ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE LIFEBOAT

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
The Beginning—in which Several Important Personages are Introduced

There existed, not many years ago, a certain street near the banks of old Father Thames which may be described as being one of the most modest and retiring little streets in London.

The neighbourhood around that street was emphatically dirty and noisy. There were powerful smells of tallow and tar in the atmosphere, suggestive of shipping and commerce. Narrow lanes opened off the main street affording access to wharves and warehouses, and presenting at their termini segmentary views of ships' hulls, bowsprits, and booms, with a background of muddy water and smoke. There were courts with unglazed windows resembling doors, and massive cranes clinging to the walls. There were yards full of cases and barrels, and great anchors and chains, which invaded the mud of the river as far as was consistent with safety; and adventurous little warehouses, which stood on piles, up to the knees, as it were, in water, totally regardless of appearances, and utterly indifferent as to catching cold. As

regards the population of this locality, rats were, perhaps, in excess of human beings; and it might have been observed that the former were particularly frolicsome and fearless.

Farther back, on the landward side of our unobtrusive street, commercial and nautical elements were more mingled with things appertaining to domestic life. Elephantine horses, addicted to good living, drew through the narrow streets wagons and vans so ponderous and gigantic that they seemed to crush the very stones over which they rolled, and ran terrible risk of sweeping little children out of the upper windows of the houses. In unfavourable contrast with these, donkeys, of the most meagre and starved aspect, staggered along with cartloads of fusty vegetables and dirty-looking fish, while the vendors thereof howled the nature and value of their wares with deliberate ferocity. Low pawnbrokers (chiefly in the "slop" line) obtruded their seedy wares from doors and windows halfway across the pavement, as if to tempt the naked; and equally low pastry-cooks spread forth their stale viands in unglazed windows, as if to seduce the hungry.

Here the population was mixed and varied. Busy men of business and of wealth, porters and wagoners, clerks and warehousemen, rubbed shoulders with poor squalid creatures, men and women, whose business or calling no one knew and few cared to know except the policeman on the beat, who, with stern suspicious glances, looked upon them as objects of special regard, and as enemies; except, also, the earnest-faced man in

seedy black garments, with a large Bible (*evidently*) in his pocket, who likewise looked on them as objects of special regard, and as friends. The rats were much more circumspect in this locality. They were what the Yankees would call uncommonly "cute," and much too deeply intent on business to indulge in play.

In the lanes, courts, and alleys that ran still farther back into the great hive, there was an amount of squalor, destitution, violence, sin, and misery, the depth of which was known only to the people who dwelt there, and to those earnest-faced men with Bibles who made it their work to cultivate green spots in the midst of such unpromising wastes, and to foster the growth of those tender and beautiful flowers which sometimes spring and flourish where, to judge from appearances, one might be tempted to imagine nothing good could thrive. Here also there were rats, and cats too, besides dogs of many kinds; but they all of them led hard lives of it, and few appeared to think much of enjoying themselves. Existence seemed to be the height of their ambition. Even the kittens were depressed, and sometimes stopped in the midst of a faint attempt at play to look round with a scared aspect, as if the memory of kicks and blows was strong upon them.

The whole neighbourhood, in fact, teemed with sad yet interesting sights and scenes, and with strange violent contrasts. It was not a spot which one would naturally select for a ramble on a summer evening after dinner; nevertheless it was a locality where time might have been profitably spent, where a good lesson or two might have been learned by those who have a tendency to

"consider the poor."

But although the neighbourhood was dirty and noisy, our modest street, which was at that time known by the name of Redwharf Lane, was comparatively clean and quiet. True, the smell of tallow and tar could not be altogether excluded, neither could the noises; but these scents and sounds reached it in a mitigated degree, and as the street was not a thoroughfare, few people entered it, except those who had business there, or those who had lost their way, or an occasional street boy of an explorative tendency; which last, on finding that it was a quiet spot, invariably entered a protest against such an outrageous idea as quietude in "the City" by sending up a series of hideous yells, and retiring thereafter precipitately.

Here, in Redwharf Lane, was the office of the firm of Denham, Crumps, and Company.

Mr Denham stood with his back to the fire, for it was a coldish autumn day, with his coat-tails under his arms. He was a big bald man of five-and-forty, with self-importance enough for a man of five-hundred-and-forty. Mr Crumps sat in a small back-office, working so diligently that one might have supposed he was endeavouring to bring up the arrears of forty years' neglect, and had pledged himself to have it done before dinner. He was particularly small, excessively thin, very humble, rather deaf, and upwards of sixty. Company had died of lockjaw two years previous to the period of which we write, and is therefore unworthy of farther notice. A confidential clerk had taken, and

still retained, his place.

Messrs Denham, Crumps, and Company, were shipowners. Report said that they were rich, but report frequently said what was not true in those days. Whether it has become more truthful in the present days, remains an open question. There can be no question, however, that much business was done at the office in Redwharf Lane, and that, while Denham lived in a handsome mansion in Russell Square, and Crumbs dwelt in a sweet cottage in Kensington, Company had kept a pony phaeton, and had died in a snug little villa on Hampstead Heath.

The office of Denham, Crumps, and Company was small and unpretending, as was the street in which it stood. There was a small green door with a small brass plate and a small brass knocker, all of which, when opened by their attendant, a small tiger in blue, with buttons, gave admittance to a small passage that terminated in a small room. This was the outer office, and here sat the four clerks of the establishment on four tall stools, writing in four monstrous volumes, as furiously as if they were decayed authors whose lives depended on the result. Their salaries did, poor fellows, and that was much the same thing!

A glass door, with scratches here and there, through which the head of the firm could gaze unseen, separated "the office" from Denham's room, and a wooden door separated that from Crumps' room, beyond which there was a small closet or cell which had been Company's room before that gentleman died. It

was now used as a repository for ancient books and papers.

"Very odd," said Mr Denham, and as he said so he touched a small silver bell that stood on his writing-table.

The tiger in blue and buttons instantly appeared.

"Here, Peekins, post these letters. Has no one called this afternoon; I mean, no one resembling a sailor?"

The boy in blue started, and his face became very red.

"Why, what's the matter, boy? What do you mean by staring at me, instead of answering my question?"

"Please, sir," stammered Peekins meekly, "I didn't mean no 'arm, sir, but you see, sir, his face was so drefful fierce, and he looked sich a wild—"

"Boy, are you mad?" interrupted Mr Denham, advancing and seizing the tiger by his blue collar; "what are you talking about? Now, answer my question at once, else I'll shake the little life you have out of your body. Did any sailor-like man call at the office this afternoon?"

"Oh, sir, yes, sir,—I—I—thought he was drunk and wouldn't let 'im in, sir; he's bin a standin' stampin' at the door for more than—"

The end of the sentence was cut short by Mr Denham suddenly ejecting the boy from the room and shouting, "Let him in!"

In a few seconds a heavy tread was heard in the outer office, and the boy ushered in a tall young man, of unusually large proportions, with extremely broad shoulders, and apparently about twenty-three years of age, whose rough pilot-coat, wide

pantaloons, and glazed hat bespoke him a sailor. His countenance was flushed, and an angry frown contracted his brow as he strode into the room, pulled off his hat and stood before the head of the house of Denham, Crumps, and Company.

"I beg pardon, sir," began the sailor, somewhat sharply, yet without disrespect, "when I am asked to come—"

"Yes, yes, Bax," interposed Mr Denham, "I know what you would say. Pray calm yourself. It is a pity you should have been kept waiting outside, but the fact is that my boy is a new one, and apparently he is destitute of common sense. Sit down. I sent for you to say that I wish you to take the 'Nancy' to Liverpool. You will be ready to start at once, no doubt—"

"Before the schooner is overhauled?" inquired Bax, in surprise.

"Of course," said Denham, stiffly; "I see no occasion for *another* overhaul. That schooner will cost us more than she is worth if we go on repairing at the rate we have been doing the last two years."

"She needs it all, sir," rejoined Bax, earnestly. "The fact is, Mr Denham, I feel it to be my duty to tell you that there ain't a sound plank or timber in her from stem to stern, and I'm pretty sure that if she costs you money, she's likely to cost me and the men aboard of her our lives. I strongly advise you to strike her off the books, and get a new one."

"Mr Bax," said Denham, pompously, "you are too young a man to offer your advice unless it is asked. I believe the engineer

employed by me to examine into the condition of my vessels is quite competent to judge in these matters, and I have unbounded confidence in him. When I placed you in command of the 'Nancy,' I meant you to navigate, not to criticise her; but if you are afraid to venture—"

"Afraid!" cried the young sailor, reddening. "Is anxiety about the lives of your men and the safety of your property to be called fear? *I* am willing to sail in the 'Nancy' as long as a plank of her will hold to her ribs, but—"

Bax paused and bit his lip, as if to keep back words which had better not be spoken.

"Well, then," rejoined Mr Denham, affecting to disregard the pause, "let me hear no more about repairs. When these require to be done, they *shall* be done. Meanwhile, go and make preparation to sail by the morning tides which serves about—what hour, think you?"

"Flood at half after six," said Bax, curtly.

"Very well, come up here at half-past five, one of the clerks will see you. You will have to run down to Dover in the first place, and when there my agent will give you further instructions. Good afternoon!"

Bax rose and quitted the room with a stern "Good day, sir."

As he passed through the outer office he was arrested by one of the clerks laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, Mr Foster," said Bax, a bright smile chasing the frown from his face, "it seems we're to swim if we can, or sink if we

can't this winter;—but what want ye with me?"

"You are to call me Guy, not *Mister* Foster," said the lad, gaily. "I want to know where you are to be found after six this evening."

"At the 'Three Jolly Tars,'" answered Bax, clapping on his glazed hat.

"All right, I'll look you up. Good-day."

"Guy Foster," shouted Mr Denham from the inner room.

"Yes, uncle," and in another moment the youth was standing, pen in hand, in the august presence of his relative, who regarded him with a cold stare of displeasure.

There could scarcely have been conceived a stronger contrast in nature than that which existed between the starched, proud, and portly uncle, and the tall, handsome, and hearty young nephew, whose age was scarcely twenty years.

"How often am I to tell you, sir," said Mr Denham, "that 'yes, uncle,' is much too familiar and unbusinesslike a phrase to be used in this office in the hearing of your fellow-clerks?"

"I beg pardon, uncle, I'm sure I had no intention of—"

"There, that will do, I want no apology, I want obedience and attention to my expressed wishes. I suppose that you expect to get away for a few days' holiday?"

"Well, unc—, sir, I mean, if it is quite convenient I should—"

"It is *not* quite convenient," interrupted the uncle. "It cannot possibly, at any time, be convenient to dispense with the services of a clerk in a house where no supernumeraries are kept to talk slang and read the newspapers. I see no reason whatever in young

men in ordinary health expecting as a right, two or three weeks' leave each year without deduction of salary. *I* never go to the country or to the sea-side from one year's end to the other."

"You'd be much the better for it if you did, uncle," interposed Guy.

"That, *sir*," retorted Denham with emphasis, "is *your* opinion, and you will allow me to say that it is erroneous, as most of your opinions, I am sorry to find, are. *I* find that no change is necessary for my health. I am in better condition than many who go to Margate every summer. I thrive on town air, sir, and on city life."

There was much truth in these observations. The worthy merchant did indeed seem to enjoy robust health, and there could be no question that, as far as physical appearances went, he did thrive on high living, foul air, and coining money. Tallow and tar sent forth delicious odours to him, and thick smoke was pleasant to his nostrils, for he dealt largely in coal, and all of these, with many kindred substances, were productive of the one great end and object of his life—gold.

"However," pursued Mr Denham, leaning back on the mantle-piece, "as the tyrannical customs of society cannot be altogether set at nought, I suppose I must let you go."

"Thank you, unc— sir," said Guy, who, having been chained to the desk in the office of Redwharf Lane for the last eleven months, felt his young heart bounding wildly within him at the prospect of visiting, even for a brief period, his mother's cottage on the coast of Kent.

"You have no occasion to thank *me*," retorted Mr Denham; "you are indebted entirely to the tyrannical customs and expectations of society for the permission. Good-bye, you may convey my respects to your mother."

"I will, sir."

"Have you anything further to say?" asked Mr Denham, observing that the youth stood looking perplexedly at the ground, and twirling his watch-key.

"Yes, uncle, I have," answered Guy, plucking up courage. "The fact is—that, is to say—you know that wrecks are very common off the coast of Kent."

"Certainly, I do," said Denham with a frown. "I have bitter cause to know that. The loss occasioned by the wreck of the 'Sea-gull' last winter was very severe indeed. The subject is not a pleasant one; have you any good reason for alluding to it?"

"I have, uncle; as you say, the loss of the 'Sea-gull' was severe, for, besides the loss of a fine vessel and a rich cargo, there was the infinitely more terrible loss of the lives of twenty-two human beings."

As Mr Denham had not happened to think of the loss of life that occurred on the occasion, and had referred solely to the loss of ship and cargo, which, by a flagrant oversight on the part of one of his clerks, had not been insured; he made no rejoinder, and Guy, after a moment's pause, went on—

"The effect of this calamity was so powerful on the minds of the people of Deal and Walmer, near which the wreck took

place, that a public meeting was called, and a proposal made that a lifeboat should be established there."

"Well?" said Mr Denham.

"Well," continued the youth, "my mother gave a subscription; but being poor she could not give much."

"Well, well," said Mr Denham impatiently.

"And—and *I* gave a little, a very little, towards it too," said Guy.

"Your salary is not large; it was very foolish of you to waste your money in this way."

"Waste it, uncle!"

"Come, sir, what does all this tend to?" said Denham, sternly.

"I thought—I hoped—indeed I felt assured," said Guy earnestly, "that *you* would give something towards this good object—"

"Oh, did you?" said the merchant, cutting him short; "then, sir, allow me to say that you were never more mistaken in your life. I never give money in charity. I believe it to be a false principle, which tends to the increase of beggars and criminals. You can go now."

"But consider, uncle," entreated Guy, "this is no ordinary charity. A lifeboat there might be the means of saving hundreds of lives; and oh! if you could have seen, as I did, the despairing faces of these poor people as they clung to the rigging scarcely a stone's-cast from the shore, on which the waves beat so furiously that no boat except a lifeboat could have lived for a moment; if

you could have heard, as I did, the wild shriek of despair as the masts went by the board, and plunged every living soul into the raging sea, I am certain that you would gladly give a hundred pounds or more towards this philanthropic object."

"Nephew," said Denham, "I will not give a sixpence. Your inexperience and enthusiasm lead you astray, sir, in this matter. Lifeboats are capable of being upset as well as ordinary boats, and there are cases on record in which the crews of them have been drowned as well as the people whom they recklessly went out to save. My opinion is, that persons who devote themselves to a sea-faring life must make up their minds to the chances and risks attending such a life. Now you have my answer—good-bye, and give my best regards to your sister. I will expect you back next Saturday week."

"I have still another favour to ask, sir," said Guy, after some hesitation.

"Has it anything to do with what you are pleased to term a philanthropic object?"

"It has."

"Then," said Mr Denham, "save me the trouble of refusing, and yourself the pain of a refusal, by holding your tongue,—and retiring."

Guy coloured, and was about to turn away in disgust, but, repressing his indignation by a powerful effort, he advanced with a cheerful countenance, and held out his hand.

"Well, good-bye, uncle. If ever you go to the coast, and happen

to see a storm and a shipwreck, you'll change your mind, I think, in regard to this matter."

Mr Denham did go to the coast, and, did see a storm and a shipwreck, but whether this prediction ever came true is a point that shall not be revealed at this part of our narrative.

Chapter Two.
In Which more Important Personages are Introduced, and Display their Characters by their Actions More or Less

The "Three Jolly Tars" was one of those low taverns where seamen were wont to congregate—not *because* it was a low tavern, but because there was no other sort of tavern—high or low—in that neighbourhood.

The world (that is to say, the delicately-nurtured and carefully-tended world) is apt to form erroneous opinions in regard to low taverns, and degradation, and sin in general,—arising from partial ignorance and absolute inexperience, which it is important that we should correct in order that the characters of our story may not be falsely judged. God forbid that it should be for a moment supposed that we have a word to say in favour of low taverns. Our aim just now is, not to consider these, but, to convince the reader, if possible, that every man who enters one of them is not necessarily a lost or utterly depraved creature.

It is undoubtedly true that these low taverns are moral pig-sties. Nay, we owe an apology to the pigs for the comparison. *Sties* appear to be places of abode suited to the nature and tastes

of their occupants, and the grumps who inhabit them seem not only to rejoice in them (for this alone would be no argument, inasmuch as the same may be affirmed of men who rejoice in low taverns), but to be utterly incapable of higher enjoyment out of them. Let a pig out of his stye, afford him every conceivable opportunity of intellectual and physical improvement, and he will carefully search out the nearest mudhole—unhappy until he finds it—will thrust not only his nose but his body into it, and will find supreme enjoyment in wallowing in the mire; and no blame to him for this; he is grumpish by nature. Yes, a low tavern is beneath the level of a pig-stye!

Nevertheless, as it is possible that, *for a time*, man may, through sin, or circumstances, or both, be reduced to such a condition as to take shelter in a pig-stye, without exposing himself to the charge of being a pig; so, it is possible that a man may frequent a low tavern, *not* without detriment, but, without becoming thereby worthy of being classed with the lowest of the low. Do not misunderstand us, gentle reader. We do not wish in the slightest degree to palliate the coarse language, the debasement, the harsh villainy, which shock the virtuous when visiting the haunts of poverty. Our simple desire is to assure the sceptical that goodness and truth are sometimes found in strange questionable places, although it is undoubtedly true that they do not deliberately search out such places for an abode, but prefer a pure atmosphere and pleasant companionship if they can get it.

It must not be supposed, then, that our friend John

Bax—sometimes called "captain," sometimes "skipper," not unfrequently "mister," but most commonly "Bax," without any modification—was a hopeless castaway, because he was found by his friend Guy Foster in a room full of careless foul-mouthed seamen, eating his bread and cheese and drinking his beer in an atmosphere so impregnated with tobacco smoke that he could scarcely see, and so redolent of gin that he could scarcely smell the smoke!

In those days there were not so many sailors' homes and temperance coffee-houses as there are now. In the locality about which we write there were none. If Jack wanted his lunch or his dinner he found the low tavern almost the only place in which he could get it comfortably. Tobacco smoke was no objection to him;—he rather liked it. Swearing did not shock him;—he was used to it. Gentle folk are apt to err here too. Being *shocked* at gross sin does not necessarily imply goodness of heart; it implies nothing more than the being unused to witness gross sin. Goodness of heart *may* go along with this capacity of being shocked, so, equally, may badness of heart; but neither of them is implied by it.

What a grand thing is truth—simple abstract truth! and yet how little do we appreciate it in regard to the inconceivably important matter of *reasoning*. We analyse our chemicals and subject them to the severest tests in order to ascertain their true properties;—truth is all we aim at; but how many of us can say that we analyse our thoughts and subject our reasoning to the test

of logic in order simply to ascertain *the truth*.

"Smoke for ever! I say, Bill, open that there port a bit, else we'll be choked," cried a stentorian voice, as Guy entered the little apartment, where some dozen of noisy sailors were creating the cloud, which was a little too strong for them.

For some moments Guy glanced round inquiringly, unable to pierce the dim curtain that enshrouded everything, as with a veil of dirty gauze.

"Lost your reckoning, I guess," drawled a Yankee skipper.

"Never mind, let go your anchor, my lad," cried a voice from the densest quarter of the smoke, "it's not a bad berth, and good holdin' ground."

"What'll you take to drink, my boy, supposin' you gits the offer?" inquired another man, giving him a facetious poke in the ribs.

"Is John Bax here?" inquired Guy.

"Hallo, messmate—here you are, port your helm and heave a-head—steady! rocks to leeward; starboard hard! ah, I knew you'd never clear these rocks without touchin'," said Bax, as his young friend tripped over three or four spittoons, and plunged into the corner from which the sailor's deep bass voice issued. "There now, sit down; what'll you have?"

"Nothing, Bax; what a horrible hole to feed in! Couldn't you come out and talk with me in the fresh air?"

It must indeed have been a wonderfully impure place when Guy could venture by contrast to speak of the air outside as being

fresh.

"Couldn't do it, my lad," replied Bax, with his mouth full. "I haven't had a bit since six o'clock this morning, and I'm only half through."

The fact was evident, for a large plate of biscuit and cheese stood on the small table before the seaman, with a tumbler of hot gin and water. So Guy sat down, and, observing that the waiter stood at his elbow, ordered half a pint of stout. Guy did not drink spirits, but he had no objection to beer, so he took occasion to remonstrate with Bax on his tendency to drink gin, and recommended beer instead, as it would "do him more good." It did not occur to Guy that a young man in robust health does not require physical good to be done to him at all, beyond what food, and rest, and exercise can achieve, and that, therefore, artificial stimulant of any kind is unnecessary!

"Skipper ahoy!" shouted, a gruff voice in the doorway.

"Ay, ay!" cried several of the party in reply.

"Is John Bax in this here port?"

"Here you are," replied the man in request, "port your helm, old boy! rocks on the lee bow, look out!"

"Steady, so," said a fat burly seaman, as he steered in obedience to these sailing directions, and finally "cast anchor" beside our two friends.

"How are ye, Captain Bluenose?" said Bax, holding out his hand.

"Same to you, lad," replied the Captain, seizing the offered

hand in his own enormous fist, which was knotty and fleshy, seamed with old cuts and scars, and stained with tar. "Hallo! Guy, is this you?" he added, turning suddenly to the youth. "Why, who'd 'a thought to see *you* here? I do b'lieve I han't seen ye since the last time down at the coast. But, I say, Guy, my boy, you han't took to drinkin', have ye?"

"No, Captain," said Guy, with a smile, "nothing stronger than beer, and not much of that. I merely came here to meet Bax."

Captain Bluenose—whose name, by the way, had no reference to his nose, for that was small and red—scratched his chin and stared into vacancy, as if he were meditating.

"Why, boy," he said at length, "seems to me as if you'd as good cause to suspec' me of drinkin' as I have to suspec' you, 'cause we're both *here*, d'ye see? Howsever, I've been cruisin' after the same craft, an' so we've met, d'ye see, an' that's nat'ral, so it is."

"Well, and now you have found me, what d'ye want with me?" said Bax, finishing the bread and cheese, and applying to the gin and water.

"Shipmet, I'm goin' home, and wants a berth a-board the 'Nancy,'" said Bluenose.

"Couldn't do it, Captain," said Bax, shaking his head, "'gainst rules."

"I'll go as a hextra hand—a suppernummerary," urged the Captain.

"Why, Captain," said Guy, "is it not strange that I should have come here to make the very same request? Come, Bax, you're a

good fellow, and will take us both. I will guarantee that my uncle will not find fault with you."

"Ah, that alters the case," said Bax, "if you choose to take the responsibility on your own shoulders, Guy, you're welcome to the best berth a-board the old 'Nancy.' D'ye know, I've a fondness for that old craft, though she is about as unseaworthy a schooner as sails out o' the port of London. You see, she's the only craft bigger than a Deal lugger that I ever had command of. She's my first love, is the old 'Nancy,' and I hope we won't have to part for many a day."

"Quite right, young man," said Captain Bluenose, nodding his head approvingly, and filling his pipe from a supply of tobacco he always carried in the right pocket of his capacious blue waistcoat. The Captain gazed with a look of grave solemnity in the manly countenance of the young sailor, for whom he entertained feelings of unbounded admiration. He had dandled Bax on his knee when he was a baby, had taught him to make boats and to swim and row when he became a boy, and had sailed with him many a time in the same lugger when they put off in wild storms to rescue lives or property from ships wrecked on the famous Goodwin Sands.

"Quite right, young man," repeated the Captain, as he lighted his pipe, "your sentiments does you credit. W'en a man's got his first love, d'ye see, an' finds as how she's all trim and ship-shape, and taut, and well ballasted, and all that sort o' thing, stick to her to the last, through thick and thin. That's wot *I* say, d'ye see?

There's no two ways about it, for wot's right can't be wrong. If it can, show me how, and then I'll knock under, but not before."

"Certainly not, Captain," cried Bax, laughing, "never give in —that's my motto."

"There," said Bluenose, gravely, "you're wrong—'cause why? You're not right, an' w'en a man's not right he ought always to give in."

"But how is a fellow to know when he's right and when he's wrong?" asked Bax.

"Con-sideration," said Bluenose.

"Bravo! Captain," cried Guy, with a laugh, "if it be true that 'brevity is the soul of wit,' you must be the wittiest fellow on Deal beach."

"I dun-know," retorted the Captain, slowly, "whether it's the soul or the body o' wit, an' wot's more, I don't care; but it's a fact, d'ye see, that consideration'll do it; least-wise if consideration won't, nothin' will. See now, here it is,"—(he became very earnest at this point),—"w'en a thing puzzles people, wot does people do? why, they begins right off to talk about it, an' state their opinions afore they han't got no opinions to state. P'raps they takes the puzzler up by the middle an' talks wild about that part of it; then they give a look at the end of it, an' mayhap they'll come back and glance at the beginnin', mayhap they won't, and then they'll tell you as grave as owls that they've made up their minds about it, and so nail their colours to the mast."

At this stage in the elucidation of the knotty point, Bluenose

observed that his pipe was going out, so he paused, pulled at it vigorously for a few seconds, and then resumed his discourse.

"Now, lads, wot *ought* you for to do w'en you've got hold of a puzzler? Why, you ought to sit down and consider of it, which means you should begin at the beginnin'; an' let me tell you, it's harder to find the beginnin' of a puzzler than p'raps you suppose. Havin' found the beginnin', you should look at it well, and then go on lookin', inch by inch, and fut by fut, till you comes to the end of it; then look it back, oncommon slow, to the beginnin' again, after which turn it outside in, or inside out,—it don't much matter which way,—and go it all over once more; after which cram your knuckles into yer two eyes, an' sit for half-an-hour (or three-quarters, if it's tremendous deep) without movin'. If that don't do, and you ha'nt got time to try it over again, give in at once, an haul your colours down, but on no occasion wotiver nail them to the mast,—'xceptin' always, w'en you're cocksure that you're right, for then, of coorse, ye can't go far wrong."

This little touch of philosophy convinced Bax that if he did not wish to sit there half the night, the sooner he changed the subject the better, so he called the waiter, and paid his bill, saying to his companions that it was time to go aboard if they wanted a snooze before tripping the anchor.

"What have you had, sir?" said the waiter, turning to Bluenose.

The man said this with a sneer, for he knew that the captain had taken nothing since he entered the house, and was aware, moreover, that he was a water-drinker.

"I've had nothin'," replied the Captain, "nor don't want any, thank 'ee."

"Oh! beg pardon, sir," the waiter bowed and retired impressively.

"The house couldn't keep goin' long with *some* customers," stammered a rough-looking, half-tipsy fellow who had overheard these remarks.

"Might do something for the good of the house," said another, who was equally drunk.

"Who bade *you* put in your oar?" cried the first speaker fiercely, for he had reached that condition of intoxication which is well known as the fighting stage. The other man was quite ready to humour him, so, almost before one could understand what had been said, a savage blow was given and returned, oaths and curses followed, and in two seconds one of the combatants had his opponent by the throat, threw him on his back, with his neck over the fender and his head thrust into the ashes.

Instantly the room was a scene of wild confusion, as some of the friends of both men endeavoured to separate them, while others roared in drunken glee to "let 'em have fair play, and fight it out."

The result of this quarrel might have been serious had not Bax thrust the yelling crowd aside, and, exerting to the utmost the extraordinary muscular power with which he had been endowed, tore the combatants asunder by main force, and hurled them violently to opposite sides of the room.

"Shame on you; lads," said he, "can you not drink your grog without quarrelling about nothing?"

The towering size and the indignant look of Bax, as he said this, were sufficient to quell the disturbance, although some of the more irascible spirits could not refrain from grumbling about interference, and the Yankee roundly asserted that "before he'd go into a public, and sit down and smoke his pipe without doin' somethin' for the good o' the 'ouse, he'd like to see himself chawed up pretty slick, he would."

"Waiter a-hoy!" shouted Captain Bluenose sternly, on hearing this.

"Yes-sir."

"Bring me a tumbler o' gin and a pot o' *cold water*."

"Tum'ler—o'—gin—sir—an'—a—por—o'—col' wa'r, sir? Yes—sir."

The waiter stopped suddenly and turned back.

"*Mixed*, sir?"

"No, *not* mixed, sir," replied Bluenose, with a look and tone of withering sarcasm; "contrairywise, wery much separated."

When the gin and water were placed on the table, the Captain quietly took up the former and cast it, glass and all, under the grate, after which he raised the pot of water to his lips, and, looking round on the company with a bland smile, said:—

"There, I've took somethin' for the good of the house, and now, lads, I'll drink to your better health and happiness in my favourite tipple, the wich I heartily recommend to *you*."

Bluenose drained the pot, flung a half-crown on the table, and swaggered out of the house with his hands deep in the pockets of his rough pea-jacket.

The fact was that the worthy Captain felt aggrieved, and his spirit was somewhat ruffled at the idea of being expected to drink in a house where he had oftentimes, for years past, regaled himself with, and expended his money upon, bread and cheese and ginger-beer!

Chapter Three.
In which the Introduction of Important Personages is Continued, in Rather Exciting Circumstances

"Where away's the boat, lad?" said Captain Bluenose to Bax, on recovering his equanimity.

"Close at hand; mind the fluke of that anchor. The owner of this spot should be put in limbo for settin' man-traps. Have a care of your shins, Guy; it's difficult navigation here on a dark night."

"All right, Bax," replied Guy; "I'll keep close in your wake, so if you capsize we shall at least have the comfort of foundering together."

The place through which the three friends were groping their way was that low locality of mud and old stores, which forms the border region between land and water, and in which dwelt those rats which have been described as being frolicsome and numerous.

"Hold hard!" roared Bluenose, as he tripped over the shank of an anchor, "why don't you set up a lighthouse, or a beacon o' some sort on these here shoals?"

"Starboard, old boy, starboard hard, steady!" cried Bax.

With seaman-like promptitude the Captain obeyed, and thus

escaped tumbling off the end of the wharf at which they had arrived.

"Nancy, a-hoy!" cried Bax in a subdued shout.

A juvenile "Ay, ay, sir!" instantly came back in reply from the dark obscurity that overhung the river. The sound of oars followed.

"Smart little fellow that nephew of yours; he'll do you credit some day," said Bax, turning towards Bluenose, who, although close at his side, was scarcely visible, so dark was the night.

The Captain's rejoinder was cut short by the boy in question sending the bow of the boat crash against the wharf, an exploit which had the effect of pitching him heels over head into the bottom of it.

"Why didn't you give us a hail, uncle?" remonstrated the boy, as he rose and rubbed his elbows.

"Good practice, my lad, it's good practice," replied Bluenose, chuckling, as he stepped in.

A few seconds sufficed to take them alongside of the "Nancy," in two narrow berths of which the Captain and Guy were quickly stowed away and sound asleep, while Bax paced the deck slowly overhead, having relieved the watch and sent him below.

Just half an hour or so before dawn—that mysterious, unreal and solemn period of the night or morning—Captain Bluenose came on deck minus his coat and shoes, in order to have a look at "how things were getting on,"—as if the general operations of nature had been committed to his charge, and he were afraid lest

the sun should not be able to rise without his assistance.

"Light air, west-sou'-west," muttered the Captain as he stepped on deck, cast a glance up at the vane on the mast-head, and then swept his eye round the (imaginary) horizon.

There was not much to be seen, except the numerous lights of the shipping, and the myriad lamps of the great city, whose mighty hum of life had not yet begun to awaken. It was the deadest hour of night (if we may use the expression), although advanced towards morning. The latest of late sitters-up had gone to bed and got to sleep, and the earliest of early risers had not yet been aroused. None save night-workers and night-watchers were astir, and these did not disturb in any appreciable degree the deep quiet of the hour.

While Bax and his friend were conversing in subdued tones near the binnacle, they were startled by a piercing shriek, followed by a heavy plunge in the water, which, from the sound, appeared to be not far distant. They sprang to the bow, which was pointing down the river,—the flood-tide was running strong up at the time. On reaching it they heard a gurgling cry, not twenty yards ahead of the vessel.

"Hold on!" cried Bax to Bluenose, sharply, at the same time fastening the end of a rope round his waist with the speed of thought, and plunging over the side head-foremost. The cry and the plunge brought Guy Foster on deck instantly. He found the Captain holding on with all his might to the end of the rope, on which there seemed to be a tremendous strain.

"Take a turn round that belayin' pin," gasped the Captain.

Guy obeyed, and the moment his companion was relieved, he shouted, "All hands a-hoy!"

It was unnecessary. The four men who formed the crew of the "Nancy" were already springing up the fore-hatch. There was bustle among the shipping too. Lights danced about, the sound of oars was heard in various directions, and sharp eager shouts, as of men who felt that life was in danger, but knew not where to hasten in order to afford aid.

"Haul now, lads, with a will," cried the Captain; "so, steady, avast heaving. Ah! that's a smart lad."

While the men were hauling on the rope, little Tommy had bounded over the side into the boat, which he quickly brought close to the rope, and, seizing it, guided his craft to the end to which Bax was fastened. He found him buffeting the strong current stoutly, and supporting a head on his shoulder in such a way that the mouth should not get below water.

"All right, Tommy," said Bax, quietly. "Don't get excited, my lad; lend a hand to raise her a bit out o' the water. Now, can you hold her there for one moment?"

"Yes, if you just give me the end of that shawl in my teeth, —so."

Tommy could say no more, for he was squeezed flat against the gunwale of the boat, with his stout little arms tight round the neck and waist of a female figure, the fingers of his left hand grasping her hair, and his legs twisted in a remarkable manner

round the thwart to keep him from being dragged out of the boat, besides which his mouth was full of the shawl.

Bax at once grasped the gunwale, and moved hand over hand to the stern, where, by a powerful effort, he raised himself out of the water and sprang inboard. A few minutes more sufficed to enable him to drag the female (a young girl) into the boat, and place her in safety on the schooner's deck.

The whole thing was done in much less time than is required to tell it. Only one of the boats that were out searching discovered the schooner, just as the female was got on board.

"All right?" inquired one of the men.

"All right—saved," was the answer, and the boat pulled away into the obscurity of the morning mist with a cheer of congratulation. Then all was again silent, and the sluggish tide glided slowly past the dark hulls that rested on the bosom of the Thames.

On carrying the girl into the small cabin of the "Nancy" it was found that she was still in a state of insensibility. The dim light of the swinging lamp fell on her pale face, and revealed to the surprised and sympathetic beholders features of great beauty and delicate form, over which masses of dark brown hair straggled in wild confusion.

"Now, lads, clear out o' the way," cried Captain Bluenose, pulling off his coat energetically. "Leave this here little craft to me. I know 'xactly wot's got to be done, d'ye see. Turn her on her face—there; never go for to put a drownded body on its back, be

it man or woman. Stick that coat under her breast, and her arm under her forehead. So, now we'll go to work."

There is no doubt that the worthy captain understood precisely what he meant to do, and was working on a systematic plan; but what the result of his labours might have been it is impossible to say, for at that moment he was interrupted by the tread of hurried footsteps on deck, and the sudden entrance of a silvery-haired man, whose black coat, vest, and pantaloons contrasted strangely with his heavy oilskin coat and sou'-wester, and tended to puzzle the beholder as to whether he was a landsman in nautical outer garments, or a seaman clothed partly in what Jack calls "shore-going toggery."

There was an expression of wild anxiety on the man's face as he sprang towards the prostrate form of the girl, fell on his knees, and, seizing her hand, exclaimed, "Lucy, dearest Lucy!" He stopped suddenly as if he had been choked, and, bending his ear close to Lucy's lips, listened for a few seconds with knitted brow and compressed lips. At that moment there was a flutter on the eyelids of the girl, and a broken sigh escaped her.

The man kneeling at her side sprang convulsively to his feet, raised his hands high above his head, and exclaimed, "O God, in Christ's name I thank thee," in tones so fervent, as almost to approach to a shout.

With this irrepressible cry of gratitude every trace of strong emotion appeared to vanish from the countenance and the manner of the stranger. Turning to Bluenose, who had been

gazing at this scene in much surprise, not unmingled with anxiety, he said in a calm but quick voice:—

"My friend, this child is my daughter. Pray leave me alone with her for a few minutes."

"Excuge a oldish man, sir," said the Captain; "p'raps you'd better let me stay, 'cause why, I knows how to treat drownded—"

"Thank you, it is unnecessary," said the stranger. "Besides, I myself am acquainted with the rules of the Humane Society. But you can aid me by getting hot blankets and warm coffee."

"Come along, Captain," cried Bax, seizing his friend by the arm and dragging him out of the cabin.

Guy had quitted it, followed by Tommy, the instant the old man had expressed a wish to be left alone with his child.

"There, now, you obstinate man," cried Bax, relaxing his grasp on gaining the foot of the companion ladder; "up with you, and send Tommy to look after coffee and blankets. He knows where to get 'em. I'll go and put on dry toggery; the best thing that *you* can do, is to keep out of people's way."

This latter piece of advice was not very agreeable to one whose heart was tender, and his desire to engage in works of active benevolence very strong. But feeling that the advice was good, and thoroughly appreciating the fact that, having shipped as a "suppernummerary hand," he was bound to obey his young commander, he went on deck without remonstrance, walked aft to the binnacle, and began to fill his pipe.

Guy and Tommy were already there, engaged in earnest

conversation. The ruddy light of the binnacle lamp streamed up in the face of the latter, and revealed his curly fair hair clustering in wild disorder over his flushed brow, as, with fire gleaming in his blue eyes, he stared up in his companion's face and related how that Bax, in the coolest manner possible, had kept treading water with the girl in his arms, knowing quite well that not even *his* strength, great though it was, could enable him to pull himself by the rope to the ship against the tide, and knowing that, in a few minutes, some one would get into the boat and pick them up.

"And so *some one* did, and very cleverly and bravely done it was, Tommy," said Guy, laying his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Well, I don't think much o' that," replied Tommy. "It don't call for much courage to jump into a boat of a fine night, twist your legs round a thort, and hold on to a girl by claws and teeth till somebody comes to yer help."

It was all very well for Tommy to disclaim credit for what he had done; but the glad triumphant expression of his face, and his firm erect gait, proved that he was very much satisfied indeed with the share he had had in that night's adventure.

"Ah, sir," continued the boy, "there never was a man like Bax!"

"You appear to admire him very much," said Guy; "and from the little that I have seen of him I think you have good reason."

"Admire him!" cried Tommy, with a look of scorn; "no, I don't. I *like* him. He's a trump!"

"Who's a trump?" inquired Bluenose, coming up at that moment.

"Bax," replied the boy, with the air of one who takes up an impregnable position, and defies the whole world in arms to overthrow him.

"So he is, so he is, a reg'lar trump," said the Captain, "an' wot's more, there ain't no more of them there trumps in the pack, for he's the king of 'arts, he is. An' you're a trump, too, Tommy; you're the *knave* of 'arts, you are, ye little beggar. Go and git blankets and hot coffee for that gal, and look sharp, my lad."

"I have heard you speak once or twice of Bax and his exploits," said Guy Foster, when the boy left them, "but this is the first time I have seen him perform. I did not see much of him when down on the coast last summer, but I saw enough to make me like him. Is he really the wonderful fellow that Tommy makes him out to be?"

"Wonderful?" echoed the Captain, puffing his pipe vigorously, as was his wont when a little puzzled for an expression or an idea. "No, he ain't wonderful; that's not the word. He's a *life-preserver*, that's wot he is. None o' your hinflated injinrubber or cork affairs, but a reg'lar, hanimated, walkin', self-actin' life-preserver. Why, I've know'd him, off and on, since he was the length of a marline spike, d'ye see—an' I've seed him save dozens, ay *dozens*, of lives—men, women, and children,—in lifeboats, an' in luggers, an' swimmin'. Why, he thinks no more o' that wot he's done to-night, than he does of eatin' salt junk.

He's got a silver medal from the Royal Life-Boat Institution, an' another from the Queen of Spain, and a gold 'un from some other king or queen, I don't 'xactly know who—besides no end o' thanks, written on paper, also on wot they calls wellum, in beautiful German text and small-hand;—ho! you know, nobody knows wot that feller's been a-doin' of all his life. If he was hung round with all the gold and silver medals he *deserves* to have, he'd go to the bottom—life-preserver though he is—like the sheet-anchor of a seventy-four, he would."

"What's that about going to the bottom?" said Bax, who came aft at the moment.

"That's just wot you've got nothin' to do with," replied Bluenose, resuming his pipe, which, in the ardour of his discourse, he had removed from his lips, and held out at arm's length before him.

"Well, I have *not* much to do with going to the bottom," said Bax, laughing. "But where's Tommy?—oh! here you are. Have you attended to orders?"

"Blankits, hot, just bin sent in. Coffee, hot, follers in five minits."

"Brayvo," ejaculated Bluenose, with an approving smile. "I wonder who the old man is?" said Guy. "He neither looks like a landsman nor a seaman, but a sort of mixture of both."

"So he is," said Bax. "I happen to know him, though he does not know me. He is a Scripture reader to sailors (Burton by name), and has spent many years of his life at work on the coast,

in the neighbourhood of Ramsgate. I suppose he was goin' down the coast in the vessel out of which his daughter tumbled. I didn't know he had a daughter. By the way, she's not a bad one to begin with, Tommy; a regular beauty," continued Bax, with a smile. "You've often wondered whether the first would be a man, or a woman, or a child. The point is settled now!"

"Yes," replied the boy, with a grave meditative look. "I suppose I *may* say she's my *first*, for you know you could not have done it without me."

There was something ludicrous, as well as sublime, in this little chip of humanity gravely talking of poor Lucy Burton being "his first," as if he had just entered on a new fishing-ground, and were beginning to take account of the creatures he had the good fortune to haul out of the sea!

And in very truth, reader, this was the case. Under the training of a modest, lion-hearted British sailor, the boy was beginning to display, in unusual vigour, those daring, enthusiastic, self-sacrificing qualities which, although mingled with much that is evil, are marked characteristics of our seamen; qualities which have gone far to raise our little island to her present high position of commercial prosperity and political importance, and which, with God's blessing, will continue to carry our flag, our merchandise, and our bibles, to the ends of the earth, and guard our shores, as in days of old, from the foot of every foreign foe. England can never fully appreciate how much she owes to her seamen. The thousands of our inland population have a very

inadequate conception of the race of heroes by which our coasts are peopled. Bax is no exaggerated specimen, got up, in these sensation days, for effect. It is a glorious fact,—proved by the hard and bare statistics furnished annually by the Board of Trade, and from other sources,—that his name is legion, and that the men of whom he is a type swarm all round our coasts, from the old Ultima Thule to the Land's End.

Yes, Tommy was in good training. He had begun well. He was evidently a chip of the elder block. It did not, indeed, occur to his young imagination to suppose that he could ever become anything in the most distant degree resembling his idol Bax. Neither did he entertain any definite idea as to what his young heart longed after; but he had seen life saved; he had stood on the sea-shore when storms cast shattered wrecks upon the sands, and had witnessed the exploits of boatmen in their brave efforts to save human life; he had known what it was to weep when the rescuer perished with those whom he sought to save, and he had helped to swell with his tiny voice, the bursting cheer of triumph, when men, women, and children were plucked, as if by miracle, from the raging sea! To take part in those deeds of heroism was the leading desire in the boy's life; and now it seemed as if his career were commencing in earnest, and the day-dreams in which he had so long indulged were at last about to become waking realities.

Chapter Four.
In which Introductions still go on, and Coming Events Cast their Shadows Before

Mrs Maria Foster,—the widow of James Foster (formerly captain in the merchant service), the mother of Guy Foster (clerk in the firm of Denham, Crumps, and Company), and the promoter or supporter of every good cause,—was a little woman of five-and-forty or thereabouts, with mild blue eyes, a philanthropic heart, and pale blue ribbons in her cap.

Mrs Foster may be said to have been in easy circumstances. That is to say, she had sufficient (being a thrifty and economical lady) to "make the two ends meet," even to overlap somewhat, though not,—as a friend of ours once observed,—to tie in a handsome bow, so that she had a little to spare for charitable purposes. It must not be supposed, however, that the good lady was possessed of a small fortune. The "circumstances," which were easy to her, would have proved remarkably uneasy to many; but she possessed the rare and tailorly quality of being able and willing to cut her coat according to her cloth. There was no deeper mystery than that in the "ease" with which we have characterised her "circumstances."

The coast of Kent was her locality; the environs of the town of Deal, her neighbourhood; and a small—almost miniature but pretty—cottage, her habitation. The cottage stood in the middle of a little garden, close to that wide extent of waste land, lying to the north of Deal, which is known by the name of the Sandhills, and on the seaward edge of which formerly stood the pile—and now lie the remains—of Sandown Castle.

Everything in and around the cottage was remarkably neat—including its mistress, who, on the evening of the day in which her son sailed with Bax in the "Nancy," was seated at a little table in her small parlour, summing up an account on a sheet of note-paper,—an operation which appeared to cause her much perplexity, if one might judge from her knitted brows, her deep sighs, and her frequent remarks of "it won't do," and "what *can* it be?"

These observations were apparently addressed to the cat, which sat in front of the fire, watching the tea-kettle and the buttered toast; but although the good lady was addicted to talking to her cat, in a general way, about her love for it and its state of health, we cannot suppose that she really appealed to it on such a grave subject as arithmetical calculation. If she did she got no answer from the cat—not even a sign of recognition; but she did from a bright-faced, fair-haired girl, of about eighteen, who at that moment entered the room, with a teapot in one hand, and a cream-jug in the other.

"What is it that puzzles you, mamma?" said the girl, setting

down the pot and jug, and preparing to attend to the duties of the tea-table.

To this Mrs Foster replied, in an absent way, that she didn't know, that it was quite beyond her comprehension, and that she was utterly perplexed; but that she *would* find it out, if she should sit all night over it. Whereupon she proceeded to state that "three and two made five, and seven made—made"—she wasn't quite sure how much that made, until her companion told her it made twelve; which piece of information she received with an—"Oh! of course it does. Dear me, Amy, how silly I am!"—just as if she had known the fact all her life, and had only forgotten it at that moment, unaccountably, for the first time! Mrs Foster then went on to add a variety of other figures to this,—with an occasional word of assistance from Amy,—until the whole amounted to the sum of one hundred and thirty-three.

"There," said Mrs Foster, with a pleased expression, as she put the figures down, "now how many twelves are in that—eh? let me see. Twelve times twelve are a hundred and forty,—no, that's too much; twelve times eleven—how much is twelve times eleven?"

Mrs Foster did not ask this of Amy; no, she gazed up at the ceiling, where an uncommonly large spider was affixing its web, —with the design, no doubt, of lowering itself down to the tea-table,—and demanded the solution of the problem, apparently, from that creature.

"I think it is a hundred and thirty-two, mamma," said Amy, pouring out the tea.

"Oh, *of course*, how stupid!" said Mrs Foster, who was quite struck with the obviousness of the fact—on being told it. "There now, that comes to eleven shillings and one penny, which settles the Soup Kitchen. One pound two does the Hospital for the Blind, and there's one pound due to the Sailors' Home. But still," continued Mrs Foster, with a return of the perplexed expression, "that does not get me out of my difficulty."

"Come to tea, dear," said Amy, "and we will try to clear it up together afterwards."

"Impossible, child. I could not eat with appetite while this is puzzling my brain. Let me see; there were fifteen pounds, *apparently*, spent last year, when I put it on paper, and yet here is a sovereign over," said Mrs Foster, holding up the coin, and looking at it reproachfully, as if the blame lay with it and not with herself.

"Well, mamma," said Amy, laughing, "but where is your difficulty?"

"Don't you see, child? by rights I ought to give fifteen pounds away; well, my book tells me that fifteen pounds *have* been given, and yet here is a sovereign left over to give!"

"Then don't give it, mamma, just put it back into your purse, and that will make the thing right, won't it?"

"No, dear, it won't, because, you see, the money *must* be right, so the book *must* be wrong; oh! here it is. I declare I have forgot to carry *one*. There, that's right. Now, dear, we shall have tea."

It may be necessary to explain here, that although Amy called

Mrs Foster "mamma," she was in fact not related to her at all, being only an adopted daughter. Poor Amy Russell was a child of the sea.

Two years previous to the time of which we write, she, with her father and mother, had been wrecked on the coast of Kent while returning from a long residence in New Zealand. Their vessel filled the moment she struck, and the seas buried the hull so completely that passengers and crew were obliged to take to the rigging. Here they remained all night exposed to the fury of the storm. Many of the unfortunates, unable to withstand the exposure of that terrible night, fell or were washed out of the rigging and perished. Among these were Amy's father and mother. Amy herself was taken care of by the captain, with whom she was a great favourite, and, along with those who remained until the morning, was saved by one of the lifeboats stationed on that coast.

They had a narrow escape from drowning even after being taken into the boat, for, just as they were approaching the entrance to the harbour, where crowds of the inhabitants of the town were anxiously watching them, a tremendous sea completely filled the boat, swept away the starboard oars, and carried several of the wrecked passengers overboard, Amy being one of them. This happened close under the head of the pier. All the passengers were recovered by the lifeboat's crew in a few seconds, with the exception of Amy, who, being exhausted by previous exposure, began to sink at once. The boatmen, in the

turmoil of raging water and howling wind, did not observe this, and a cry of consternation was uttered by the people on the pier, who saw the whole thing clearly from their elevated position; but the cry was either drowned by the noise of the tempest, or not understood by the boatmen.

At that moment a tall stripling on the pier raced to the edge of it, shot like a rocket head-foremost into the sea, and in a second or two reappeared with the young girl in his arms. They were both dragged into the lifeboat, amid ringing cheers of delight and admiration.

The stripling who did this brave deed was none other than our friend Guy Foster, who chanced to be lodging with his mother in the neighbouring town at that time. Guy insisted on having Amy conveyed to his mother's place of abode. Mrs Foster soon discovered that the poor orphan had neither relations nor friends in England, and having taken a fancy to her, adopted her as a daughter. Thus did she come to call Mrs Foster "mamma," and to preside at the tea-table in Sandhill Cottage.

But, to return from this digression:– Mrs Foster was congratulating herself on having discovered the error in her accounts, when the door opened and a stout florid woman, of fifty or thereabouts, with a shiny red skin, presented herself and said:

"Please, ma'am, here's a gentleman as wants to see you, and won't go away, though I told him you was at tea, w'ich is a fact, though it had no impression whatever on him, such is his

imprence, goin' for to reflect on my character for truth, as never told a lie since I was a baby in long frocks, so I didn't; but it's always the way with these men that go tax-gatherin', though I don't know that he's that neether, so I don't; what shall I say, ma'am?"

Mrs Laker, having uttered the foregoing without pause or inflection of voice from beginning to end, came to an abrupt stop. Whether from want of breath or ideas it is difficult to say; perhaps from both.

"Show the gentleman in, Laker," said Mrs Foster; "no doubt he has good reason for wishing to see me."

Laker vanished. She was impulsive in her actions as well as in her words. She was her mistress's factotum—her cook, housemaid, sempstress, and confidential adviser; in addition to which she was somewhat of a bore, being stubborn and opinionated, but a good and faithful servant on the whole.

The individual who was presently introduced was a bustling little old gentleman with a shining bald head and a cheerful countenance.

"Excuse my rudeness—madam—" he began, bowing low, as he advanced with a hesitating step—"this intrusion, really—"

"Do not mention it, sir, pray be seated," said Mrs Foster; "you are welcome—surely I have met with you before?"

She put on a pair of gold spectacles as she said this, and looked earnestly at her visitor, who, having placed his hat on the floor and bowed to Amy, sat down and pulled out a bundle of papers.

"You have, madam," replied the visitor. "My name is Summers—David Summers, ma'am, at your service. I had the pleasure of being introduced to you at a meeting in a town not far distant, where an effort was being made to raise contributions towards the establishment of a lifeboat—"

"Oh! I recollect," cried Mrs Foster, whose sympathetic heart at once opened to the man who had made (as she had thought) such an eloquent appeal at the meeting in question; "I am delighted to see you, Mr Summers. If I mistake not, I invited you to come and see me when you should visit this part of the coast."

"You were kind enough to do so, madam, hence my venturing to call at this hour. I quit Deal to-morrow, early, and I am anxious to re-plead my old cause with you; but indeed I know this to be unnecessary, your own sympathies being already enlisted in my favour."

Mrs Foster assured Mr Summers that he was right, but begged of him, notwithstanding, to plead with her as if she were an enemy, in order that she might hear all he had to say on the subject, adding, that she hoped he would stay and have a cup of tea.

Hereupon Mr Summers bowed, drew in his chair, remarked to Amy that the lifeboat service was one of the most interesting and important topics of the day, and the National Lifeboat Institution one of the most valuable institutions in the kingdom, and at once launched into his favourite theme with all the gusto of an enthusiast who has gained the ear of a sympathetic audience.

We will, however, spare the reader the details and statistics which afforded so much pleasure to Mrs Foster and her adopted daughter, knowing full well that there is an immense difference between these when set down in hard type, and when poured forth in rich energetic tones, backed by twinkling eyes and a beaming countenance.

"Do you really mean to tell me, Mr Summers," said Mrs Foster —when the old gentleman came to the end of a long statement, "that about a thousand ships are wrecked, and nearly a thousand lives lost, besides more than a million pounds worth of property, on the shores of this country *every year*?"

"It is a sad but incontrovertible fact," replied Mr Summers. "Official lists are drawn up annually by the Board of Trade, which give the number and positions of wrecks—cold dry lists they are too. Matter-of-fact columns and figures, without a touch of softness about them. They are not meant to appeal to the feelings; they are a mere record of facts. So many vessels went ashore in such and such a gale—they were sunk, dismasted, dashed to pieces. So many persons were saved, so many drowned, —that is all. Ah! who can picture to himself the awful realities that are condensed in those brief accounts?

"When a magnificent steamer, after a fine voyage from the antipodes, comes within hail of port, is caught in a fearful hurricane, cast ashore and dashed to pieces, leaving hundreds of passengers, men, women, and children, to perish in the dark night, grasping the very rocks of their native land, the event is too

awful to escape notice. So numerous are the crushed and broken hearts in the land, that their cry awakens public attention, and the newspapers teem for a time with graphic details of the wreck; details which, graphic though they be, fall inconceivably short of the dread reality; but no notice is taken, except in the way of brief record, of the dozens of small coasting vessels that shared the fate of that steamer in the same terrific gale. No one reads the fate of yonder little schooner, one mast of which is seen just peeping out of the sea under that frowning cliff, and yet there is a terrible tale connected with it. Who shall tell or conceive of the agonies endured, before the morning light came, by the skipper and his crew of four men and a boy, as their little ship was lifted and flung upon the rocks by each succeeding wave? And who can conceive their feelings when the longed for light *did* come at last, and daring fishermen on the shore sought to render aid in vain, for their boats were overturned and cast back upon the beach, and themselves barely escaped with their lives, and so the perishing men stood in helpless misery and gazed landward in despair until a mighty wave carried away the mast to which they clung, and, with a last wild shriek they sank in sight of friends and home, because *there was no lifeboat there*."

"Can this be true?" said Mrs Foster, in a tone of deep sympathy.

"True!" echoed Mr Summers, "would God that it were not. I have mentioned but one case, yet it is a fact that for *every* gale that blows *dozens* of wrecks take place on our coasts, each with its

more or less tragic history. You remember the last gale? It is not three weeks since it blew. No fewer than one hundred and ninety-five wrecks took place on the shores of the United Kingdom on that night and the following day, and six hundred and eighty-four lives were lost, many of which would undoubtedly have been saved had there been a sufficient number of lifeboats stationed along our shores; for you must bear in remembrance, that although hundreds of lives are annually saved by ordinary shore boats, and by ships' boats, hundreds also are saved by lifeboats in circumstances in which ordinary boats would be utterly useless.

"Here is a newspaper paragraph," continued the old gentleman, unfolding a paper and preparing to read, "which shows the brief way in which the public prints at times notice events of the most stirring and heroic nature:– 'On the morning of the 3rd December last, after a stormy and rainy night, the wind shifted to the North West and blew a hurricane. Many vessels got on shore near Holyhead, from various causes. The lifeboat of the National Lifeboat Institution was launched and proceeded to their assistance. She got ahead of one, a schooner, and anchored, but the intense violence of the wind blew her to leeward, anchor and all, and she was unable to communicate, and had great difficulty in returning ashore. She again put off to the schooner *Elizabeth* of Whitehaven, which had a signal of distress flying, having parted one chain, and brought her crew of four men on shore. The hurricane continued unabated well into the night. The

weather having moderated, the lifeboat was despatched at 2 a.m., and brought on shore twenty-three men from the *Confiance* of Liverpool; then again put off and brought ashore nineteen men from the barque *Elizabeth Morrow* of Glasgow; next proceeded to the schooner *L'Espérance* of Nantes, and saved two men, making altogether a total of forty-eight lives saved by the lifeboat in this hurricane only.'

"Dear madam," observed Mr Summers, looking at Mrs Foster over his spectacles, "surely it is unnecessary for me to point out that this brief narrative does not give us the most distant conception of the terrors, the endurance, the heroism, incident to that night! Permit me to read you another paragraph. It is given more in detail and does better justice to the scene."

The old gentleman selected another paper, opened it, and read as follows:—

"'The sum of 9 pounds has recently been given by the National Lifeboat Institution to a boat's crew, in appreciation of their gallant conduct in putting off in a salmon-coble, during a heavy gale of wind, and rescuing, at great risk of life, the crew of four men of the schooner *Thankful* of Sunderland, which was totally wrecked off Burghead, n.b., on the 19th July. Every moment the position of the ship was becoming more dangerous as the advancing tide drove her in among the small rocks at the back of the sea-wall, and no boat could live in the terrible surge that was fast breaking up the vessel. The crew, four in number, along with the pilot, took to the fore-rigging, and in a short time the

beach was strewn with pieces of the wreck—the bulwarks were nearly all destroyed—the boat washed overboard—and the deck broken up. Though only forty yards from the pier, not the least assistance could be rendered to the crew, whose faces were quite distinguishable as they clung to the swaying rigging. At twenty minutes past six the fore-mast cracked, and its living freight had hardly time to crawl down to the only bulwark above water (for the schooner now lay on her beam-ends with her bilge towards the sea), when it fell by the board. In about five minutes more the main-topmast was snapped by the gale as if it had been a reed, while the bowsprit and other gear were carried away, leaving nothing but the gutted hull with the mainmast standing. Another hour of awful suspense passed, during which the five men lashed themselves to the bulwark, the sea every other minute breaking over their heads in huge masses. At half-past seven, one of the sailors, a young man, was washed from the wreck, but fortunately succeeded in catching the floating rigging, by which he was able to regain his former position. Another young heroic sailor seemed to be the life of the whole company in this trying emergency, and his efforts to keep up the spirits of his companions were signally successful. About eight o'clock the waves broke over the ship with renewed violence, but still those on the shore could return no answer in the affirmative to the piercing cry that came from the wreck, "Can't we get a boat?" The voice was that of the gallant sailor already referred to; the others were too much exhausted to utter a word. McIntosh, the

pilot from Burghead, expired from sheer cold and exhaustion. None who saw him perish soon forgot the fearful agony of his daughter as she bade her father farewell from the parapet of the breakwater. After renewed efforts a boat was got over the breakwater, and at great risk succeeded in saving the other men, who were in a very exhausted condition.'

"And now, dear madam," pursued the old gentleman, tying up his papers, "I will not run the risk of wearying you with more details, but come to the point at once by soliciting from you a contribution towards the establishment of a lifeboat on the coast here, where I am sure you must be well aware there is very great need for one."

"I am sure there is," said Mrs Foster, opening her box; "alas! I fear the wind is rising even now. The rattling of the window-frames will bring what you have told me to remembrance ever after this night. How much does it require to establish a lifeboat?"

"Between five and six hundred pounds," replied Mr Summers. "After which about twenty pounds annually will suffice to maintain it in working order."

"So much!" exclaimed Mrs Foster. "I fear that you will find it difficult to raise so large a sum."

"I trust not, but if we raise a pretty large proportion of it, the Lifeboat Institution will make up the balance. Perhaps"—here the old gentleman paused and looked dubiously at Mrs Foster—"perhaps you would like to know the precise nature of the objects for which the Lifeboat Institution has been founded.

Will you do me the favour to listen for five minutes longer? The operations of the Institution are of deep importance to the national welfare."

Mrs Foster at once expressed her willingness to listen, and the old gentleman, re-opening his bundle of papers, selected one from which he read sundry interesting details regarding the National Lifeboat Institution.

It need scarcely be said, that with such a sympathetic mind to address as that of Mrs Foster, Mr Summers prolonged his visit for another hour, and it is perhaps equally unnecessary to say that the worthy lady found a suitable object on which to bestow the sovereign which had perplexed her so much at an earlier part of the evening. She not only gave the money with the air of a "cheerful giver," but she begged Mr Summers to send her as many papers on the subject of lifeboats and wrecks as he happened to be possessed of, and promised to become an active agent in pleading with her friends in behalf of the object he had in view.

The wind was rising while the party in Sandhill Cottage were thus engaged. It came in ominous and heavy gusts, rattling the window-frames and moaning in the chimneys to such an extent that Mrs Laker, who was of a timid and superstitious nature, was fain to sit outside the parlour door in order to be near the other inmates of the cottage.

"About a thousand lives lost in each year on the shores of this kingdom!" thought Mrs Foster, as she lay in bed that night

listening to the rising storm with feelings of awe and solemnity which she had never before experienced.

If Mrs Foster had been acquainted with the subject in detail, she might have had further food for solemn reflection in the fact that the greater part of those lives were lost *unnecessarily*; that their loss was owing not nearly so much to the direct providence of God as to the incompetence, the ignorance, the false economy, and the culpable carelessness of man.

Mrs Foster's head lay on a soft pillow while the tempest raged around her humble dwelling. She little thought that one around whom her heart-strings were entwined was out on the wild sea that night, exposed to its utmost fury and in urgent need of the aid of that species of boat which had filled her thoughts that evening, and still continued to influence her dreams.

Chapter Five.
The Gale—False Economy and its Results—A Wreck on the Goodwin Sands

What seamen style a "whole gale" seemed to be brewing when the "Nancy" tripped her anchor and shook out her sails.

Sailors have a quiet, matter-of-fact, and professional way of talking about the weather. Landsmen would be surprised (perhaps something more!) if exposed to what Jack calls a stiff breeze, or a capful of wind. A "whole gale" may sound peculiar to some ears, but if the said gale were to sound *in* the same ears, the hearers would be apt to style it, in consternation, "a most tremendous hurricane!"

On board the "Nancy," Bax and Bluenose had some suspicion that *something* was brewing, but whether a "whole gale," or "half a gale," or a "stiff breeze," they could not be expected to divine, not being possessed of supernatural gifts.

Had they been possessed of a good barometer they would have been able to foretell what was coming without supernatural gifts; but Messrs Denham, Crumps, and Company were economical in their tendencies, and deemed barometers superfluous. Being, to some extent, ignorant of nautical affairs (as well as of scientific),

and being to a large extent indifferent to the warning voices of those who knew better, they thought fit to intrust the "Nancy" to the unaided wisdom of the intelligent young seaman who commanded her.

Of course, being acute men of business, they took every "needful" precaution, and being men of experience, they were not blind to the fact that many vessels were annually lost; they therefore insured schooner and cargo to their full value. Having done so, Messrs Denham, Crumps, and Company felt at ease. If the "Nancy" should happen to go down—no matter; it would perhaps be a more rapid and satisfactory way of terminating a doubtful venture! It was just possible that in the event of the "Nancy" going down *lives* might be lost, and other lives rendered desolate. What then? The "Firm" had nothing to do with that! The lives embarked in the "Nancy" did not belong to Denham, Crumps, and Company. If they should go to the bottom, there would be nothing to lose, and nothing to pay; perhaps a trifle to the widows and children, that was all! In regard to this also they felt quite at ease.

On the strength of such views and opinions the tackling of the "Nancy" was allowed to become rotten; the cables and the anchors of the "Nancy" were economically weak and insufficient; the charts of the "Nancy" were old and inaccurate, and the "Nancy" herself was in all respects utterly unseaworthy.

It could scarcely be expected, however, that the operations of Nature were to be suspended because of the unprepared

condition of this vessel; not to mention hundreds of others in similar condition. The gale continued to "brew." A stiff breeze carried the "Nancy" down the Thames towards the open sea; then a sudden calm left her to float without progressive motion on the water. As evening approached the breeze sprang up again and freshened. Then it chopped round to the east, and when night fell it began to blow hard right in the teeth of the little vessel.

Bax was a good and a bold seaman. He knew the coast well, and hoped, in due course, to double the North Foreland, and find shelter in the Downs. He knew the channels and buoys thoroughly, and had often run the same course in stormy weather. But the gale which now began to buffet the little schooner was of more than ordinary violence. It was one of those fierce hurricanes which, once in a year, or, it may be, once in three or four years, bursts upon our island, strews the coast with wrecks, fills many homes and hearts with desolation, and awakens the inhabitants of the inland counties to a slight sense of the terrible scenes that are of constant occurrence on the shores which form the bulwark of their peaceful homes.

"We shall have rough weather to-night, I fear," observed Mr Burton, coming on deck some time after sunset, and addressing Bax; "doubtless you know the channels well, young sir?"

"I do," replied the sailor, with a peculiar smile. "Twelve years' experience has not been altogether thrown away on me. I have sailed these waters in old Jeph's lugger since I was a little boy."

"Is that old Jeph the smuggler, sometimes called the mad

philosopher, from the circumstance of his mind being much taken up with odd notions about lifeboats?" inquired the missionary.

"The same," replied Bax, "though I'll go bound for it there's not an honester man in Deal than old Jeph is now, whatever he may have done in the smuggling way when he was young. I have known him only as a good old man; and in regard to these same notions he has about lifeboats, it's my firm belief that we'll see his plans, or something like them, carried out before long. He's not so mad as folk think, and certainly not half so mad as the people who give no thought whatever to these subjects."

Bax said this warmly, for there was a strong bond of sympathy between him and his old friend, whom he could not bear to hear mentioned in a slighting manner.

"I meant not to say a word against old Jeph," replied Mr Burton, quickly. "I merely spoke of him in the way in which seamen in these parts commonly refer to him. It pleases me much to hear so good a character of him from one who, I have no doubt, has had good opportunity of judging."

Here Guy Foster, who was standing near the binnacle, turned round and said earnestly:—

"I can testify to the fact that old Jeph is a good Christian man; at least if love to our Saviour, and anxiety for the salvation of souls, is to be accepted as evidence."

The missionary said that there was no better evidence than that, and was about to question Bax further in regard to the old

man who bore such a peculiar character, when a loud peal of thunder drew the attention of all to the threatening aspect of the weather.

"Heave the lead, Bill!" cried Bax to one of the men.

"Ha! that's wot I've been lookin' for," observed Bluenose, spitting his quid over the lee bulwarks, and replacing it with a fresh one. "I've never got no confidence in a skipper as don't keep his lead a-goin' in shoal water. Specially in sich waters as them 'ere, wot shifts more or less with every gale."

The command to heave the lead was followed by an order to reduce sail, and as the gale freshened and the night closed in, this order was repeated more than once, until the schooner was beating to windward under the smallest possible amount of canvas.

An anxious expression rested on Bax's face as he stood by the steersman, glancing alternately at the sails and at the horizon where clouds of the blackest kind were gathering.

"Does your barometer indicate very bad weather?" inquired Mr Burton.

"I have no barometer," replied Bax, bitterly.

The missionary looked surprised, and Guy Foster bit his lip, for he felt that this piece of false economy was a blot on the firm to which he belonged. In order to change the subject, he inquired for Lucy, who, since the time of her rescue, had remained in bed.

"My daughter does well, thanks be to God!" said Burton. "I think that no evil will flow from her accident, for she was but a

short time in the water; thanks to *you*, friend Bax."

"And to my 'prentice, Tommy Bogey," said Bax, with an arch smile which was peculiar to him when he felt humorously disposed.

The smile fled, however, and was replaced by an anxious look, as Tommy himself came aft and reported that the schooner had sprung a leak.

Bax instantly went below, and returned with the assurance that the leak was trifling.

"The 'Nancy' is a sorry old hulk," said he, "but half an hour more on this tack, and I'll 'bout ship and run for the Downs, where we will be comparatively safe."

The gale had by this time increased so much that the little craft lay over with her lee bulwarks almost under water at times.

Little fear would her gallant commander have felt had she been tight, and trim and sound; but he knew that her rigging was old, and one of her masts unsound, and he felt that the best seamanship could be of no avail whatever against her numerous defects. His experienced eye told him that a storm of no ordinary severity was coming, and he trembled for the life of the young girl who had been so unexpectedly placed under his care.

Had the dangers attendant upon an unseaworthy vessel and the difficulty of navigating the channels of these celebrated Sands, been all that Bax had to fear, he would have felt comparatively at ease; but the economical spirit of Denham, Crumps, and Company had supplied him with anchors and chains which he

feared were neither new enough nor sufficiently powerful to hold his vessel after she had gained her anchorage-ground. In these circumstances, he resolved to run for the shelter of Ramsgate Harbour.

Before he could carry out his intentions the wind chopped round to the north, and for some time blew so hard as to threaten the capsizing of the schooner. The cross sea also rendered her almost unmanageable, so that, ere long, she was driven to leeward of the outer lightship that marks the north end of the Goodwins.

Again the wind shifted a few points to the eastward, and soon the "Nancy" was flying like a racehorse towards the shore.

Pilots and seamen alone can properly comprehend the peculiar dangers that attend the navigation of this part of our coast. It would only perplex a landsman to be told in detail the proceedings of the "Nancy" and her crew after this point. Suffice it to say that Bax handled her with consummate skill, and did all that man could do for the safety of his vessel, and the human lives that were dependent on his knowledge and care.

"Is your daughter dressed?" inquired Bax of Mr Burton, as a fiercer gust than usual nearly laid the schooner on her beam-ends, and deluged the decks with water.

"No, she sleeps soundly, and I am loth to disturb her. Do you think we are in much danger?"

"In none, if the schooner were seaworthy, but in much, seeing that she has not got a sound plank or spar. Go down, sir, and get her dressed at once; and, harkee, let her put on every wrap she

happens to have with her."

The missionary needed no second bidding. He went below to rouse and assist Lucy, while Bluenose, Guy, and the rest of those on board, held on to ropes, and belaying pins, and awaited the result in silence. The noise of the wind, and the peals of thunder that seemed to tear the heavens asunder, rendered conversation impossible. They all felt that a few minutes would decide whether this terrible rush landward would terminate in safety or disaster, and they knew that everything, as far as human skill had to do with it, depended on Bax.

With a look of calm, sober gravity the young seaman stood grasping the weather-shrouds of the mainmast, and looking intently towards the light-ship called the Gull Light, which is anchored off the North-sand-head.

During this period of suspense the lead was kept constantly going, and reported almost every half-minute. Precious, significant, half-minutes those, as much so as are the last few grains of sand in the hour-glass!

"Keep her away two points," cried Bax.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the steersman. At that moment a violent gust snapped the topsail-yard, and the sail was instantly blown to ribbons. The dashing of this spar about carried away the foretop-mast, and almost as a necessary consequence, the jib with the jib-boom went along with it.

The schooner instantly became unmanageable, and was driven bodily to leeward.

Seizing an axe, Bax, with the prompt assistance of the crew and his friends, soon cleared away the wreck, and once more got the head of his vessel round towards the Gull Light, the lanterns of which were seen faintly gleaming through the murky atmosphere. But it was too late. The breakers of the North-sand-head were already roaring under their lee, and also right ahead of them.

"Port! port! hard a-port!" shouted Bax.

"Port it is," replied the steersman, with that calm professional sing-song tone peculiar to seamen.

At that instant, the schooner struck the sand, passed over the first line of breakers, and rushed onwards to certain destruction.

"Bring Lucy on deck," cried Bax.

Mr Burton ran below to obey, but the words had scarce been spoken when Guy Foster entered the cabin, and seizing the trembling girl in his arms, bore her gently but swiftly to the deck.

Here the scene that met her gaze was truly awful. It seemed as if above and below there were but one wild chaos of waters over which brooded a sky of ebony. The schooner had by this time got into the hideous turmoil of shallow water, the lurid whiteness of which gleamed in the dark like unearthly light. As yet the vessel was rushing fiercely through it, the rudder had been carried away by the first shock, and she could not be steered. Just as Lucy was placed by Bax in a position of comparative shelter under the lee of the quarter-rails, the "Nancy" struck a second time with fearful violence; she remained hard and fast on the sands, and the

shock sent her foremast overboard.

If the condition of the little vessel was terrible before, its position now was beyond description awful. The mad seas, unable to hurl her onward, broke against her sides with indescribable fury, and poured tons of water on the deck; so that no one could remain on it. Having foreseen this, Bax had prepared for it. He had warned all on board to keep close by the main shrouds, and take to the mast when the schooner should strike. He himself bore Lucy aloft in his strong arms as if she had been a little child, and placed her on the main cross-trees. Here she clung with a convulsive grasp to the main-topmast, while Guy secured her in her position with a rope.

Sitting down on the cross-trees and holding on to them by his legs—a matter of no little difficulty, as the vessel was rolling violently from side to side, Bax began to strip off his thick pilot-coat, intending to cover the girl with it. But he was arrested by the boy Tommy Bogey.

"Hold on," he shouted into his commander's ear, "I fetched up this un; I know'd ye'd want it for 'er."

Tommy had thoughtfully carried up one of Bax's spare coats, and now handed it to his master, who, assisted by Mr Burton, wrapped it carefully round Lucy, and then descended the rigging to examine the state of the vessel.

She heeled very much over to leeward, but the form of the bank on which she lay fortunately prevented her being thrown altogether on her beam-ends. Had this happened, the cross-trees

would have been buried in water, and all must have perished.

When Bax re-ascended the mast, Bluenose put his mouth close to his ear and shouted:

"Couldn't ye send up a rocket?"

"Han't got any," replied Bax.

There had been a signal-gun aboard, but at the first shock it tore its fastenings out of the old planks, and went crashing through the lee bulwarks into the sea.

"Couldn't we get up a glim no-how?" pursued Bluenose. "Ay, couldn't that be done?" cried Guy, who clambered towards them in order to take part in the consultation, for the shrieking of the storm rendered every voice inaudible at the distance of anything more than an inch or two from the ear.

"The matches were in the cabin, and that's flooded now," said Bax.

Guy replied by taking a tin box from his pocket, in which were a few matches.

"Ha! that'll do," cried Bax eagerly, "there's a can of turpentine just under the fore-hatch, which can't have been damaged by water. I'll go and fetch it."

"Stay, *I* will go. Do you look after Lucy and her father," said Guy; and, without waiting for a reply, he slid down one of the back-stays and gained the deck.

To traverse this was an act involving great danger and difficulty. The waves broke over it with such force that Guy's arms were nearly torn out of their sockets while he held to

the bulwarks. He attained his object, however, and in a short time returned to the cross-trees with the can. Bax had in the meantime cut off some of the drier portions of his clothing. These, with a piece of untwisted rope, were soaked in turpentine, and converted hastily into a rude torch; but it was long before a light could be got in such a storm. The matches were nearly exhausted before this was accomplished. Only those who have been in similar circumstances can adequately appreciate the intense earnestness with which each match was struck, the care with which it was guarded from the wind, and the eager anxiety with which the result was watched; also the sinking of heart that followed each effort, as, one by one, they flared for an instant and went out!

At last the saturated mass caught fire, and instantly a rich flame of light flashed over the wild scene, and clearly revealed to them the appalling circumstances in which they were placed. Poor Lucy shuddered, and covering her eyes cast herself in prayer on Him who is "mighty to save." Bax raised the burning mass high over his head, and waved it in the black air. He even clambered to the top of the broken mast, in order to let it be seen far and wide over the watery waste. The inflammable turpentine refused to be quenched by the raging storm, and in a few seconds they had the comfort of seeing the bright flame of a rocket shoot up into the sky. At the same moment a flash in the distance showed that their signal had been observed by the light-ship.

The sound of the gun was not heard by those on the wreck,

but both it and the rocket were observed from the shore, where many a hardy seaman and pilot, knowing full well the dangers of such a night, kept watch and ward in order to render prompt assistance to their fellow-men in distress.

It would be a matter of some interest to ascertain how many of the inhabitants of this busy, thickly-populated isle are aware of the fact that during every storm that blows, while they are slumbering, perchance, in security and comfort in their substantial dwellings, there are hundreds, ay, thousands, of hardy seamen all round our coasts, standing patiently in such sheltered spots as they can find, encased in oilskin, and gazing anxiously out into the dark sea, regardless of the pelting storm, indifferent to the bitter cold, intent only on rendering aid to their fellow-men, and ready at a moment's notice to place life and limb in the most imminent jeopardy,—for what? Can any one suppose that they do this for the sake of the silver medal, or the ten or twenty shillings awarded to those who thus act by the Lifeboat Institution? Do men in other circumstances hold their lives so cheap? Assuredly there is a higher, a nobler motive that prompts the heroes of our coast to their deeds of self-sacrifice and daring.

To those who clung to the main-top of the "Nancy" these signals were a bright gleam of hope, with the exception of Lucy, whose spirit sank when she endeavoured in vain to penetrate the thick darkness that followed. Suspecting this, Bluenose, who clung to the cross-trees beside the missionary, and assisted him to shelter his daughter from the storm, shouted in her ear to keep

her mind easy, "for the people on shore would be sure to send off the lifeboat, and there would be no danger if the mast held on!"

"If the mast held on!" Ha! little did Lucy know how much anxiety filled the heart of Bax in regard to the mast holding on! With much difficulty he had persuaded Denham, Crumps, and Company, about a year before the events we are now relating, that the mainmast of the "Nancy" was utterly useless, and obtained their unwilling consent to have it renewed. But for this it would have shared the fate of the foremast, and those who now clung to it would have been in eternity. But although the mast was strong, its step and holdfasts, Bax knew, were the reverse of sound; and while he stood there cheering his companions with hopeful remarks, he alone knew how frail was the foundation on which his hopes were founded.

Fortunately for Lucy and her father, they looked to a higher source of comfort than the young skipper of the "Nancy." They knew that it was no uncommon thing for men, women, and children to be saved, on the coasts of Britain, "*as if* by miracle," and they felt themselves to be in the hands of Him "whom the winds and the sea obey."

Guy held on to the weather-shrouds close to Bax. Speaking so as not to be heard by the others, he said:

"Is there much chance of a boat putting off to us?"

"Not much," replied Bax. "A lugger could scarcely live in such a sea. Certainly it could not come near us in this shoal water. I doubt even if the lifeboat could come here."

For two hours after this they remained silently in their exposed position, their limbs stiffening with cold, drenched continually with spray, and occasionally overwhelmed by the crest of a monstrous wave. Sometimes a rocket from the lightship shot athwart the dark sky, and at all times her lights gleamed like faint stars far away to windward. When the sea broke around them in whiter sheets than usual, they could see the head of the broken foremast drawn against it like a black line to leeward. Everything else above and below, was thick darkness.

One of the seamen, who had been for some time in bad health, was the first to give way. Without uttering a word he loosened his hold of the shrouds and fell backwards. Guy saw him falling, and, making a desperate grasp at him, caught him by the breast of his shirt, but the garment gave way, and next moment he was down in the boiling flood. Guy, with an impulse that was natural to him, was about to leap off to his rescue, but Bluenose caught him by the collar and held him forcibly back. In another moment the man was gone for ever.

So silently did all this pass, and so furious was the tumult of the storm, that Lucy and her father were not aware of what had occurred.

Our brave little friend Tommy Bogey was the next who failed. Whether it was that witnessing the seaman's death had too powerful an effect on his spirit, or that the cold acted more severely on his young muscles than on those of his companions, it is impossible to say, but, soon after the loss of the man, the

boy felt his strength giving way. Turning with instinctive trust to his friend in this extremity, he shouted:—

"Bax, give us a hand!"

Before his friend could do so, his grasp relaxed and he fell back with a piercing shriek that rose above even the howling wind.

Almost an instant after he struck the water, Bax dived head-foremost into it, and came up with him in his arms. Both man and boy went to leeward instantly. The former had counted on this. The fate of the seaman who had just perished had led him to reflect that a vigorous effort might have enabled him to gain the stump of the fore-mast, which still stood, as we have said, to leeward of the main-mast. Acting on this thought, he had plunged without hesitation when the moment for action came, although it did come unexpectedly.

A faint shout soon told his horror-stricken companions that he had gained the point of safety.

"It won't do to leave 'em there," cried Bluenose, starting up, and clambering as far out on the cross-trees as he dared venture; "even if the mast holds on, them seas would soon wash away the stoutest man living."

"Oh! save my preserver!" cried Lucy, who, regardless of the storm, had sprung wildly up, and now stood clinging to a single rope, while her garments were almost torn from her limbs by the fury of the hurricane.

"Can nothing be done to save them?" cried the missionary as

he kindly but firmly dragged his daughter back to her former position.

"Nothin', sir," said one of the sailors. "There ain't a cask, nor nothin' to tie a rope to an' heave to wind'ard—an' it's as like as not it wouldn't fetch 'em if there wos. They'd never see a rope if it wos veered to 'em—moreover, it wouldn't float. Hallo! Master Guy, wot are ye up to?"

Guy had hauled in the slack of one of the numerous ropes attached to the main-mast that were floating away to leeward, and was fastening the end of it round his waist. Bluenose and the missionary turned quickly on hearing the seaman's shout, but they were too late to prevent the bold youth from carrying out his design, even if they had wished to do so.

Taking a vigorous spring to windward, Guy was in the sea in a moment. In another instant he was lost to view in darkness. Bluenose seized the end of the rope, and awaited the result in breathless suspense. Presently a shout so faint that it seemed miles away, was heard to leeward, and the rope was jerked violently.

"Now lads, all hands a-hoy!" cried Bluenose in wild excitement. "Just give 'em time to haul in the slack, and tie it round 'em, and then pull with a will."

The incident and the energy of the Captain seemed to act like a spell on the men who had up to this time clung to the shrouds in a state of half-stupor. They clustered round Bluenose, and each gaining the best footing possible in the circumstances, seized

hold of the rope.

Again the rope was shaken violently, and a heavy strain was felt on it. The men pulled it in with difficulty, hand over hand, and in a short time Bax, Guy, and Tommy were once more safe in their former position on the cross-trees.

Terrible indeed their danger, when such a position could be spoken of as one of safety!

Another hour passed away. To those who were out on that fatal night the minutes seemed hours—the hours days.

Still no succour came to them. The storm instead of abating seemed to be on the increase. Had it not been for the peculiar form of the shoal on which they lay, the old vessel must have been dashed to pieces in the first hour of that terrible gale.

Gradually Bax ceased to raise his encouraging voice—indeed the whistling wind would have rendered it inaudible—and the party on the cross-trees clung to their frail spar almost in despair. As the gale increased so did the danger of their position. No chance of deliverance seemed left to them; no prospect of escape from their dreadful fate; the only ray of hope that came to them fitfully through the driving storm, was the faint gleaming of the lightship that guards the Goodwin Sands.

Chapter Six.
Heroes of the Kentish Coast —The Lifeboat—The Rescue

Deal beach is peculiar in more respects than one. There are a variety of contradictory appearances about it which somewhat puzzle a visitor, especially if he be accustomed to sea-coast towns and villages in other parts of the country.

For one thing, all the boats seem hopelessly high and dry on the beach, without the chance, and apparently without any intention, of ever being got off again. Then there is, at certain seasons of the year, nothing whatever doing. Great hard-fisted fellows, with nautical garments and bronzed faces, are seen lounging about with their hands in their pockets, and with a heavy slowness in their gait, which seems to imply that they are elephantine creatures, fit only to be looked at and wondered at as monuments of strength and laziness.

If the day happens to be fine and calm when the stranger visits the beach, he will probably be impressed with the idea that here is an accumulation of splendid sea-going *matériel*, which has somehow got hopelessly stranded and become useless.

Of course, in the height of summer, there will be found bustle enough among the visitants to distract attention from the fact to which I allude; but in spring, before these migratory

individuals arrive, there is marvellously little doing on Deal beach in fine weather. The pilots and boatmen lounge about, apparently amusing themselves with pipes and telescopes; they appear to have no object in life but to kill time; they seem a set of idle hulking fellows;—nevertheless, I should say, speaking roughly, that at least the half of these men are heroes!

The sturdy oak, in fine weather, bends only its topmost branches to the light wind, and its leaves and twigs alone are troubled by the summer breeze; but when the gale lays low the trees of the forest and whirls the leaves about like ocean spray, then the oak is stirred to wild action; tosses its gnarled limbs in the air, and moves the very earth on which it stands. So the heroes on Deal beach are sluggish and quiescent while the sun shines and the butterflies are abroad; but let the storm burst upon the sea; let the waves hiss and thunder on that steep pebbly shore; let the breakers gleam on the horizon just over the fatal Goodwin Sands, or let the night descend in horrid blackness, and shroud beach and breakers alike from mortal view, then the man of Deal bestirs his powerful frame, girds up his active loins, and claps on his sou'-wester; launches his huge boat that seemed before so hopelessly high and dry; hauls off through the raging breakers, and speeds forth on his errand of mercy over the black and stormy sea with as much hearty satisfaction as if he were hasting to his bridal, instead of, as is too often the case, to his doom.

Near the north end of Deal beach, not very far from the ruins of Sandown Castle, there stood an upturned boat, which served

its owner as a hut or shelter whence he could sit and scan the sea. This hut or hovel was a roomy and snug enough place even in rough weather, and although intended chiefly as a place of out-look, it nevertheless had sundry conveniences which made it little short of a veritable habitation. Among these were a small stove and a swinging oil lamp which, when lighted, filled the interior with a ruddy glow that quite warmed one to look at. A low door at one end of the hovel faced the sea, and there was a small square hole or window beside it, through which the end of a telescope generally protruded, for the owners of the hovel spent most of their idle time in taking observations of the sea. There was a bench on either side of the hut which was lumbered with a confused mass of spars, sails, sou'westers, oil-skin coats and trousers; buoys, sea-chests, rudders, tar-barrels, and telescopes.

This hovel belonged jointly to old Jeph and Captain Bluenose. Bax had shared it with them before he was appointed to the command of the "Nancy." In the olden time the owners of these nautical huts dwelt in them, hence the name of "hoveller" which is used at the present day. But with the progress of civilisation the hovellers have come to reside in cottages, and only regard the hovels as their places of business. Hovellers, as a class, do little else than go off to ships in distress and to wrecks; in which dangerous occupation they are successful in annually saving much property and many human lives. Their livelihood from salvage, as may be supposed, is very precarious. Sometimes they are "flush of cash," at other times reduced to a low enough

ebb. In such circumstances it almost invariably follows that men are improvident.

Not many years ago the hovellers were notorious smugglers. Many a bold deed and wild reckless venture was made on Deal beach in days of old by these fellows, in their efforts to supply the country with French lace, and brandy, and tobacco, at a low price! Most of the old houses in Deal are full of mysterious cellars, and invisible places of concealment in walls, and beams, and chimneys; showing the extent to which contraband trade was carried on in the days of our fathers. Rumour says that there is a considerable amount of business done in that way even in our own days; but everybody knows what a story-teller Rumour is.

The only thing that gives any colour to the report is the fact that there is still a pretty strong coast-guard force in that region; and one may observe that whenever a boat comes to the beach a stout fellow in the costume of a man-of-war's man, goes up to it and pries into all its holes and corners, pulling about the ballast-bags and examining the same in a cool matter-of-course manner that must be extremely irritating, one would imagine, to the owner of the boat!

At night, too, if one chances to saunter along Deal beach by moonlight, he will be sure to meet, ere long, with a portly personage of enormous breadth, enveloped in many and heavy garments, with a brace of pistols sticking out of his breast pockets, and a short cutlass by his side. But whatever these sights and symptoms may imply, there can be no question that

smuggling now is not, by any means, what it was thirty or forty years ago.

On the night of the storm, described in the last chapter, the only individual in old Jeph's hovel was old Jeph himself. He was seated at the inner end of it on a low chest near the stove, the light of which shone brightly on his thin old face and long white locks, and threw a gigantic black shadow on the wall behind. The old man was busily engaged in forming a model boat out of a piece of wood with a clasp knife. He muttered to himself as he went on with his work, occasionally pausing to glance towards the door, the upper half of which was open and revealed the dark storm raging without.

On one of these occasions old Jeph's eyes encountered those of a man gazing in upon him.

"Is that you, Long Orrick? Come in; it's a cold night to stand out i' the gale."

He said this heartily, and then resumed his work, as if he had forgotten the presence of the other in an instant. It is not improbable that he had, for Jeph was very old. He could not have been far short of ninety years of age.

Long Orrick entered the hovel, and sat down on a bench opposite the old man. He was a very tall, raw-boned, ill-favoured fellow, of great muscular strength, and with a most forbidding countenance. He was clad in oiled, rough-weather garments.

"You seem busy, old man," said he abruptly.

"Ay, I had need be busy," said old Jeph without looking up;

"there are many lives to save; many lives bein' lost this very night, and no means of savin' 'em; leastwise not sufficient."

"Humph! ye're eternally at that bit o' humbug. It's bam, old man, all bam; bosh and gammon," said Orrick. "It'll never come to no good, *I* tell ye."

"Who knows?" replied the old man meekly, but going on with his work not the less diligently because of these remarks.

"Jeph," said Orrick, leaning forward until his sharp features were within a few inches of his companion's face, "Jeph, will ye tell me where the 'hide' is in yer old house?"

"No, Long Orrick, I won't," replied the old man with an amount of energy of which he seemed, a few seconds before, quite incapable.

The reply did not seem to please Long Orrick, neither did the steady gaze with which it was accompanied.

"You won't?" said Orrick between his set teeth.

"No," replied the old man, dropping his eyes on the little boat and resuming his work.

"Why not," continued the other after a pause, "you don't require the hide, why won't you lend it to a chum as is hard up?"

"Because I won't encourage smugglin'," said Jeph. "You've smuggled enough in yer young days yerself, you old villain; you might help a friend a bit; it won't be you as does it."

"It's because I have smuggled w'en I was young that I won't do it now that I'm old, nor help anyone else to," retorted Jeph; "besides, you're no friend o' mine."

"What if I turn out to be an enemy?" cried Orrick, fiercely; "see here," said he, drawing out a long knife, and holding it up so that the light of the stove glittered on its keen blade, "what if I give you a taste of this, old man?"

"You won't," said Jeph, calmly.

"No! why not?"

"Because you're a coward," replied Jeph, with a quiet chuckle; "you know that you wouldn't like to be hanged, ha! ha! and you know that Bax would be down on you if you touched my old carcase."

Long Orrick uttered a savage oath, and said, "I'm brave enough, anyhow, to let you taste the cold steel to-night—or desperate enough if ye prefer it."

He seized Jeph by the throat as he spoke, and pressed the blade of the knife against his breast. The old man did not shrink, neither did he struggle. He knew that he was in the hands of one whose type is but too common in this world, a bully and a coward, and, knowing this, felt that he was safe.

It seemed, however, as if the very elements scorned the man who could thus raise his hand against unprotected age, for the wind shrieked louder than usual in its fury, and a blinding flash of lightning, accompanied by a deep crash of thunder, added to the horror of the scene.

Just then an exclamation was heard at the door of the hovel. Long Orrick released his hold hastily, and turning round, observed a round ruddy visage scowling at him, and the glittering

barrel of a pistol levelled at his head.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed hoarsely, endeavouring to pass it off as a jest, "so you've caught us jokin', Coleman,—actin' a bit—and took it for arnest, eh?"

"Well, if it *is* actin', it's oncommon ugly actin', *I* tell ye; a deal too nat'ral for my tastes, so I'd advise ye to drop it here, an' carry yer talents to a theaytre, where you'll be paid according to your desarts, Long Orrick."

"Ah! the night air don't agree with ye, Coleman, so I'll bid ye good-bye," said the other, rising and quitting the hut.

"Wot's he bin' a doin' of, old man?" inquired Coleman, who was a huge, ruddy, good-humoured coast-guardsman, with the aspect of a lion and the heart of a lamb; whose garments were of the roughest and largest kind, and who was, to adopt a time-honoured phrase, armed to the teeth,—that is to say, provided with a brace of pistols, a cutlass, and a port-fire, which last could, on being struck against a rock, burst into flame, and illuminate the region for many yards around him.

"Oh, he's bin' actin'," replied the old man, with a quiet chuckle, as he resumed his work on the boat; "he's bin' actin', that's all."

At this moment the boom of a gun fired by the Gull lightship broke on the ears of the men of Deal, and a moment later the bright flash of a rocket was seen. It was the well-known signal that there was a ship in distress on the sands.

Instantly the hardy boatmen were at work. One of their largest

boats was launched through the wild surf, as if by magic, and its stout crew were straining at the oars as if their lives depended on the result.

The boat happened to be the one belonging to Captain Bluenose and his comrades, and the first man who leaped into her, as she was driven down into the sea, was Long Orrick; for, bad man though he was, he was not without his redeeming points, and, coward though he was before the face of man, he was brave enough in facing the dangers of the sea.

It was a fearful struggle in which the Deal lugger engaged that night. The sea threatened to bury her altogether as she pushed off through the breakers, and some of the men seemed to think it would be too much for them. A man named Davis took the helm; he had saved many a life on that coast in his day.

The intense darkness of the night, coupled with the fury of the winds and waves, were such that no men, save those who were used to such scenes, would have believed it possible that any boat could live in so wild a storm. In addition to this the cold was excessive, and the spray broke over them so continuously that the pump had to be kept going in order to prevent their getting filled altogether.

It was a long weary pull to the Gull light-ship. When they reached it they hailed those on board, and asked where away the wreck was.

"Right down to leeward, on the Sand-head," was the reply.

Away went the lugger before the gale with just a corner of the

foresail hoisted. It was not long before they came in sight of the breakers on the Sands. Here they were obliged to put out the oars and exercise the utmost caution, lest they should incur the fate from which they had come out to rescue others. Davis knew the shoals and channels well, and dropped down as far as he dared, but no wreck of any kind was to be seen.

"D'ye see anything?" shouted Davis to Long Orrick, who was in the bow.

Orrick's reply was inaudible, for the shrieking of the gale, and the roar of breakers drowned his voice.

At that moment a huge wave broke at a considerable distance ahead of them, and against its white crest something like the mast of a vessel was discerned for an instant.

"God help them!" muttered Davis to himself; "if they're as far as that on the sands there's no chance for them, unless, indeed, the Broadstairs or Ramsgate lifeboat finds 'em out. Let go the anchors!" he shouted; "look sharp, lads!"

The anchor was let go, and the lugger was veered down by its cable as far in the direction of the wreck as possible, but the boat was so large and drew so much water that they could not even get within sight of the wreck. In these circumstances the men nestled as they best might under the lee of the boat's sides, and prepared to ride out the storm, or at least to remain at anchor there until day-light should enable them to act with more precision and safety.

Fortunately for all parties concerned, other eyes and ears had

been on the watch that night. At Broadstairs, which lies a little to the north of Deal, the crew of the lifeboat had been on the look-out, and no sooner did they see the rocket and hear the gun, than they launched their boat and put off to the rescue.

It is generally found that there are more men to man the lifeboats on many parts of our coasts than are required, and this is specially the case on the Kentish coast. Hence, when the signal-rocket goes up on a stormy night, many eager eyes are on the watch, and there is a rush to the boat in order to secure a place. On this occasion there were one or two men who, rather than wait to pull on their oilskin coats and pantaloons, had run down just as they happened to be clothed at the time, and in a very unfit state to face the inclemency of a night which might involve hours of unremitting and exhaustive labour. These jumped into their places, however, and their less fortunate comrades, who arrived too late, supplied them with garments. In five minutes the lifeboat was flying under sail towards the Goodwin Sands.

Seldom had the Broadstairs boat faced so wild a storm as that which blew on this occasion. The sea broke over her in cataracts. Again and again she was more than half-filled with water, but this was speedily got rid of, and in the course of an hour she was beside the lugger.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.