instructed him in the plan of operation. Five men were to meet them in the lane leading down into Iken Wood: they carried a net capable of covering four furrows. Not a single word must be spoken. Five would drag in front, and three behind; one was to hold the check-string, by which an alarm was conveyed to every one who had hold of the net. In case of a sudden jerk at this string, each person dropped his hold of the net, and ran for the nearest hedge, where he concealed himself until he heard the signal to join forces again, which signal was for that night the crowing of a cock. When by sundry kicks in the net they found that game was enclosed, they were to drop the net, at the sound of a small reed whistle, so low as only to be heard by those who were at a short distance. As the young host was only a novice, it was proposed that he should take his station between Hudson and Luff, his two visitors.

After all proper hints had been repeated, and these worthies had sufficiently regaled themselves, they all went to the cart-lodge; took out the market-cart, harnessed the old chestnut gelding, something between a cart-horse and a roadster, and off they started for as novel an expedition as ever any man of fortune undertook.

Will the reader believe that a man of good character – aye, and as honest, upright, good-natured, kind-hearted, and benevolent a man, as any of his rank and condition – a man of an intelligent and unwarped mind – and one who through life was looked upon as good a neighbour as could be – should so forget himself as to trust his reputation, his honour – his very life and happiness (for at that time the Game Laws were very severe), between two as great rascals as ever stole a head of game, or shot a fellow-creature, in the frenzy of their career?

The reader must imagine a man far above all want, and with every blessing which an abundant fortune could supply, without any idea of intending an affront to the lord of Orford, or any of his affluent neighbours, seated in his own luggage-cart, with his very name written in large letters, X.

Y. Z., Esq., with his place of abode upon it! He must imagine such a man, trusting himself between two notorious characters merely for the spree of the moment, and purely for the sake of curiosity running the risk of losing his character and his liberty, and yet without a thought of his danger. Yet the tale is as true as it is strange. Had not the writer heard the subject of it often declare the fact, he should have believed it impossible.

They are off, however, and Luff is the driver. As if acquainted with his horse, and the horse with him, they went at a rate which astonished even the owner of the animal. He had said, "Let me drive, for I understand his humour"; but he found that another understood his own horse as well as himself. This brute was like a donkey in one respect. Except you gave him a jerk with the rein, and at the same time gave a rap on the sides of the cart, you could not get him to move. What, then, was the surprise of the Squire to find that a stranger could make the old horse go as well as he could. But not a word was to be spoken – so in silence he brooded over the singular knowledge of his coachman, and gave him credit for his driving, which he richly deserved. It was evident the old horse had been in his hands before that night. On they went through Boyton, Butley, the borders of Eyke, to the lane leading down to Orford. Here at a certain gate they stopped, and on the other side of the hedge were the five men with the net. The old horse was tied to the gate, the net unrolled, spread out, and, without a single word being spoken, each man took his station.

It was just the dawning of the morn, when they could hear the old cock pheasants crowing to their mates, to come down from their perches to feed. A rustling wind favoured the work; a large barley stubble was before them, lying with a slope up to the famous preserve of Iken Wood.

As they proceeded onward, sundry kicks in the net told of the captured game, which was regularly and dexterously bagged, by the leading man passing on to the net to the place of fluttering, and wringing the necks of the said partridges, pheasants, hares, rabbits, or whatever they were; then passing them along the meshes to the head of the net, whence they were safely deposited in the different game-bags of the foremen.

That this sport was as much enjoyed by these men as that enjoyed by the best shot in the land; that these fellows were as expert in their movements and as experienced as Colonel Hawker himself, and as bold as any foxhunter in the country, is quite true.

There was one in that party whose courage was soon put to the test, after a fashion which he little calculated upon, and never forgot.

After having bagged a considerable quantity of game, and swept several acres of stubble, they were ascending the middle of the field, toward the covert, when a sudden violent check of the alarm-string, which ran from one to the other, told that they must drop the net, and be off. Off they ran, helter-skelter, as fast as they could, to the nearest fence.

The Squire's heart was in his throat, and his courage in his heels, as, with unwonted speed, he ran for his life to the fence. Into brake and briar, amidst nettles and thistles, brambles and thorns, dashed the hero of the night, with his top-boots sticking plounce into the mud, and, for the life of him, not daring to extricate them, for fear of his being heard and taken by the gamekeepers. The water oozed coolly over the tops, conveying a gentle moisture to his feverish skin, and proving no small consolation for his exertions.

There he lay in a dreadful fright, expecting every instant some stout keeper's hand to seize him by the shoulders, and lug him out of his hiding-place. Then it was for the first moment that he felt the awkwardness of his situation. Reflection told him his danger. Though he durst scarcely breathe, he felt his heart beat tumultuously against his chest, at the thought of his folly and the possibility of detection.

"Oh, what a fool I am," thought he, "to run the risk of transportation for such a freak! My name is on my cart; it is my horse, and the fellows will swear they were in my employ. On me will be visited the vengeance of the law. Lord Hertford will never forgive me. I shall have all the magistrates, squires, noblemen, gentlemen, gamekeepers, and watchers up in arms against me; and all for what? –

for a foolish curiosity, which I have thus gratified at the expense of my character. Oh! if I get out of this scrape, never, never will I get into such a one again!”

In the midst of these painful impressions, the Squire’s heart was gladdened by the cheerful sound of “bright chanticleer.” Never did cock crow with a pleasanter sound than that good imitation, which told that the coast was clear.

Some time did the Squire hesitate whether he should join the sport again, and a still longer time did it take him to extricate his boots from the mud, for he came out of the ditch minus the right leg covering, and, after sundry tugs, and, when out, sundry shakings, &c., to turn out the water, and then, as may be supposed, no small difficulty in getting it on again, he managed to join his companions, who had almost felt persuaded that he had totally decamped. The cause of this alarm was a poor unfortunate jackass, which had strayed from the lane into the stubble, and which, standing with his head and ears erect, had presented to the foreman the appearance of a determined gamekeeper.

A few more acres were dragged, more game secured, and the party once more safely seated in the cart. Two sacks of game lay in the bottom of the vehicle, which were both deposited (saving one bagful for the host) at the Green Cottage at Butley Moor. What a happy man was that host, when, after all his dangers, he found himself again within his own doors! happier still, when, after entertaining his free companions, whose jokes upon his expressions of joy at escape were amusing enough to them, though painfully interesting to himself; happier still was he, when, at four o’clock in the morn, he let them out of his house, and bade poachers and poaching good-bye for ever!

Nineteen beautiful cock pheasants were hung up in his larder; but so ashamed was the Squire of their being seen there, that, before he retired to his own bed, he put them all into a box, with hay, &c., and directed them to Mr. Thomas Page, his wine-merchant, in London. His *spolia opima* were not mentioned till years had in some measure worn off the rust of danger, and then he gave his friends and neighbours reason to rejoice in his adventure, and that he had escaped transportation.

CHAPTER VI HARVEST-HOME

It was the evening before Harvest-Home, September 29, 1793, that a sailor called at the back-door of the Priory Farm, Downham Reach, to ask for a draught of fresh water. It was no uncommon thing for sailors to call for such a purpose. Downham Reach was the nearest point at which ships of large tonnage would usually anchor, and shift their cargoes in lighters for the town of Ipswich, whence it was distant about four miles. The crews of vessels frequently had to walk up to the town from this spot; so that it was no uncommon thing for them, upon landing near the Priory Farm after a voyage, to be glad of a sparkling draught of clear water. The desired draught was handed to the sailor by the ever-ready hand of Margaret Catchpole, who always took an interest in men belonging to the sea.

“Is dis de Priory Barm?” asked the man, in broken English.

“This is the Priory Farm,” was the quick and eager reply of Margaret.

“How bar to Gipswitch?”

“Four miles to Ipswich. What country are you from?”

“Mynheer be brom Hamsterdam. I lept me bessel in de harber. Mynheer de Captan did ’mand me up to Gipswitch. ’E ’mand me ’top at Priory Barm to tale von Margaret Catchpole dad ’e you’d come up ’ere to-morrow, at nine o’clock in de eve.”

“What is your captain’s name?”

“Von Villiam Laud.”

The reader need not be told the rest of the conversation, which of course related to the Captain. How he was? How he got on? Whose service he was in? How he would come up? And where Margaret was to meet him? It was all arranged that she should be upon the shore at nine o’clock, and look out for a small sail-boat, which should come up the river and run ashore against the creek: that the watchword should be “Margaret,” and that punctuality should be observed.

Margaret’s quick understanding soon construed all the sailor said into proper English, though she could not perceive that the man only feigned a foreign accent and manner. He was indeed one of Laud’s crew, an emissary sent on purpose to decoy the poor girl on to the strand, that he might carry her off to a foreign shore, against her own determined purpose.

It is not to be wondered at that she should be a little agitated. Whose heart would not have been so under similar circumstances? The expected arrival of some fashionable and insinuating man of fortune into the saloon of fashion has not agitated the heart of an amiable and interesting young lady more sensibly than poor Margaret felt herself fluttering within at this peculiar time. It is a great question, however, whether any high-spirited damsel could prevent the exposure of her high feelings with more effect than this poor girl did hers, who not only had her own interest to induce her so to do, but her lover’s also.

The last day of September came, and with it all the bustle and pleasure of Harvest-Home. No small share of work fell to Margaret’s hands, who had to prepare the harvest supper for fourteen men, besides women and children.

At that time of day, all the single men lodged in the master’s house, and were expected to conform to all the rules, regulations, hours, and work, of a well-regulated family.

Once in a year, the good farmer invited the married men, with their wives and families, to supper; and this supper was always the Harvest-Home. This was the day on which the last load of corn was conveyed into the barn or stack-yard, covered with green boughs, with shouting, and blowing of the merry harvest horn.

All the labourers upon the Priory Farm were assembled at six o’clock in the evening: nine married men, and five single ones; the wives, and those children who were old enough to come to the feast, together with the boys, four in number, who had to work upon the land.

A picture fit for the hand of Wilkie was exhibited in that ancient farm-house. It is surprising that no good artist should have painted *The Harvest Supper*. *The Rent-day*, *Blindman's-buff*, *The Fair*, *The Blind Fiddler*, or any of his celebrated works, could scarcely afford a more striking subject for the canvas, or the printseller, than *The Harvest-Home*. Such a scene may have been painted, but the writer of these pages has never seen it described, though he has often witnessed it in real life, and has shared with innocent pleasure in its rustic joy.

Margaret received great assistance from some of the married women. One pair of hands could not, indeed, have prepared sufficient eatables for such a party: – smoking puddings, plain and plum; piles of hot potatoes, cabbages, turnips, carrots, and every species of vegetable which the farmer's lands could produce – beef, roast and boiled, mutton, veal, and pork, everything good and substantial; a rich custard, and apple-pies, to which the children did ample justice, for all were seated round this well-furnished table in the old kitchen, celebrated for its curious roof and antique chimney-piece.

The lord of the feast, or head man in the harvest-field, took his station at the head of the table, whilst the master of the house, and his wife, his sister, and even his daughter, were the servants of the feast, and took every pains to gratify and satisfy the party.

Poor labourers are not the only class in England fond of a good dinner. There are hundreds and thousands, with half the appetites of these joyful sons and daughters of the sickle, who glory in a feast. How often is the rich table spread with every delicacy, and at an enormous cost the greatest rarities provided, and a group of lords and ladies seated thereat! Things just tasted and dismissed, and all due ceremonies performed, the company rise without any satisfaction, and return to their homes grateful to nobody; sometimes hungry and dissatisfied, moody and contentious; disappointed, disaffected, tired, and palled by the very fashion of the thing, in which there has been no enjoyment and no thankfulness.

It was not so at this rustic feast. Simplicity and pleasure sat upon each face. Fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, felt thankful to God for their master's prosperity, and received his attentions with unaffected gratitude.

After the feast, and a flowing jug or two of brown ale had been emptied, the wives and children were invited into the best parlour to tea and cakes, whilst the merry reapers were left to themselves, to enjoy in their own way the stronger harvest ale, which was just broached by the hand of their master.

Margaret had done her duty well, and was busily engaged washing up the dishes as fast as she could, that she might, in the midst of this bustling evening get her work sufficiently forward not to be missed, should she run down to the shore.

"Boy, take the can to the girl and have it filled"; for the master had deputed Margaret to draw whatever ale was called for.

This was soon done, and the boy returned just as the old clock struck eight.

Margaret heard with a fluttering heart the songs, according to custom, commencing; and getting her work well forward, she resolved, after the next can of ale was replenished, to be off.

Accordingly, she ran up the back stairs, and brought down her bonnet and shawl, which she left behind the staircase-door, and anxiously awaited the moment to be off duty. She had put every plate in the rack, laid all the iron spoons in the drawer, cleaned the spit, and placed it, bright and shining, over the chimney-piece. All the skewers had been strung, all the knives and forks washed and wiped, boilers, saucepans, gridirons, and the rest of the culinary utensils cleaned, and placed in their proper places; in short, scarcely any one would have believed that they had that day been used. Clean they were, and cleaner the well-washed face and hands of the active girl, who had finished her work, and prepared herself for an interview with one whose image had been graven on her mind through every period of her short service.

At last she heard that welcome sound, more enchanting to her ear than any song which the young men had sung: "Boy, take the can to Margaret!"

It was soon replenished; and scarcely was the kitchen-door closed, ere the bonnet and shawl were put on, the latch of the door lifted up, and the bright rising moon shining gloriously in at the door. Happy moment! what pencil could portray the features of that face upon which the moon so clearly shone on that September night?

Poor girl! 'twas a breathless moment of long anticipated pleasure to thy good and honest heart, such as many a one, like thee, may have experienced; but such as none, be she who she may, could have more anxiously endured.

At last, Margaret is off.

The pleasure of the feast continued; and, as the foaming ale went round, the spirits of the youths arose, and each bachelor who could not sing had to toast his favourite lass.

There were singular disclosures made at this season, which generally indicated the future destiny of the bachelor. It was amusing enough to hear those who did not choose to tell their lover's name attempt to sing, as "the lord" called upon him for a toast or song.

"We haven't had Jack Barry's song," said a sly fellow of the name of Riches, who himself was one of the best singers in the party. "Please, sir" (for such the lord of the feast was styled that night), "call upon Jack for his song."

Now, the labourer at the head of the table knew that Jack could not sing. He did not suppose, either, that he had any favourite lass; for no one had seen Jack flirting, or directing his attentions towards any favoured individual. The lord, however, was bound to do his duty, when so urged; he therefore said, "John Barry, we call upon you for a song."

"I cannot sing, master: I wish I could," was the reply.

"Then you must give us a toast; and you know what it must be – 'Your favourite lass.'"

Jack hung down his head in solemn silence, for he felt extremely awkward. He *had* a favourite lass; he felt he had; and no one knew it but himself; and if he should toast her, he felt that he should be laughed at. He remained in a state of painful suspense, between doubt and fear. A thousand thoughts revolved in his mind, whether he should not give a fictitious name, or some one whom he had heard of, or only knew by sight; but then appeared the certainty of some of them congratulating the person he might happen to mention, and so bringing him into a scrape. He thought also of dissimulation, and a lie, at which Jack's honest nature revolted. But if he should really tell his sweetheart's name! He felt for her, he felt for himself, and he remained a long time without uttering a word.

"Come, Jack, my boy, what's the matter? Give us your favourite lass! What makes you flinch, my lad?"

Jack remained silent, until some began to think he meant to shirk the subject. The fact is, that Jack had really some notion of bolting, and once or twice he cast a sidelong glance at the door, with the full intention of an escape; but Will Riches, perceiving this, most unceremoniously bolted the door; and, as the jug stood close by him, he declared he would know Jack's sweetheart before another drop should be drunk.

"Come, Jack," says he, "why not give us at once the girl you love best?"

"Because she does not love me," was Jack's quick reply.

Here was a most significant glance from one to another round about the room; and more than one whispered to his neighbour, "Who is it?" Not a soul could tell, for no one had the slightest idea who the girl could be who would refuse so honest a fellow as Jack Barry. Some began to think that Jack had stepped out of his latitude, that he had dared to aspire to the master's daughter; some, that it was Matilda Baker, the grocer's girl; others set it down as Lucy Harper, of Stratton. But, be the damsel whom she might, Jack's speech had set such a spirit of curiosity a-working, that the married men hoped to know for their wives' sake, and the single ones for their mistresses' amusement. Jack had got further into the mire by his floundering, and every one saw that he was struggling all he could to escape.

"Well, Jack, who is she? Who is she? Do we any of us know her?"

“Yes, all of you.”

Here they were all out at sea again.

“It must be the master’s fair daughter,” said Ned Palmer to his neighbour.

“I don’t think it,” was the reply; “but he is not willing to tell us, and it’s hardly fair to press him.”

“It’s a law, a positive law – I’ve told mine,” says John Ruddock, “and I don’t see why he should flinch from the name. I must have it.”

“The name! the name!” exclaimed one or two resolute fellows.

A tear stood in Jack’s eye. This might be a good joke to some; but the elders of the party, who saw it, especially honest Tom Keeble, the lord of the evening, felt for the young man that respect which induced him to make a sortie or parley, in the hope of giving him relief.

“Riches,” said he, “as the jug stands by you, I shall call upon you for a song. Our young friend may, by the time you have entertained us, have recovered himself; and, after your song, I shall order the jug round to drink your health, if we do not get the lass.”

Now, Will prided himself upon his vocal powers, and was a bold, forward fellow. He had no objection to sing, nor had any of the company any objection to his song; and, truth to tell, all hoped the jug of brown ale would not be stopped long, either for the song or for “the favourite lass.” So Will sang his song.

“I’ll sing you a new song,” says he. “I’ll sing you one in which you can all join in chorus in the house, as you have often done in the field. I’ll sing you —

‘HALLO LARGESS.’”

Accordingly, he lifted up his voice, and sang this truly happy and appropriate harvest song: —

Now the ripened corn
In sheaves is borne,
And the loaded wain
Brings home the grain,
The merry, merry reapers sing a bind,
And jocund shouts the happy harvest hind,
Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Largess!

Now the harvest’s o’er,
And the grain we store,
And the stacks we pull,
And the barn is full,
The merry, merry reapers sing again,
And jocund shouts the happy harvest swain,
Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Largess!

Now our toil is done,
And the feast is won,
And we meet once more
As we did of yore,
The merry, merry reapers sing with glee,
And jocund shout their happy harvest spree,
Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Largess!

Now the feast we share —

'Tis our master's fare,
May he long, long live
Such a treat to give,
And merry, merry reapers sing with joy,
And jocund shouts the happy harvest boy,
Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Largess!

Now we join in song
With our voices strong,
And our hearts are high
With our good supply,
We merry, merry reapers joyful come
To shout and sing our happy Harvest-Home,
Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Largess!

The spirit of this song is in the chorus, which is peculiar to the eastern counties of this kingdom. So "Hallo Largess!" may be well understood here, but in many parts of the country is quite unknown. At the time of harvest, when the men are reaping down the fields, should their master have any friends visiting his fields, the head man among the labourers usually asks a largess, which is generally a shilling. This is asked not only of friends and visitors, but of strangers likewise, should they pause to look at the reapers as they bind up the sheaves.

At evening, when the work of the day is over, all the men collect in a circle, and Hallo, that is, cry, Largess. Three times they say, in a low tone, "Hallo Large! Hallo Large! Hallo Large!" and all, hand in hand, bow their heads almost to the ground; but, after the third monotonous yet sonorous junction, they lift up their heads, and, with one burst of their voices, cry out, "Gess!"

Varieties of this peculiar custom may exist in some districts. Sometimes the man with the most stentorian lungs will mount an eminence and lead the rest, who join in chorus. They generally conclude the ceremony with three shouts, and then "Thank Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Master" (as the case of the donor may be) "for his largess." Whence the origin of this practice, is not now easily to be ascertained. It was much more common than it is. The habit of dividing the gains, too, at the harvest frolic, is going fast out of fashion; nor is its substitute an amendment.

At the period here mentioned, and in the Priory Farm, it was customary for the lord to divide the largess among the men, women, and children; which formed a species of family nest-egg, to provide against some urgent necessity. The custom has now degenerated into an ale-house revel, and the money is all drunk out for the benefit of no one but the publican.

"Will Riches, your health!" said the lord, as, at the same moment, he turned the contents of a canvas-bag upon the table, which exhibited a very good aspect of liberal contributions. The reader may suppose that every master-tradesman who visited the farm had to give his share, and that the lord had not been unmindful of his solicitations, when, upon counting the contents of the bag, there were found one hundred shillings and sixpence. This exactly gave five shillings a-piece to the fourteen men, half-a-crown ditto to the nine women, and two shillings each to the four boys.

The division of this sum gave great satisfaction; and our persecuted friend, Jack Barry, had almost unperceived accomplished a successful retreat in the interesting moment of pocketing the cash. But the watchful songster had him in his eye; and, as he rose to thank the company for the honour done him in drinking his health, he intercepted Jack in the act of drawing back the bolt of the door.

"I think this is the best place I can speak from; and, as Jack is so anxious to be off, perhaps to see his sweetheart, I hope he'll give me the opportunity of proposing her health in his absence, for not until he has given us her name shall the bolt be drawn."

The poor fellow had counted on his escape, but little thought of the extremity of ridicule he was thus bringing upon himself. At length, urged on all sides, he could resist no longer, but, in a kind of ludicrous despair, he exclaimed —

“Well, then, I’ll toast the health of Margaret Catchpole!”

The pencil of Wilkie could alone describe the wild burst of unrestrained glee at this declaration.

“Margaret Catchpole!” was as suddenly responded in surprise by men, women, and children; and such grinning countenances, and coarse laughter, and joking congratulations, were beginning to show themselves, that Jack, no longer able to endure their gibes, bolted to the door, and, finding no resistance to his will, made his exit, amidst the roars of his companions, who vociferated, with a cheer, “The health of Margaret Catchpole!”

Jack fled precipitately from this scene of tumult and confusion, and, as he passed the little foot-bridge over the stream from the moat, he still heard the rude merriment he had excited. The moon rose brilliantly over the little chapel in the dark background, and was reflected upon the water in a line with the bridge, and showed Jack’s figure in darkness crossing the light plank; but he was soon in the shadow of those lofty trees, which darkened the footpath towards the gamekeeper’s cottage. He had instinctively taken this path because it led to Levington, his father’s house; and he then remembered that parent’s parting words — “If ever you feel yourself unhappy, my boy, remember you have a home here, in which, as long as your mother and I live, we shall be happy to give you a welcome.”

Jack was really unhappy, and he had some cause for feeling so, though he felt that it lay not with himself. He knew that he had spoken the truth, though it had cost him a severe pang; and whilst he felt much grief at the thought of the jeers and quizzings he should meet with, and the annoyances he might occasion the poor girl whom he really loved, he had still spoken the truth, which he was not ashamed to confess. He was arrested in his progress by the voice of John Gooding, the old gamekeeper of the great Squire of Nacton — Philip Broke.

“Who goes there?” was his question.

“John Barry,” was the reply.

“Where now, Jack — where now?”

“What, Mr. Gooding, is it you? Has the tide turned? Can I walk along the shore to Levington?”

“The tide has only just turned; but, if you take the wood-path for a while to Nacton, you may then, if you like it, keep the shore along Orwell Park, and pass the old Hall to Levington. But what makes you leave good company at this time o’ night?”

“I have left them all very merry at the harvest supper, but I had a mind to see my friends.”

“Well, Jack, had it been any other man upon the farm, I should have been suspicious of you as a poacher; but I know you well, and can believe you. I should not trust some that you have left behind. I was just going down to the Priory, to see how you lads fared to-night.”

“Well, Mr. Gooding, you will find them all very glad to see you, and no doubt they will make you welcome; but will you trouble yourself to let master know where I am gone to-night, that he may close his doors without expecting to see me?”

“That I will; and, when I get there, I will propose your health, Jack, during your absence.”

“Do so, Mr. Gooding; and tell them all, they have my hearty good wishes for their health and happiness.”

“Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

CHAPTER VII THE CONFLICT

But where is Margaret all this time? She is on the shore, casting an anxious eye upon the waters. The moon is shining with such perfect brightness, that she can see across the river, though it be nearly two miles from the strand at Downham Reach to Freston Tower. She looks towards the dark shades of Woolverstone, and with a lover's anxious eye, fancies she can descry a sail. A sail there was; but it came very slowly on, though a breeze reached the spot where poor Margaret was standing.

In that old vessel, seated at the helm, was as extraordinary a character as ever sailed upon the waves of the Orwell; and as he will be no insignificant actor in some succeeding scenes of this work, he shall be here introduced to the notice of the reader. He is thus described in the *Suffolk Garland*.

"The ancient fisherman whose character is here portrayed is not a mere creature of the imagination, but an eccentric being, once resident in the parish of St. Clement, Ipswich, by name Thomas Colson, but better known by the appellation of Robinson Crusoe. He was originally a wool-comber, and afterwards a weaver; but a want of constant employment in either of these occupations induced him to enter into the East Suffolk Militia. Whilst quartered at Leicester, he learned, with his usual ingenuity, the art of stocking-weaving, which trade he afterwards followed in this county. But this employment, in its turn, he soon relinquished, and became a fisherman on the river Orwell. His little vessel (if vessel it might be called, for every part of it was his own handiwork) presented a curious specimen of naval patchwork, for his extreme poverty did not afford him the means of procuring proper materials. In this leaky and crazy vessel, it was his constant custom, by day and by night, in calms and in storms, to toil on the river for fish. His figure was tall and thin; his countenance meagre, yet striking; and his eye sharp and piercing. Subject to violent chronic complaints, with a mind somewhat distempered, and faculties impaired, he was a firm believer in the evil agency of wizards and witchcraft. . . His mind was so haunted with the dreams of charms and enchantments, as to fancy that he was continually under the influence of these mischievous tormentors. His arms and legs, nay, almost his whole body, was encircled with bones of horses, rings, amulets, and characts, verses, words, &c., &c., as spells and charms to protect him against their evil machinations. On different parts of his boat was to be seen 'the horseshoe nailed,' that most effective antidote against the power of witches. When conversing with him, he would describe to you that he saw them hovering about his person, and endeavouring by all their arts to punish and torment him. Though a wretched martyr to the fancies of a disordered imagination, his manners were mild and harmless, and his character honest and irreproachable. But, however powerful and effective his charms might be to protect him from the agency of evil spirits, they did not prove sufficiently operative against the dangers of storm and tempest. For, being unfortunately driven on the ooze by a violent storm on the 3rd of October, 1811, he was seen, and earnestly importuned to quit his crazy vessel; but relying on the efficacy of his charms, he obstinately refused; and the ebb of the tide drawing his bark off into deep water, his charms and his spells failed him, and poor Robinson sank to rise no more."

The writer of these pages knew Colson well. He has often, when a boy, been in his boat with him; and always found him kind and gentle.

The old man who sat at the helm of his crazy vessel, now toiling up the Orwell, was a perfect fisherman, patient, quiet, steady, active, and thoughtful. He had enough to employ his mind as well as his body, and too deeply was that mind engaged. The whole legion of evil spirits seemed to be his familiar companions, or rather his incessant enemies. He knew all their names, and their propensities; how they visited and afflicted men; and his great study was, how to prevent their malice taking effect upon himself or any one else. He would converse with them, and parley with them; he would seem to suffer when any of them took him by surprise and found him off his guard. The loss of any one of his numerous charms was sure to occasion the visit of that very demon from whose attacks it was supposed to defend him. He has often been tried by intelligent persons, anxious to discover if he

really invented a new tale for each spirit; notes were kept of the name and the peculiar temper he attributed to each; and, months afterwards, he was questioned again and again upon the same points, but he never faltered – never attributed a wrong direction to any one – but was as accurate and certain as on the first day he spoke of them.

The whole purport of these attacks was to persuade Robin to do some wicked deed, at which his mind revolted; and when they could not prevail against him, they used to seem, to his suffering mind, to torment him, sometimes to pinch him, sometimes to pelt him, at others, to burn or scald him, pull his hair off his head, to pull his ears, his nose, or his arms; and, under all these seeming attacks, the old man's countenance would exhibit the species of suffering resembling the agonies of one really under such torture. No one could persuade him that it was imaginative; he would shake his head and say, "I see them plainly – take care they do not visit you!"

He was a very kind friend to many who were afflicted; and never saw a person in distress whilst he had a fish in his boat, or a penny in his pocket, and refused to help him.

From the great encouragement he met with, and the friends who were always kind to him, it is supposed that he might have laid by a sufficiency for his latter days, for at one time he had amassed enough to have purchased a new vessel, but in an evil hour he was induced to lend it to an artful villain, who represented himself in great distress, but who ran off with the whole.

It was curious to see the old man whilst repairing his boat, which was, when given to him by Mr. Seekamp, but a wreck, as it lay upon the mud near Hog Island. It was curious to see him, whilst plying his hatchet, suddenly stop, seat himself on a piece of timber, and hold parley with one of the demons, who, in his frenzy, he fancied attacked him. After searching about his person, he would suddenly catch up a talisman, which shown to the enraged spirit would send him off, and leave the tormented in peace. His delight was visible in the chuckling joy of his speech, as he returned triumphantly and speedily to his accustomed work.

Colson, who sat at the helm of his vessel, which creaked heavily under the breeze as it sprang up, was in one of his moods of reverie, when, stooping down and straining his eyes to windward, he saw a sail. It was a small boat, which seemed to have got more wind in her canvas than Robin could obtain.

On came the boat; and the breeze began to swell the many-coloured sail of the bewitched barque; but Robin's canvas was heavy compared with the airy trimming of the feathers of the little duck that followed him. Like a creature of life, she skipped along, and soon overtook the old fisherman of the Orwell.

"What ship ahoy! What ship ahoy!" exclaimed a gruff voice from the boat below, as Robin, leaning over the stern of his clumsy craft, looked closely into her with an eager eye.

"It's only old Robinson Crusoe," replied the other. "You may speak long to him before you know what he means, even if you get any answer at all."

"Ahoy! ahoy!" was, however, the old man's reply. "You've got the foul fiend aboard. What are you up to, Will? I know that's Will Laud's voice, though I haven't heard it lately. Whither bound, Will? whither bound?"

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Will. "I never heard him say so much before. The foul fiend always sails with him. But give him a good word, John, and a wide berth."

"Heavy laden, Robin? heavy laden? You've a good haul aboard. Crabs, or lobsters, or crayfish – eh, Robin? turbot, plaice, or flounders? soles, brill, or whiting? sanddabs, or eels? But you've got plenty, Bob, or I mistake, if not a choice. The tide is falling: you'll never reach the Grove to-night."

"I shall get up in time, Will. You've lightened my cargo. You've got a pleasant companion aboard. You've got my black fiend on your mainsail. There he sits, pointing at you both, as if he had you in his own clutches. Take care he don't drive you aground. He sticks close to the sail, Will."

"Heave ahoy! heave ahoy! Good-night!" and away bounded the boat, which was then passing Pin Mill, in the widest part of the river, and steering towards the shades of Woolverstone. The obelisk

rose high over the dark trees, pointing to the clear, moonlit sky, its pinnacle still tinged with the last red light of that autumnal evening.

But the breeze freshening, the little skiff darted along the side of the greensward, which sloped to the water's edge; and, as she passed, the startled doe leaped up from her repose, and stamped her foot, and snorted to the herd reposing or browsing on the side of the hill.

Woolverstone Park, with its thick copses and stately trees, whose roots reached, in snaky windings, to the very shore, was now the range along which the barque skirted till it came opposite the white cottage, which stands on a small green opening, or lawn, slanting down to the river.

The park boat was moored against the stairs, and a single light burned against the window, at which a white cat might be seen to be sitting. It was a favourite cat of the gamekeeper's, which had accidentally been killed in a rabbit-trap, and, being stuffed, was placed in the window of the cottage. Visible as it always was in the same place, in the broad day and in the clear moonlight, the sailors on the river always called that dwelling by the name of the Cat House; by which it is known at the present day. High above it might be seen the mansion, shining in the moonbeam, and many lights burning in its various apartments – a sign of the hospitality of W. Berners, Esquire, the lord of that beautiful domain.

But the two sailors in the boat were little occupied with thoughts about the beauty of this scene, or the interest that might attach to that side of the water. Their eyes were bent upon the opposite shore; and, as they sailed along, with a favourable wind, they soon passed the boathouse and the mansion of Woolverstone.

"Luff, do you think we shall be lucky? I'd venture my share of the next run, if I could once safely harbour the prize from yonder shore."

"Why, Will, you speak as if the Philistines were to meet you. Who can prevent your cutting out such a prize?"

"I know not; except that she is too difficult a craft to manage."

"Pshaw, Will! her cable may be easily cut; and once we have her in tow, with this side-wind upon our sail, we shall be back again as quickly as we came."

"Maybe, maybe, John; but I do not like being too desperate. I'll fulfil my word, and give you more than half my share, which you know is a pretty good one, if you will lend me an honest and fair play."

"I'll do nothing, Bill, but what you tell me. I'll lay like a log in the boat, and stir not without the boatswain's whistle; and as to an honest hand, I'll tell you what, Will, 'tis something as good as your own – it will do by you as well as your own would do by me."

"Say no more, say no more! But look, John – I do believe I see her by the shore."

"I see something white, but that's the cottage in the Reach."

"No, no, John; keep her head well up; my eyes are clearer than yours – I see her flag waving in the wind. You may take your tack now, John – we shall run directly across. Ease out the mainsail a bit, and I'll mind the foresail. Bear up, my hearty! bear up, my hearty!"

With such words of mutual encouragement did these men of the sea, the river, and the land, after passing Woolverstone Park, steer directly across, towards Nacton Creek, that they might hug the wind under Downham Reach, and move more rapidly, in shallow water, against the tide.

Any one would imagine, from their conversation, that they were intent upon cutting out some vessel from her moorings, instead of a poor, defenceless girl, who, trusting to nothing but the strength of true love, stood waiting for them on the shore.

There stood the ever faithful Margaret, with palpitating heart, watching the light barque, as it came bounding over the small curling waves of the Orwell. In her breast beat feelings such as some may have experienced; but, whoever they may be, they must have been most desperately in love. Hope, fear, joy, and terror, anxiety, and affection – each, in turn, sent their separate sensations, in quick succession, into her soul. Hope predominated over the rest, and suggested these bright thoughts —

“He is coming to me, no more to be tried, no more to be disapproved, but to tell me he is an honest man, and engaged in honest service.”

What a picture would she have presented at that moment to any genuine lover of nature! Who could describe that eye of expectation, swelled as it was with the animating hope of happiness to come! Who could describe that heaving heart, answering as it did to every heave of the little boat which came bounding to the shore! And what words shall speak that sudden emotion, as the welcome sound of the grounding keel, and the rush of waters following it, told that the boat was ashore, which conveyed to a woman’s heart all that she had so long looked for, hoped, and feared – her lover’s return!

The watchword, “*Margaret*,” was spoken, and in another moment her joy and grief, and love and hope, were, as it were, embodied in the embrace of him she loved. Moments at such time fly too rapidly – an hour seems but an instant. There is so much to say, to express, to ponder upon, that the time is always too short. In honest love there seems to be no fear, no death, no time, no change – a sort of existence indescribably happy, indefinitely blissful, hopeful, and enduring.

In the heart of Margaret, the poor Margaret Catchpole, love was her life; and as she stood upon that strand, and first welcomed her William, she felt the purest, happiest, and holiest feelings of joy, rectitude, and honesty – such as she never before had felt to such extent, and such as she knew but for a few short moments, and often wished for again, but never, never afterwards experienced.

Since his absence from Margaret, the character of Laud had become more and more desperate, and to say that the same pure feeling burned in his breast as did in Margaret’s would not be true. No man who leads a guilty life can entertain that purity of love in his heart which shall stand the test of every earthly trial; but Margaret, like many real lovers, attributed to him she loved the same perfection and singleness of attachment which she felt towards him. Had she known that this pure flame was only burning as pure and bright in the honest soul of Jack Barry, she would, it may be, have rejected Laud, and have accepted him; but she knew not this. She was not blind to the faults of the sailor, though she was blinded to his real character. She expected to find a love like her own, and really believed his affection to be the same to the last.

“Now, Margaret,” he at length exclaimed, “now’s the time: my boat is ready, my ship is at the mouth of the river. A snug little cabin is at your service; and you will find more hearts and hands to serve you than you ever had in your life.”

“But where am I to go, William? What business have I on board your master’s vessel? He would not approve of your sailing with your young wife. I thought you came to tell me you were prepared to marry me from my own dear father’s house, and to be a comfort and a blessing to my aged mother.”

“Margaret, you say you love me. My time is short. I am come here to prove the sincerity of my love, and to take you, in an honest way, to a country where we may be married; but if you send me away now, we may never meet again.”

“If you are true, William – if, as you say, your prospects are good, and you have spared sufficient from your lawful gains to hire a cottage and to make me happy, why not get leave of absence, and come and marry me in dear old England?”

“I may not be able to get leave for a long time; and what difference does it make whether we are married here, or in my employer’s country? Marriage is marriage, Margaret, in every place, all the world over.”

“Yes, Will; but I have heard that marriages solemnized in some countries do not hold good in others; and whether they did or not, I should like those who first gave me birth to give me to you, William. My consent, they know, is a willing one; but I should not be happy in mind, if I were to leave my parents without their knowing where I was gone.”

“What will it matter if they do not know it till we return? I almost think you would like another better than me, Margaret.”

“If you, William, were, in some respects, other than you are, I should like you full as well; but, as you are, I love you, and you know it. Why not come ashore, and marry me at our own church, and

in the presence of my own parents? As to any other, William, though another may like me, I cannot help it, but I can help his having me.”

“Then there is another that does love you! – is there, Margaret?”

A blush passed over Margaret’s face as she replied, “Another has told me so, and I did not deceive him. He thought you dead, or he would never have ventured upon the subject. I told him he was mistaken, that you were not dead, and that I still loved you, William.”

“Then he knows I live, does he?”

“Yes.”

“And you have betrayed me?”

“No: I have not told any one but him; and as he pressed his suit, thinking that you were no more, I felt it to be only due to him to tell him you were alive.”

“And who is he, Margaret? You would not have been so plain with him if he had not had somewhat of your confidence.”

“He is an honest young man, and of very good and respectable parents – he works at the Priory Farm; and seeing him, as I do, daily, I can form sufficient judgement of his character to believe he would never betray any one.”

“Upon my word, Margaret, he must be a prodigy of perfection! Perhaps you would like him to be bridesman upon our wedding-day?”

“I would, indeed, if he would like it, and you had no objection.”

“What is his name?”

“John Barry.”

“What! of Levington?”

“Yes.”

“His brother is in the coastguard. It was he who gave me this, Margaret, this cut upon my forehead – this, that you took such pains to heal.”

“And it is healed, William; and your heart, too, I hope.”

“No, no, no! – I owe him one!”

“Consider me his creditor, and pay it me; for I healed that wound, and it brought with it reformation.”

“I would not give you what I would give him.”

“No, William; but you ought not to bear malice. His brother has been very kind to me. I may say, he is the only one who never reproached me with having been the mistress of a smuggler.” (There was a fearful frown upon the smuggler’s brow at this moment, and a convulsive grasp of the poor girl’s hand, that told there was agony and anger stirring in his soul.) “But you are not a smuggler now, William. I did not mean to hurt your feelings. All reproach of that name has long passed away from my mind.”

William was silent, and gazed wildly upon the waters. One hand was in his bosom, the other was in Margaret’s hand, as she leaned upon his shoulder. There might be seen a strange paleness passing over his face, and a painful compression of his lips. A sudden start, as if involuntary, and it was most truly so. It told of a chilliness on the heart, that seemed to freeze the blood in his veins. He actually trembled.

“William, you are not well.”

“No, I am not; but a little grog, which is in the boat, will soon set me right again.”

“Shall I run and fetch it?”

“No, no, – wait a bit, wait a bit. Hold – I was a smuggler! Yes, you said I was a smuggler! The world despised me! You bore the reproach of my name! Well, Margaret, the smuggler comes home – he comes to marry you. Will the world believe him to be altered? Will they not call you, then, the smuggler’s bride?”

“No, William, not if you are really altered, as you say you are. I wish you were in the British service; seamen are wanted now, and the smuggler would soon be forgiven, when he once sailed under the flag of Old England.”

“’Tis too late, ’tis too late, now, Margaret! I will not say I may not ever sail under our gallant Nelson. You might persuade me to it, if you would only sail with me to Holland, and there be married to me, Margaret.”

“You have heard me upon this point: do not urge it any more. I have now stolen away from duty, William, to meet you here, and I hope I shall not be missed. Let me only hear you say you will come again soon, to marry me at home, and I shall return to my service happy.”

“I would if I could, but I cannot.”

“Why not, William? why not?”

“Do not ask me why. Come, Margaret, come to the boat, and share my fate. I will be constant to you, and you shall be my counsellor.”

“Nay, William, do not urge me to forsake all my friends, and put all this country in terror as to what has become of me. I cannot go on board your boat. I cannot give you myself until God and my parents have given me to you. So do not think of it; but, come again, come again! – yes, again and again! – but come openly, in the sight of all men, and I will be yours. I live for you only, William, and will never be another’s whilst you live.”

“But how can I live without you, Margaret? I cannot come in the way you talk of; I tell you I cannot. Do, then, do be mine.”

“I am yours, William, and will ever be so; but it must be openly, before all men, and upon no other terms.”

“Then it will never be!”

“Why so?”

“Because I am a smuggler!”

“You have been such, but you are not so now. You have long forsaken the gang; you are forgotten, and supposed to be dead. You may change your name; but being changed in your life, it will only be known to me.”

“And to Barry, too, Margaret; and then to his brother, and to numbers of others, who will know me. I was recognized this very night.”

“What, if you change your name?”

“My name is changed, but not my nature. I am a smuggler still!”

“No, William, no – you cannot be! You are in the service of an honest man, though a foreigner.”

“No, Margaret, I am not. You see before you the notorious Hudson. I am a smuggler still!”

It was now poor Margaret’s turn to tremble, and she felt more than language can speak. She had heard of Hudson – Captain Hudson, as he was called – but had no idea that her lover was that, or such a man. She felt a revulsion amounting to sickness, a giddiness overcame her, and she felt as if she must fall to the earth. Half carried, half urged, half pulled along, she was unconsciously moving, with her eyes fixed fully upon the boat, and approaching it, and she had no power to resist – a sort of trance-like senselessness seemed to overpower her; and yet she felt that hand, knew that form, and saw the waters and the boat, and had no energy or impulse to resist. Her heart was so struck with the deadliness of grief and despair, that the nerves had no power to obey the will, and the will seemed but a wish to die. We cannot die when we wish it, and it is well for us we cannot. Happy they who do not shrink when the time comes appointedly; thrice happy they who welcome it with joy, and hope, and love!

Margaret revived a little before she reached the boat, and resisted. The firm grasp of the smuggler was not, however, to be loosed.

“You do not mean to force me away, William?”

“I must, if you will not go.”

“I will not go.”

“You shall – you must – you cannot help it! Do not resist.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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