Kingston William Henry Giles

Digby Heathcote: The Early Days of a Country Gentleman's Son and Heir

William Kingston

Digby Heathcote: The Early Days of a Country Gentleman's Son and Heir

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23148555
Digby Heathcote: The Early Days of a Country Gentleman's Son and Heir:

Содержание

W.H.G. Kingston
Digby Heathcote: The Early Days of a Country Gentleman's Son and Heir

Chapter One

The Hero's Early Days – Bloxholme, its Squire, His Family and Dependents

"I'll not stand it, that I won't, Master Digby. To think that you, a young gentleman who has plenty to eat and drink of everything that's nice, and more than enough, too, should come and put your fingers through the paper into my jam pots, which I've just been and nicely tied down, and all for mischief's sake, it's not to be borne, let me tell you. You've been and eaten up a whole pot of raspberry jam, and better than half a one of greengage. I wonder you are not sick with it. If you ever do it again, I'll leave your honoured father's service sooner than submit to such behaviour, that I will – remember, Master Digby."

These exclamations were uttered by Mrs Carter, the

housekeeper at Bloxholme Hall, the residence of Mr Heathcote, the representative of one of the oldest families in the county.

The culprit thus addressed, who had been caught in *flagrante delicto*, stood before her with very sticky fingers, his countenance, however, wearing anything but an expression of penitence.

"I like jam, and you don't give me enough in my puddings," was the only excuse he deigned to offer for his conduct.

"You'll go without it altogether, Master Digby, let me tell you," retorted Mrs Carter. She was the only person in the establishment who ventured to thwart the young gentleman, though he did not love the old lady the worse for that.

Digby was Mr Heathcote's eldest son and heir. He had just attained the mature age of nine years, and had hitherto in many respects been considerably spoilt. Mr Heathcote had not succeeded to his property till rather late in life, and he had not till then married. A son had long been wished-for, and when one was given, the grateful hearts of the parents felt that they could not prize him too much. Too thankful they might not have been, but they petted and indulged him more than was for his good. He had also three elder sisters. They, in their fondness, did their best to spoil him; indeed, as Mrs Carter used to observe to Alesbury, the butler, she was afraid Master Digby would soon become as much of a pickle as any she had in her store-room. He was a sturdy little fellow, with fat, rosy cheeks, and a figure which already gave promise of considerable muscular powers. Alesbury

was wont to remark that it was quite a pity Master Digby had not been born a younger instead of an elder son, he seemed so well able to fight his way in the world. He had a fair complexion – already a little tanned, by the by – light brown curling hair with a tinge of gold in it, he had good-sized honest eyes, and looked as he was – from head to foot a thorough English boy. He had been spoilt hitherto, certainly, but not altogether so. He had been taught by both his parents to worship and fear God, and to hate and abhor a lie. He had only once been known to tell an untruth, and then Mr Heathcote did what very nearly broke his heart to do; he flogged him severely, and shut him up, and would not speak to him for the remainder of the day. Digby did not care much about the pain of the flogging, but he felt the disgrace keenly, and it impressed on his mind the enormity of the crime of which he had been guilty. I believe that he never after that event uttered a falsehood. His very varied tricks and numerous eccentric pranks were therefore constantly being brought to light, when less honest boys might have managed to escape detection for those they had committed; but few could find it in their hearts to punish the young heir of Bloxholme when he ingenuously confessed his fault, and expressed himself, as he really felt at the time, sorry for what he had done.

"Oh, Master Digby! Master Digby! what would your mamma say if she saw you now?" continued Mrs Carter.

"I like jam," repeated Master Digby; an assertion of the truth of which he had given strong evidence.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" added Mrs Carter, not taking notice of his reply.

"The jam isn't yours, Mrs Carter," exclaimed Digby, as if a bright idea had struck him.

"It is given into my charge by my mistress, Master Digby, and I am answerable for every pot of it," answered the housekeeper, in a serious tone, in which sorrow and rebuke were blended.

Digby was silent for a moment, and then seemed to see the matter in a new light.

"I'm sorry for taking the jam, Mrs Carter; I'll tell mamma what I've done, and then she won't be angry with you, I know," he replied, looking very penitent.

"There's a darling, now," exclaimed Mrs Carter, catching him up in her arms, and giving him a kiss; whereby, in consequence of his struggles to get free, for he had a great dislike to such marks of affection, her black silk dress was very considerably daubed with the jam yet adhering to the young gentleman's fingers. "Oh, Master Digby, Master Digby, what have you done!" cried the old lady, when she discovered the injury which her demonstration of affection had brought upon her dress. "Oh, it never will look nice again."

"I am so sorry, Mrs Carter, indeed I am," said the boy, eyeing the dark marks his fingers had left. "The first money I get I will buy you a new gown, that I will; I won't take your jam any more, that I won't."

After this promise, Mrs Carter knew that her jam was safe,

and she willingly bore the injury done her dress for such a result. She would have given Digby another hug, but she took the precaution of washing his hands before attempting such a proceeding.

"There now, Master Digby, I dare say the dress won't be much the worse, after all," she remarked, as soon as she had dried his hands. "You're a dear, good child, that you are."

Digby knew what was coming, and watching his opportunity, he bolted out of the room. Snatching up his cap, away he ran, shouting, through the gardens and woods which surrounded the old hall, in very exuberance of spirits, without any definite idea as to where he was going or what he should do with himself. Similar to this had hitherto been most of Digby's misdemeanours and scrapes, and thus, as he had not learned to estimate the evil consequences of his naughtinesses, he was not deterred, when the temptation came in his way, of committing fresh ones.

One of Digby's sisters was but a year older than himself, and very naturally was his constant companion. Kate, that was her name, was a very quick, intelligent girl, the cleverest of the family, but her talents were like wild plants, which bear flowers very beautiful to look at, but if allowed to grow without training, apt, from their very exuberance, to do mischief. Kate could write poetry, and very funny poetry it was too. Digby admired it amazingly. At all events it was rhyme, and the lines were of the same length and not inharmonious. Nobody could read it without laughing at the quaint ideas and, curious expressions.

The handwriting was curious – I wish that I could give an idea of it. The letters were very round and irregular, capitals and small letters were oddly mingled, and the lines wandered up and down the pages. The orthography, too, was not of the most orthodox description. Her little inaccuracies in that respect, however, Digby himself was not likely to discover. Kate could draw, too, and indulged largely in caricaturing the eccentricities of any of her friends and acquaintance. If her poetry was funny, the designs she produced with her pencil were still more so. They never failed to produce roars of laughter from Digby, who, if not witty or talented himself, was fully able to appreciate her wit and talent.

Both her poetical effusions and her caricatures had hitherto been devoted exclusively to Digby's amusement, and no other member of their family was aware of her powers in that direction. This arose from the little maiden's modesty and timidity. She knew that Digby would certainly appreciate to the full her productions; but she doubted too much whether others would do so to allow her to show them. Besides, the exquisite delight which the two enjoyed in looking over together, in secret, her drawings and verses would have been much decreased had other eyes been allowed to see them, and to discover faults perhaps to which they themselves were willingly blind. Not only could Kate write poetry and draw, but she could sing too; and that everybody knew, and wonderfully wild and warbling were her notes, when she did not fancy that any one was listening to

her, as she ran bounding along the green lawn, like a young fawn, or made her way among the shrubberies to any of her favourite haunts. Kate was not pretty; her figure was small and thin, and her features were rather sharp, but her eyes were bright, and full of intelligence, and she had a sweet smile, which lightened up her countenance when anything pleased her, which was very frequently. Digby, however, would have been very much surprised had any one pronounced her to be any otherwise than very pretty. His usual description of her was, "Oh, she is jolly, that sister of mine – Kate! I'll bet there isn't another girl like her in the world! Up to anything – bird's-nesting, cricketing, or fishing. Why, she can saddle her own pony, and doesn't mind where she goes when I am with her. She's as plucky as any fellow, and I hope to see her leap a five-barred gate some day – that I do."

Kate admired Digby in return, though not perhaps in the same degree, but she was quite as fond of him as he was of her, probably even fonder. I think sisters generally love their brothers more than they get loved in return, and most decidedly are ready to make more sacrifices for them, to give up more to them, to endure more from them, more shame to the boys. Yes, unselfish indeed is a good sister's love, a thing to be cherished, a thing to be grateful for.

I said Kate was not pretty. As she ran along with her garden bonnet thrown back, hanging by the string to her neck, and her frock not in the most tidy condition, she might have been

mistaken for one of the little gipsies from the encampment which was frequently made on the neighbouring common. When, however, Kate spoke, a person of discernment who might have mistaken her for a gipsy would at once have been undeceived. Her accent and manners were particularly ladylike; and if she met a stranger, she sobered in a moment, and became perfectly quiet and sedate. A blush would suffuse her cheeks, and her mouth would pucker up in a curious way as she attempted to check the laughter which was springing to her lips. After the stranger had disappeared, she would walk on a few paces seemingly in a meditative mood, or still under the influence of the unwonted restraint she had put on herself, but either a squirrel would cross her path and mount a neighbouring tree, a blackbird would fly chattering through the bushes, or a butterfly would go fluttering before her, and off she would go in chase, and was soon again the buoyant-spirited hoydenish little creature she generally appeared. Kate Heathcote was certainly not a model girl, nor was Digby a model boy. Both had very considerable faults. There was good stuff in them, but it required more cultivation than it was then receiving to bring forth good fruit. There was also bad in them, as there is in everybody, which will inevitably bring forth bad fruit unless it is counteracted. In their case it produced no little amount of highly indecorous conduct – so that although people who knew them could not help liking them, their example is in no way to be imitated.

Digby and Kate were very fond of Bloxholme. They thought

no other place they had ever heard of in the world to be compared to it. Indeed, it was a very attractive spot. The Hall was a fine old red-brick edifice, built in the time of Queen Elizabeth, with richly ornamented windows, and fine gables, and curious ins and outs of all sorts; and there were wide-extending wings of a later date, with the dining-room and a conservatory on one side, and bachelors' bedrooms and domestic offices on the other. The garden, filled in the summer with a profusion of flowers, came right up to the drawing-room windows on one side, and a broad gravelly drive swept round in front of the house with an avenue of tall elms, in which generation after generation of rooks had built their nests, reared their young, and returned, cawing in concert, evening after evening, for centuries past. The park stretched away for a quarter of a mile in front of the house. It was a fine meadow, mottled in early spring with yellow cowslips and other flowers which betokened a rich land. Fine clumps of trees were scattered over it, arranged to give a picturesque effect to the scene. Beyond them were seen the silvery line of a rapid clear stream, and a range of blue hills in the far distance. The view from the garden side of the Hall was still more attractive. Both to the right and left were thick banks of tall trees, some advancing, others receding, so as to prevent a too great uniformity of appearance. Between them, and sloping away till lost in the meadows beyond, was a wide expanse of soft velvety lawn. Pleasant was the sound in the early summer mornings, when the dew was on the grass, of the gardeners sharpening their scythes to keep it smooth and shorn.

Here and there scattered over it were clumps of rhododendrons and other large flowering shrubs, and nearer the house were beds full of gay-coloured and sweet-scented flowers. There were also some clumps of elegant evergreens, and a few vases of marble or Maltese stone, beautifully carved, which looked well either in summer or winter. Digby thought no lawns were so green, no gravel walks so yellow as those of Bloxholme. The view, too, from the lower windows, as from the lawn itself, was very beautiful, and perfectly English. There were green slopes and corn-fields, and hazel and beech woods, and rows of tall elms, and clumps of fir-trees, and patches of wild land gleaming with the bloom of the golden-coloured gorse; and then beyond all was to be seen, dancing in the sunbeams, the wide expanse of the blue ocean, with a silvery river finding its way down on the right to the little town of Osberton, which stood on its shores. Numberless are the scenes of similar beauty which are to be found throughout England. To the left of the lawn, well-kept gravel walks twisted and twined away through shrubberies of evergreens, passing several open spaces filled with flower beds and trellised arbours, and rock-work and grottoes, and other similar conceits, made with very good taste though, till they reached two wide sheets of water, which might well be called lakes, connected by a serpentine channel crossed at each end by a rustic bridge. The ponds were surrounded by trees, the shadows of which were seen reflected in the clear waters. There were picturesque little islands dotted about here and there, not far from

the shore, to which one of the largest was joined by a bridge. It had a summer-house on it, a very favourite resort of Digby and Kate. Perhaps they prized the ponds for being well stocked with fish which consented now and then to be caught, even more than for their beauty. The upper and largest pond was full of pike, and perch, and eels. In the others were carp, and roach, and dace, and the finest and fattest tench to be found in the county. There were several smaller ponds full of water lilies and other aquatic plants, which, when in bloom, as they floated borne up by their broad leaves on the calm water, looked very beautiful. These ponds had been carefully stocked with nearly all the species of fish to be found in English waters; and in the rapid stream which ran out of the lowest pond and found its way to the sea, a good basket full of mottled trout was to be caught by the expert angler. In most places it was so thickly shaded by hazel and alder, and other bushes which love moisture, that the bungler was very certain to lose his hook and line, and to catch no fish.

There was another spot, a still more favourite resort of Kate's and Digby's. It was a high mound – partly natural and partly artificial – near the upper lake. The base of the mound on one side was washed by a stream and tributary of the lake, and on the other was a grassy meadow. The mound itself was thickly covered with trees to the very top, where a summer-house, or sort of temple, was placed. From the windows a beautiful view was obtained over the lakes and woods, and gardens and fields of Bloxholme; and on one side of the village of Otterspoole and

its church-spire, and trout-stream and hanging woods, and on the other of the valleys and hills and downs which intervened between the grounds and the sea. Glimpses of the blue ocean were obtained from every height, and much did it enhance the beauty of the scenery. The path which led to the top of the mound was very intricate and steep – indeed it formed a complete labyrinth, which, though it made it far more attractive to Kate and her brother, prevented it from being so much the resort of the elders of the family.

I have described these spots as Digby's favourite resorts. I suspect, however, that had it not been for Kate, he would not have often found his way there. He liked them because she did, and he went there for the sake of her society. Hearty were the laughs the two enjoyed there. There she read to him her poetical effusions – there she showed him her drawings, and there they concocted, I am sorry to say, many a scheme of mischief.

The Hall itself was a thoroughly comfortable, warm, well-furnished mansion, with handsome drawing-rooms, and dining-room and library; and bedrooms which could accommodate Mr Heathcote's largish family, and a good many guests besides. He himself seemed fit in every respect to be the owner of such a place. He was a fine looking person – a thorough English country gentleman. He did not appear talented, and he was not; but he had the character of being a thoroughly upright, honest man, anxious to do his duty in that state of life to which God had called him. He was a good landlord, and watched over all the poor around,

whether or not living on his estate. He was a county magistrate, and was never missed in his place on the bench when the Court sat. He was strict, especially with poachers and smugglers. There was very little maudlin sentiment in his composition. If a person did wrong he considered that he ought to be punished, not only to teach him not to act in the same way again, but to teach others also. Still, no kinder or more indulgent master, to all employed in his service, was to be found in the county. “If we do not inflict the legal punishment on the man, how is he, or how are others, to know what is right or what is wrong,” he used to remark to his brother magistrates. From his invariable strictness he was looked upon as a severe magistrate, and many a poacher had to rue the night in which he was caught trespassing on the preserves of any of the neighbouring estates, till it was found to be a very unpaying amusement, and poaching was almost put down. Smugglers, also, either landsmen or seamen, who were captured breaking the revenue laws, were treated in the same manner. Every man in the district knew, that if caught aiding in running an illicit cargo of goods, the county gaol would be his abode for some months afterwards. So the smugglers found it very difficult to procure men to help them land their tubs of spirits or bales of silks. Smuggling was not entirely put down, but it received a severe check from Mr Heathcote’s system of proceeding. The gipsies, and indeed all ill-doers, held him in great awe. At the same time he might have been seen visiting the cottages of the men who had been sent to prison, ascertaining the

real wants of their families, and supplying them liberally. It was not in his way to talk much to them or to give them good advice. He would remark, perhaps, "Well, when your Bill comes out, tell him that if he does it again, he'll have to go in again. Remember that." As the county gaol was far from a pleasant abode, the warning had generally the effect intended. Mr Heathcote was a Tory, somewhat of the old school, and an unwavering supporter of the Church of England. Indeed, he was very unwavering in all his ways of proceeding. He regularly attended all poor-law boards and road-trust meetings; indeed, a large portion of his time was occupied in public matters. He was also an enthusiastic sportsman. The first of September found him, gun in hand, intent on the destruction of partridges. At every meet of the hounds in the neighbourhood he might be seen in red coat and top-boots, few in the field better mounted, while he rode about with cheery voice greeting his numerous acquaintance. He no longer attended races, however. When at college he had done so, very much to his own let and hindrance. He had betted, lost money, and incurred debts which hung over him like an incubus for years afterwards. He had barely managed to take his degree, even at a college where no great amount of knowledge was demanded for obtaining that honour. When he came into his estate he was unable to take that place in the county which his ancestors had so long held. If he had had an extravagant wife he would never have obtained it, but happily for him Mrs Heathcote was a sensible, light-minded, straightforward person. She saw what

was wanted. Retrenchment was wanted, or rather, a refraining from expenditure. A plan was laid down and persevered in, and in a few years Mr Heathcote found his estate unencumbered. He was not, however, a rich man; his house was rather large for his property, and as people judge rather by the size of the mansion than by the number or quality of the acres which surround it, he was supposed to be more wealthy than he really was, and was consequently expected to live in a more expensive way than he found to be wise. His first children having been daughters, fancying that he had nothing to do with their education, he not being a reading man, he was much oftener to be found out of the house than in it. He had learned, therefore, to consider that his public duties had the greatest call on his time and attention. When Digby was born, he at first looked upon him as a baby, and he had got so into the habit of regarding him in that light, that it did not occur to him afterwards that his boy's mind, as well as his stature, was enlarging, and that even greater care was required to strengthen and cultivate the former than the latter. Happily, Mrs Heathcote did not altogether overlook this, and she did her best to instruct him and to teach him what was right. In this she did not altogether fail. But she had the education of her daughters to attend to, and Digby was left more to his own devices than was altogether good for him. She might, of course, have had a governess, but she felt herself well able to instruct her daughters, and had an idea that no person could do so better than their mother. Motives of economy had in the first place induced

her to make the attempt, which she afterwards persevered in from the pleasure it afforded her. She was a thoroughly English, ladylike person, with no littleness about her. Tittle-tattle, scandal, or indeed talking of people except to praise them, she thoroughly detested. Her two eldest daughters did justice to her instructions.

Eleanor and Mary Heathcote were good-feeling, right-minded, ladylike girls. I shall not have much to say about them, except in connexion with Digby. One was seventeen, the other fifteen. They made attempts to assist in his education, but they found him very unmanageable. There was a large town some miles off, from which masters came, and Mrs Heathcote had begun to talk of obtaining a governess to attend to Kate and Digby, and the younger children as they grew older. A very superior person had all along superintended the nursery, but Digby had already broken through all the restraints she could put upon him, except when in her immediate presence, and then he was obedient enough, both from habit and affection.

Digby's next brother was Augustus – Gusty he was generally called; he was three years younger – a fat chubby little fellow. Digby was very fond of him, and did his best to spoil him as much as he himself was spoiled. He generally would do anything for him, or bear anything from him, but sometimes Digby lost his temper, and he would then turn round and give him a cuff, or carry off some of his property; but he was always sorry before long for having hurt the child, and would restore what he had deprived him of, with interest.

Mrs Heathcote's health had always been delicate, and latterly it had been more so than usual, and in consequence, Kate had been left to do very much what she liked, except when she and Digby were called in by Eleanor to do their lessons. She got over hers very quickly, and helped Digby to do his, so that he also had an abundance of time to follow his own fancies and devices. Three or four days in the week a master came over to initiate him in the mysteries of the Latin accidence, as well as writing and arithmetic – sciences which Mr Heathcote supposed the lady members of his family were less able to impart than could one of the sterner sex. Digby, it must be owned, did not take kindly to any of them, and showed but little respect or affection for his instructor. When Mr Heathcote made inquiries as to his son's progress, Mr Crammer invariably replied that Mr Digby was getting on nicely, and he was content, and did not think it necessary to trouble his head further on the matter.

I said a river was to be seen from Bloxholme. It flowed away for a distance of six or seven miles, till it reached the sea, on the shores of which, at its mouth, a little old sea-port town was situated, called Osberton. The Rector, Mr Nugent, was brother to Mrs Heathcote. He had a small income and a large family, and so he took pupils. He was a refined, pleasing-mannered man, very earnest and zealous, but rather strict and precise (not about religion, for in that no man can be too strict), but with regard to the behaviour of his pupils, in small as well as in important matters. As, however, he entered into their sports, and showed

a deep interest in their welfare, he perfectly won their love and affection. Osberton was an old place altogether. An old castle, with a few old guns which had not gone off for ages, guarded, or rather pretended to guard, the entrance to the river. In reality, it was no greater defence to the river than would be a stuffed dog in a court-yard. The little boat harbour and the quays were old, and the inhabitants were old-fashioned into the bargain. Now and then Digby had been sent to stay with his uncle, but the atmosphere of the place did not at that time suit his notions, and he always did his best to get home again.

In the neighbourhood of Bloxholme was Melford Priory, the residence of the Honourable Stephen Langley. It had been granted to Mr Langley's ancestors by Henry the Eighth, on the abolition of the monasteries in England. His family had, however, resided in the neighbourhood for centuries before that time. The estate belonged to Lord Calderton, his elder brother, who was a diplomatist, and consequently seldom came to the place. He allowed Mr Langley to live at Melford on the supposition that he devoted himself to looking after the property. Mr Langley had several children – the youngest, Julian, was about a year older than Digby. They had occasionally met – Digby thought him a very fast fellow, and admired him exceedingly. He described to Kate how he could ride the biggest horse in the stable, and break in the most intractable dog, and bring down a bird flying at a vast distance, and thrash any bumpkin twice his size. Mr Heathcote had a very great – an almost hereditary – respect for

Lord Calderton's family. Many of them had been very excellent people, and the present lord bore a high character. It did not, therefore, occur to him that any of them could be otherwise than good. Perhaps had he made inquiries, and ascertained how Julian was being brought up, he would not have wished his son to become his associate. The truth is, that Mr Langley was not a good man, and poor Julian was left to grooms and other servants, who did their best to ruin him, physically and morally. He listened eagerly to their conversation, imbibed their notions, and gained a taste for beer and spirits, with which they, in their ignorance of the injury they were inflicting, supplied him.

I think that we have now got a very good idea of Bloxholme, its inhabitants, and its neighbourhood. I must again warn my readers that none of the characters I have described were model people. Mr Heathcote himself certainly was not, nor was altogether Mrs Heathcote, nor was her brother, Mr Nugent; and the troubles and difficulties Digby brought upon himself, and the pain and suffering he endured, will show that he is intended for a warning rather than an example.

I must not, however, forget my old friend John Pratt – a very worthy, honest fellow. He was a sort of under steward on the property. He looked after the cows, and pigs, and poultry, and sheep, and young colts. He assisted in the kitchen garden, but did not profess to know much about flowers. He acted also as a gamekeeper, but he was especially great in fishing matters, and everything connected with the ponds and the rookery. He always

decided when the young rooks were to be shot, and when the ponds were to drained or drawn. He superintended the taking of all wasp's nests. He had charge of the ferrets, the hawks, and dogs; and as to vermin, the stoats, and the weasels, and polecats, and even the rats, it was supposed had positively an instinctive dread of him. He was a tall, thin, wiry man, with a bald forehead, and grey hair, and a keen intelligent countenance. Digby was very fond of him, and he in return doted on the young master, and would have gone through fire and water to serve him. He had already contrived to instruct Digby in many of the secrets of his science, and as he used to say, "It was a pleasure to teach Master Digby, he took to it so kindly, and was afraid of nothing. He'd grapple with a weasel, or a snake, or a pike, and not cry out for help, when most other young 'uns would a been running screaming away from them. To see him once tackle-to with one of the big swans, and only a little stick in his hand, it was for all the world like St. George a-fighting the dragon, just as you see on a gold sovereign."

Digby, however, had, in the encounter mentioned, very nearly got his arm broken, and would in other ways have suffered probably severely had not John come to the rescue. It proved, however, the fearlessness of his disposition, which had so won John Pratt's admiration. John Pratt himself feared no mortal foes; but the poorer classes in that part of the country were excessively superstitious, and he partook to the full of the general feeling.

Whereas, happily, throughout England generally, the grosser

styles of superstition have been in a great degree eradicated by the exertions of the ministers of the Gospel and by the spread of education, in some parts, and this was one of them, all the absurd notions in which our ancestors indulged in the dark ages have been handed down to the present generation. Ghosts, hobgoblins, witches and their secret powers, charms, amulets, spirits of every sort, were believed in with undoubting faith. Education had not spread into the district, and, unfortunately, the clergymen who had successively ministered in that and the neighbouring parishes had done little or nothing to eradicate the pernicious and anti-Christian notions which were prevalent among the people. They had been what were called very good sort of men. They had preached very fair average sermons on a Sunday, and if people chose to come to church to hear them they were welcome to do so. If any of their parishioners were sick and sent for them, they went to them, with their Bibles in their pockets, from which, perhaps, they read a chapter or two, and, with a few ordinary words of consolation or advice, they hurried away as fast as they could. They hunted, and shot, and dined with Mr Langley and Mr Heathcote, and all the gentlemen round; and drank their wine, and told good stories, and amused themselves and those with whom they associated to the utmost of their power. They passed for worthy jolly good fellows, and no more was demanded of them. It never seemed to occur to them that they would have to answer some day or other respecting the souls of their fellow-creatures committed to their pastoral care. They

wondered why there was so much ignorance and superstition in their parishes; why people did not come to church; why dissent was rife; why dissenting chapels were built; why the country people were so immoral; why there was so much drunkenness, folly, and wickedness.

John Pratt, as I was saying, notwithstanding all his good qualities, was a firm believer in witches, ghosts, and hobgoblins, and an arrant coward with regard to the spiritual world.

As Digby ran through the grounds he found him by the side of the lake, repairing one of the fishing punts. As he sat with mallet and blunt chisel in hand, driving the oakum into her seams, he was neither whistling nor smiling, as was his wont. So absorbed was he, indeed, in his own thoughts, that he did not observe the young master's approach.

"What's the matter, John?" said Digby; "you don't seem happy to-day."

John started, and looked up, "Oh, Master Digby, is that you? I didn't see you, that I didn't," he exclaimed. "Happy, did you say, Master Digby? No, I ain't happy by no means. I'm going to be bewitched; and that's enough to make a man anything but happy, I'm thinking."

"What does that mean, John?" asked Digby; "I don't understand."

"Why, Master Digby, you knows Dame Marlow – she as lives with her old man down in the gravel-pits at Mile-End – she's a witch, and a wicked old body, if ever there was one in this world.

Well, t'other day, as I was sauntering like down the green lane, who should I see breaking through the fence at the corner of the copse but the old Dame herself. She'd a bird in her hand, and as I ran up to her I found 'twas a hen pheasant. When she seed me she tried to hide it away under her red cloak, and, in her hurry, very nearly toppled down the bank on her nose, into the road. 'Oh, Dame Marlow, Dame Marlow, what have you been about?' I cried out. 'You've been a-stealing master's pheasants, that you have; you wicked old woman, that you are.' Still I didn't like to lay hands on her, do you see, for I know'd well what she was, and what she can do. On she went, hobbling away with her crutch as fast as I could walk, almost. At last she stopped, and turning round her face – oh how wicked and vengeful it looked, how her red ferret eyes glared at me – says she to me, 'Who calls? Ay, is that you, John Pratt? Ay; and you're seeking your own harm. You want to bring down a curse on your own head; you want to malign and injure a poor old body with a decrepit husband, who can't help himself, do you? Speak, man – what is it you want?' 'I want master's pheasant which you've been trapping, dame,' says I; 'and I must have it, too,' says I, growing bold. 'Ay, I see you want to be cursed,' says she; 'you want to have the marrow dry up in your bones, and the skin wither up on your flesh, and the hair fall off your head, and your eyes grow dim, and your teeth drop out, and your legs not to bear your body, and your hands to tremble,' – 'Stop, stop, dame,' says I, 'don't curse me now; I'm only doing my duty. I want the pheasant back; I'd sooner

give you its value than quarrel with you.' 'It's too late,' says she, looking more wicked than ever, and not trusting me, I suppose; 'you're bewitched already, and you'll find it out before long, that you will, let me tell you.' Saying this, on she hobbled, as before. I followed, thinking that I ought and must have the pheasant; but she turned upon me such a wicked look, and again hissed out, 'You're bewitched, John Pratt; you're bewitched, man,' that I couldn't stand it, and had to run away as fast as my legs could carry me, while she set up a shout of laughter which is even now ringing in my ears."

"Very horrid, indeed, John," said Digby, who did not exactly know whether or not to believe in Dame Marlow's powers. "But do you really think she can do what she says?"

"No doubt about it, Master Digby," answered the old man, with grave earnestness; "you should just hear what all the folks in the country round do say of her. There's no end of the cows, and sheep, and pigs, she's bewitched in her time. Many's the one she's sent to their graves before their glass was run out, just because they'd offended her. Oh, she's a terrible woman, depend on that, Master Digby."

Much more nonsense of a similar character did poor John talk. I need not repeat it. Digby was almost persuaded to believe all that the old man told him.

This conversation was interrupted by a light, hearty fit of laughter. So eager had they become that they had not perceived that Kate had approached them, and had been an attentive and

amused listener to much that had been said on the subject.

"All that you have been saying is arrant nonsense, John," she exclaimed, unable longer to restrain herself; "and you, Digby, are a little goose to believe him. Why, Dame Marlow has no more real power over the elements or over her fellow-creatures than you or I, or her own black cat has. We'll soon concoct a plan to make her undo her own curse, and to punish her, at all events. An idea just now came into my head when I heard you two wise people talking. Come along, Digby, to our island, and we'll work it out. If it comes to anything, as I think it will, we'll get John to help us; and we'll make Dame Marlow repent that she ever pretended to be a witch, or threatened to injure any of the poor people who are silly enough to believe in her."

From the hearty shouts of laughter which John soon heard coming across the water from the island, there could be little doubt that Kate's idea was considered by her and Digby as a very bright one, and that, under the influence of their united wits, it was undergoing a rapid development.

John Pratt was amazed. He had great admiration of Master Digby's physical courage. He felt a sensation approaching to awe as he contemplated the fearlessness with which Miss Kate proposed to encounter one who possessed such unlimited powers over even the spirits of darkness. "There's the true old blood in their veins, that there is," remarked John to himself, as he went on caulking the punt.

Chapter Two

How Digby and Kate Carried out Their Plot – An Evil Counsellor – Youthful Tricks and Their Consequences

As soon as Digby and Kate could make their escape from the schoolroom the next morning, they repaired to an attic, where all sorts of lumber was piled up, and refuse articles of every description were collected till some destination was assigned for them. Here they soon found what they came to look for. There was some rope, and the lining of a black gown, and some black silk, and a few bits of red cloth. The things were done up tightly in bundles, and, with delighted eagerness, they hurried off with them to the summer-house on the top of the mound. Soon after they got there, John Pratt appeared, with a bundle of hay.

"All right, John," exclaimed Digby, "that will stuff him well. And have you got the other things I asked you for?"

"Yes, Master Digby, but there's something I don't half likes about the matter. It will look too horrid, I zuzpect."

"Never fear, John; it will punish the old woman properly, and be great fun," cried Kate, eagerly. "Give me the things; we shall soon be ready; and do you go down and keep ward and watch to

give us timely notice of any one's approach."

Thus exhorted, John produced from his capacious pockets a couple of deer's antlers and two deer's hoofs, with the greater part of the skin of the legs attached to them. Kate eyed them with a merry glance. Digby did not half like to touch them, it seemed. The young lady was evidently the leading spirit on the occasion.

"That will do, John," she said, with a nod. "Nothing could be better."

John turned slowly, and went down the mound. His mind was evidently not quite satisfied with the work in which he was engaged. Still, he could not bring himself to refuse any of the requests made him by Miss Kate and Master Digby.

As soon as he had gone, Kate, who had been cutting up the black stuff, produced some large needles, and twine, and thread. Digby held the materials, and tied the knots as she directed him. It is surprising how rapidly her little fingers performed the work. She first made a ball, into which she fixed the two antlers.

"There is a capital head," she remarked. "We will work in the eyes and mouth and nose directly."

Then she made an oblong cushion, to serve as a body, and fastened the head to it. She next formed a pair of long arms, and made some pieces of skin do duty for the hands and fingers, while the two hoofs were secured to the end of the legs. With the red cloth, part of an old hunting-coat she made a mouth, and a long tongue sticking out of it; and then she made white eyes, with red eyeballs, and she fastened on a long hooked nose,

rapidly formed with paper and the black stuff. Some shreds of the latter did duty as hair, and a twist of it, with a bit of red cloth at the end, as a tail. In a very short time the young lady had put together a very ugly little imp, which did more credit to her ingenuity and imagination than perhaps it did to her good taste. Digby, however, was delighted, and clapped his hands, and danced the figure about round and round the room, with fits of uproarious laughter. It was scarcely, however, completed in all its details when the sound of a bell reached their ears.

"Oh, we must run in, Digby, or they will be sending to look for us," exclaimed Kate. "Here, we will put young Master Blackamoor away under the table. Nobody will be strolling this way, I hope; and, as soon as our afternoon lessons are over, we'll come back and finish him, and get John Pratt to carry him to Mile-End for us."

Telling John Pratt to meet them again at three o'clock, they hurried back to the Hall. Kate tried to look as grave as possible all dinner-time, but whenever hers and Digby's eyes met, from their ill-repressed twinkle their mother saw that there was some amusing secret between them.

There were some guests taking luncheon at the hall. Among them was Mr Bowdler, the newly-appointed vicar of the parish. He watched the countenances of his young friends, and he saw that there was some joke between them. What it was he could not tell, and did not choose to ask. After luncheon he took his departure, and strolled through the grounds on his way home.

They got over their lessons very quickly – indeed, Kate was never long about hers – and off they hurried again to the mound.

"Where are you going to, children?" asked Mrs Heathcote, as they were running out.

"To the mound, to meet John Pratt," answered Digby. "I'll take care of Kate, that she doesn't get into mischief. We are going to have a piece of fun, that's all."

This answer, from its very frankness, satisfied Mrs Heathcote, and away they went to carry out their scheme. As they approached the mound misgivings arose in their minds lest any body should have been there during their absence; but when they reached it, they found their ugly little imp in the position in which they had left him under the table, and their minds were satisfied on the subject. They now gave him the last few finishing touches, fastened on his tail, and secured a rope at his back. When they had done this Digby insisted on having another dance with him, and then John Pratt appeared with a large game basket. Into this, neck and crop, they stuffed the figure and the rope, and John carrying it, away they went laughing and chattering through the grounds in the direction of Mile-End.

"Now, John, you are to go into Dame Marlow's cottage, and remember you are to sit down and ask her to take the curse off you," said Kate. "She will say that she will not, and then you are to beg and entreat her, and to tell her that if she is so wicked that some one will be coming to carry her off one of these days, and then that she'll have good reason to be sorry for what she

has done. Leave the rest to us; only, if you do see anything come down the chimney, you are to run screaming away as if you were in a dreadful fright."

"Yez, Miss Kate, I'll do as you zays. But zuppose anything real was to appear, what should I do then?" said John, evidently repenting that he had entered into the young people's scheme.

Kate thought a moment; Digby looked very grave; John's fears were infecting him.

"I do not think any harm can possibly come, John," said Kate, after some time. "You know we only want to frighten and to punish the old woman who stole the pheasants, and tried to frighten you. There cannot be any harm in that, surely."

"I doan't know, I doan't know, Miss," answered John, rubbing his head very hard, as he walked on faster than before, the children having to keep almost at a run by his side.

It was curious to see that little girl, with her bright, though just then misdirected, intelligence managing that gaunt, venerable-looking, but ignorant old man.

John's education had been sadly neglected in his youth. When they got near the gravel-pits at Mile-End the party made a circuit to approach Dame Marlow's cottage at the rear. It was a curious edifice, built down on a low ledge of the gravel-pit, one side of which formed the back wall, while the roof rested on the edge. The chimney was consequently very accessible; and Digby and Kate could without difficulty reach to the top, and look down it. John, having deposited the basket containing the imp went

round to the front of the cottage, to be ready to perform his part of the drama. He had to descend to the bottom of the pit, which, with the exception of a narrow causeway, which led to the professed witch's abode, was full of water. He crossed the causeway, and then winding up a zig-zag path, stood before the door of the cottage. Digby and Kate got their figure ready to let down the chimney. Though there was a fire on the hearth, it did not send forth sufficient smoke to prevent them from looking down and hearing what was going forward within the cottage. John knocked.

"Come in, whoever you bees," exclaimed the old woman, in a harsh croaking voice. "Bad or good, old or young, little or big, rich or poor, if you've anything to zay to Dame Marlow she bees ready to hear you."

"I bees come, dame, to ask you to take the curse off me," said John, entering and sitting down. "Your zervant, Mr Marlow."

A cough and a grunt was the only answer the old man deigned to give.

"Is that the way the wind blows? I thought az how you wouldn't wish to make an enemy of me, John. There's zome things that can be done, and zome that can't. Now, when I'ze once bewitched a man it's no easy matter for me, or anyone else, to take the curse off on him: so, do you zee, John Pratt, what I've cast at thee must stick by thee, man."

The wicked old woman thought that she had got John in her power, and had no inclination to let him off easily.

Poor John begged and prayed that the dreaded curse might be taken off him; but the more earnest he seemed the more inflexible she became, and only laughed derisively at his fears. When he appealed to the old man, a grunt or a chuckle was the only answer he received.

"Then listen to me, both on you," cried John, mustering courage, and recollecting his lesson. "You bees a wicked old couple, and zome on these days there will be a coming zome one who'll make you sorry you ever cursed me, or any one else."

Scarcely had he spoken when a noise in the chimney was heard, the pot on the fire was upset, out blew a thick puff of smoke, and, amid a shower of soot, a hideous little black imp appeared, jumping about; while frightful shrieks, which seemed to be uttered by him, rent the air.

John, with loud cries, jumped up, oversetting the table, and ran into the open air. The old man, attempting to follow, tripped up and fell sprawling on the ground; while the dame herself, catching hold of John's coat tails, hobbled after him, exclaiming that she was a wicked old sinner, that she had no power to curse him or anybody else, and that she would never utter another curse as long as she lived. However, the shrieks and hisses from the chimney continued, and at last, overcome with terror, she fell down in a swoon.

Digby and Kate having ascertained that their device had taken the full effect they anticipated, hauled up their figure, and packing it away in the basket, in which operation they

considerably blackened their hands and dresses, sat down till John should join them. Getting tired of doing nothing, they cautiously approached the edge of the gravel-pit, when, looking over, they saw the wretched old couple still on the ground. They were very much alarmed when they found that they did not move, thinking perhaps they had really frightened them to death.

"Oh dear, oh dear, I wish that we hadn't done it," exclaimed Kate, looking very miserable. "And I to have led you to help me. It was very naughty of me, I know. I know – I know it was."

"Oh no, Kate, it wasn't all your fault; I'm sure I thought it was very good fun," answered Digby. "Perhaps, after all, they are not dead. I'll go and have another look." Digby approached near, stooping down, and when he looked over he saw the dame lifting up her head and gazing cautiously around. She did this more from instinct or habit than because she fancied any one might be near. Digby thought that she must have seen him. He crept back to Kate, satisfied, at all events, that she was not dead; and John Pratt soon afterwards joining them, he shouldered the basket, and they set off as fast as they could for the Hall. What to do with the imp, which had played so prominent a part in the drama, was a puzzle, till John undertook to carry it home, and burn it.

When they got back to the Hall the state of their dresses and their hands, which were more than usually dirty, caused some grave suspicions in the mind of Mrs Barker, the head nurse, who had to prepare them to come in to dessert, after dinner; and she was not long in ascertaining from Digby what had really

occurred. She thought it very wrong in John Pratt to have assisted in such a proceeding; but he was a favourite, and she was afraid that if she made much of the matter she should bring him into trouble; she therefore merely gave Kate and Digby a lecture, and they fancied that they had escaped without any further ill result from their frolic. It happened, however, that that very evening a neighbour of Dame Marlow's came running to the vicarage to say that the dame and her old man were both very ill, that they had something on their consciences, and that they wished to see the vicar and to disburden them.

Mr Bowdler was ever at the call of any of his poor parishioners who sent for him. Although he had but just finished his frugal dinner, and taken his books and sat down to enjoy himself after his own fashion, in communing in thought with great and good men. He rose from his seat, and said he would go immediately.

It was a fine moonlight night, and so he mounted his horse and trotted off to Mile-End. He found the old couple not nearly so ill as he expected, but still suffering very much from fear. I need not repeat in their own words what they said.

The dame confessed that she had done many wicked things, and that she had tried to impress people with a belief in her supernatural powers, though she knew that she was a weak old woman, without any power at all. At length, however, while she was endeavouring to frighten an honest man out of his senses, the spirit of evil had himself appeared down the chimney, and very nearly frightened her and her husband out of theirs. What

she had sent to Mr Bowdler for was, it appeared, not so much to say how sorry she had been, but to entreat him to exorcise the evil spirit, so that he might not venture to come back again.

Mr Bowdler looked grave. He might have said that prayer, and penitence, and watchfulness, were the only preventives against the approach of the evil one. However, in the present instance, he did not like to say this. The fact was that he had become completely enlightened from what he had just heard as to the true state of the case. After taking luncheon at the Hall, he had strolled, as he had been requested to do, through the grounds. The day being very fine, and not having been before at the Mound, he hunted about till he found his way through the labyrinth, and then he climbed up to the summer-house to enjoy the view which, he had been told, could be seen from it. Just as he was leaving the building, the little imp under the table had caught his eye. He pulled out the monster, and could scarcely help indulging in a smile as he examined it. He doubted, however, whether he ought to leave it there, or carry it off; but guessing from the workmanship that young hands had formed it, and recollecting Kate and Digby's glances at luncheon, he had little difficulty in guessing that it was the produce of their ingenuity. Had he been less of a stranger, he would, I have no doubt, have taken it away, or stopped and remonstrated with them on the impropriety of making such a figure; but he was a judicious man, and he feared that he might injure his future usefulness in the family by appearing officious. He was a man who only placed confidence

in good principles. He believed that preaching against one sin, or one fault, and leaving sin in general, evil dispositions unassailed, produced no permanent effect. However, he resolved to keep his eye on his young friends, and to speak to them when he could find a favourable opportunity. He now at once discovered how the figure had been employed, though he could scarcely persuade himself that Kate and Digby alone could have carried out by themselves the drama which had evidently been enacted. He did not mention his suspicions to the old couple, but he strongly urged them to repent of their evil ways, and to resolve in future to lead better lives. He assured them that neither he nor any other mortal man had the power of exorcising evil spirits; and they were silly old people to fancy so. As to what they had seen, he did not choose to pronounce an opinion; but he told them that they ought to have stopped and examined it, and that then they would probably not have been so much frightened. He was not very well satisfied, however, with the result of his visit.

"This is a pretty prank for these young people to play," said he to himself, as he rode home. "It is high time that Master Digby should be sent to school, and that Miss Kate should have a governess to look after her. If something is not done they will be getting into some worse scrape before long. I must try and speak to Mr Heathcote on the matter. He appears to think that they are still babies, and never seems to dream of the rapid development of their genius for mischief."

Not long after this, Julian Langley, who had not yet been sent

to school, was invited to spend a few weeks at the Hall. From what I have said it may be supposed that he was not likely to do Digby any good. Kate, from the first, could not abide him; and even John Pratt looked at him with no little suspicion. Julian was tall for his age, with a slight figure, fair, with light hair, and an inexpressive rather than a bad countenance. I believe that his was one of those characters which may be moulded without difficulty either for good or for ill, according to the hands into which they fall. Nothing would have made Julian Langley a very great man, or a very important member of society; but he might have become, by proper care and culture, useful in his generation, and religious and happy. Alas, poor fellow, how different was his lot. He could discourse very learnedly about horses and dogs, and all sporting matters; and of course Digby thought him a very fine fellow. It was not long before he led Digby into a variety of scrapes.

The first Sunday after his arrival all the family went to church. The Bloxholme pew had very high sides and curtains, and was directly in front of the pulpit, the preacher being the only person who could look directly down into it. Outside it, also facing the pulpit, there had, from time immemorial, been seats for a number of poor and old people. One of the occupants was an old man, who wore a scratch-wig; he was very deaf, also, and as he could not hear a word the vicar said, he invariably fell asleep during the sermon, and, as was often the case, if he had any cold, snored loudly.

Stephen Snookes was certainly not a nice old man, and Digby and Kate had no affection for him. People complained of his snoring; and the vicar had more than once spoken to him about the impropriety of his conduct in going to sleep during the sermon. Stephen promised to try and amend; but the next Sunday invariably committed the same fault.

Julian and Digby had sat quiet during the beginning of the sermon; but when old Snookes began to snore, they got up on their seats and looked over down upon the head of the delinquent. As it happened, they had heard, the evening before, a very sad, but very beautifully written tale, read in which the unhappy hero, in the days of his boyhood, hooks off an old man's wig in church. Undeterred by the sad fate which ultimately befel the hero, Julian Langley was seized with a strong inclination to imitate his example. Digby also jumped at the suggestion made to him by his companion on their way home from church.

As soon as luncheon was over they hurried to Digby's room, where they supplied themselves with a fish-hook and a line. Their eagerness to accompany the Miss Heathcotes to church in the afternoon might have created just suspicions in the minds of some of the elders of the family, but it did not; and off they set in high good humour.

Sermon time came. Old Snookes fell asleep, his loud snoring gave notice of the circumstance. Julian and Digby stood up, and the hook descended, its barbs becoming entangled in the curls of the scratch-wig. The line was then drawn tight, and the end

secured to the brass rod at the top of the pew. What was the horror of Mr Bowdler, when raising his voice, to see old Snookes suddenly bob his head, when, in the sight of a large part of the congregation, off flew his wig, it seemed, and up he stood, bare-headed. Putting his hands to his bald pate, he exclaimed, "I bees bewitched, I knows I bees! Oh, where is my wig? where is my wig?"

Even Mr Bowdler, who had observed the cause which had produced this effect, had some difficulty in keeping his countenance, while I am sorry to say his congregation did very little to keep theirs. He of course felt much vexed with the conduct of the boys. The wig was drawn up rapidly to the edge of the pew, and then it fell down again to the ground, from which the old man picked it up, and, in his hurry, clapped it on again hind part before.

Mr Bowdler felt that any good effects his sermon might have produced were too likely to be obliterated, and he resolved more than ever to advise Mr Heathcote to send Digby off to school.

Neither Digby nor Kate were aware that some time before this their parents had come to the resolution of obtaining a governess who might assist Mary in her studies, and take entire charge of them and Gusty. Their mother's health had lately become much worse, and she was utterly unfit for the task she had imposed on herself. Only the day before the arrival of the lady they were told of the arrangements that had been made. Neither of them had formed any favourable notions of governesses in general,

and Julian had assured them that those he had heard of would beat and pinch them and make them sit in the stocks, and keep them in at their lessons all day, and deprive them of their dinners. Long, indeed, was the catalogue of the enormities governesses were supposed as a class to commit.

"I should like to see anyone trying on those tricks with me," exclaimed Digby, looking very fierce, "I would soon show them what I was made of!"

"Horrid old creature, I'll not attend to her," said Kate, pouting. "I'll pretend to be as dull and stupid as a sick pig. She'll find it very difficult to knock anything into my head, let me assure her."

"Don't you think that we could play her some tricks, just to make her sorry she came here?" suggested Julian. "I'll show you how to make an apple-pie bed, and we can put salt into her tumbler at dinner, and we can pretend the cat is in the room and make a terrible fuss all dinner-time, so that she will fancy we do not hear a word she says to us. There's no end of things I can put you up to, if you will be guided by me."

Of the truth of this assertion of Master Julian's there could be no doubt, but how far they were to be guided well was a very different question. That did not, perhaps, occur to his auditors at the time. Kate's innate delicacy revolted from the idea of preparing an apple-pie bed for their new governess, especially if, as she fancied, she was an old lady, and might arrive fatigued after a long journey; but Digby thought it would be very good fun, and undertook to assist Julian in carrying out his proposal. While

the two boys were discussing the matter, Kate was absorbed in meditation.

"I know one thing I should like to do," she exclaimed. "I have often thought about it. It would give her a tremendous fright, and perhaps she would pack up her things and go off again at once."

"What is it?" exclaimed the boys in a breath, for they knew that Kate's ideas were generally very bright; "tell us all about it."

"Then listen," said Kate. "In the long gallery at the top of the house there are several pictures of old gentlemen and ladies, our ancestors I believe, in full bottomed wigs and hoops, and long coats and breeches, and swords and fans – and – that is to say, the gentlemen have some, and the ladies the other articles I mention," she added, for she saw that the boys were laughing.

"Well, go on," they exclaimed eagerly.

"Some of the portraits have been taken down and placed leaning against the walls. Now though when they were hung up they appeared as large as life, now they are on the ground the figures do not seem to so much taller than any of us. The fancy took me as I was looking at them to cut out the eyes, and to put mine in their stead; and I couldn't help laughing at the idea of how frightened any one would be to see the eyes rolling about, and to hear at the same time a groan or a sigh, as if the portrait had all of a sudden become animated. After the idea had once seized me, I could not rest satisfied till I had put it in part into execution. There would have been no fun merely to put my eyes through two holes, so after I had cut out the eyes of an old gentleman,

our great-great-great-grandfather, I believe, with a steel cuirass on his breast, and a heavy sword in his hand, I got a looking-glass, and just at dusk last evening, I carried it up and placed it on a chair before a portrait of the old knight. Then I got behind the canvas, and put my eyes at the holes and rolled them about till I caught sight of them in the glass. I very nearly shrieked with horror – the eyes looked so natural and bright, I quite forgot they were my own. I couldn't endure it any longer, but had to run out of the gallery without looking up at any of the portraits, for I could not help fancying that I should see them all rolling their eyes round at me."

"How dreadful," said Digby, shuddering. "I wonder you could stand it, Kate."

"Oh, I had to go up again to bring away the looking-glass, and as the old gentlemen and ladies all looked very quiet and demure, I soon got over my fright."

"What, then, do you want us to do?" asked Julian. "Depend on it we're up to anything."

"I will tell you," replied Kate. "There are two big pictures I have fixed on, I will cut out the eyes, and the nose, and the mouth of each of them, I can easily fasten them in again with gum. You shall go up as soon as it is dusk, and put your faces at the holes. I will then invite the new governess, Miss Apsley, I hear is her name, to come up and inspect our ancestors, and then you can sigh and groan, and then she is certain to take fright; and I'll run away, and she will follow, and you must then set up loud shrieks

of horrid laughter; and my idea is, that she will insist on going away, thinking the house is haunted, and never wish to come near it or us again."

"Oh, glorious, grand, magnificent!" exclaimed the boys.

The terms were not very appropriate it must be owned. Little did the elders of the family dream of the mischief the children were committing among their ancestors in the picture gallery.

The morning came on which Miss Apsley was to arrive. John Pratt had fixed that same morning for draining one of the ponds. This was an operation at which very naturally the boys were anxious to be present. There were eels innumerable, and tench and perch in the pond, that was certain, and it was believed that there were also some giant pike, which refused to be caught by any of the baits thrown to them. They had no lessons to do that morning, so at an early hour they set off in high glee at the fun they expected. Even Gusty was allowed to accompany them, and Kate was to follow shortly. It was neither of the large ponds which was to be drained, but still it was one of considerable size. Even people of greater age might have been highly interested at the prospect of seeing the long-hidden depths of the pond exposed to view. John Pratt was in all his glory, and his attendants stood obedient to his commands. The sluices were forced up after a good deal of hammering, and out rushed the water in a dense rapid current, rushing down with a loud roar through the serpentine canal into the lowest lake, whence it found its way to the river. A net had been drawn across to catch any

of the larger fish who might be drawn in by the current, but generally speaking the noise and unusual commotion made them seek what they fancied would be safety in the lower depths of the pond. The water was not allowed to run off very fast lest it should commit some mischief, so the operation was a long one. At length, however, the interest increased as shoals began to appear, and here and there an astonished tench or an eel was seen struggling away through the mud to get into the clearer liquid. The boys shouted and shrieked as they saw them.

"Oh there's another big fellow," cried Digby; "we must have him."

"What a whopper," exclaimed Julian; "I'll bet he weighs a dozen pounds at least."

"There goes another, there's another – there's another – oh! what a huge eel!" were the exclamations heard on every side.

John Pratt stood calm and collected. He knew that the moment of action had not yet arrived. Landing-nets were in readiness, and so was a flat punt with eel-forks, or prongs; indeed, he had omitted nothing that would enable him to capture any of the finny tribe on which he might set his eyes. At length the wished-for moment arrived. Nearly the whole bottom of the pond was laid bare, with the exception of a hole sufficiently deep to float the punt, and a narrow channel leading to it. The exposed parts of the mud were waving in every direction with the floundering struggling fish, while innumerable eels of all sizes were wriggling about and seeking for shelter. Just then Kate came

down, almost breathless, to the pond. The boys had leaped into the punt with John Pratt, and were shoving off. Their jackets, and shoes, and hats, indeed, everything but their shirts and trousers, had been thrown aside, in imitation of John and the men who were assisting. They pushed back, yielding to her petitions to take her in. The punt was very narrow, John Pratt was tall, they were all very eager. The fish swarmed around them; some they took up with the landing-nets, the big eels John forked with his prong, the tench and perch they caught with their hands; the other men were wading about with landing-nets, putting the fish into buckets, to transfer them alive to another pond while this was being cleansed. The water still kept running off, and more and more fish appeared. The boys and Kate shrieked again and again with delight. Their eagerness increased. John was aiming his prong at a large eel, the young party all leaned over on the same side, not seeing that the other edge of the punt was on the mud. The bottom was slippery with the slime of the tench and eels, John's foot slid away – in an instant over went the punt, and let them all out into the water and mud. At first Kate was frightened and shrieked, and Digby was alarmed on account of her and little Gusty, but he only laughed, and they soon found that there was very little water there, and that the bottom was hard, and so they thought it very good fun, and refused to get into the punt again. Away they went, floundering about in chase of the fish, covered from head to feet with mud, but thinking it very good fun. Digby's fear was lest some big pike should catch hold

of Gusty. He himself had a desperate tussle with a big fellow, which would have got away, or, perhaps, bit him, had not John Pratt come to his assistance. Certainly very curious figures were the four children, and no one would have supposed that they were the descendants of long lines of well-born, proud ancestors.

Scarcely had Kate left the house, when the expectant governess, Miss Apsley, arrived. After she had taken luncheon, as she was not tired with her journey, Mrs Heathcote invited her to take a stroll through the grounds to the ponds.

"We shall find the children there, and you will be able to observe them without being remarked," said Mrs Heathcote. "I hope that you will think well of them, for they are, I believe, as well-behaved, tractable children as any in the county. Digby is a dear good boy, and Kate is a clever little thing, though slightly hoydenish I own, but every one may see at a glance that she is a perfect little lady as Digby is a gentleman. You will find no difficulty in managing them."

Mrs Heathcote spoke with the pardonable pride of a mother. She was much pleased with the new governess, and wished to impress her with a favourable opinion of her children.

Miss Apsley, who was a very sensible, ladylike, right-minded person, thought that she should like Mrs Heathcote, and was congratulating herself on having such nice well-behaved little children placed under her charge. Engaged in pleasant conversation the two ladies drew near the ponds. Shouts and shrieks reached their ears, and expressions anything but refined,

which Mrs Heathcote fancied must be uttered by some groom boys, or young gipsies, were heard. When they got in sight of the pond they both stood aghast. There were the children, on whom their mother had just been passing so warm an eulogium, covered from head to foot with black mud, shouting and bawling as they ran after the fish – the refined little ladylike Kate being in no better condition than her brothers, while Julian Langley, having in his eagerness thrown off all restraint, was shouting and swearing, and using expressions which would disgrace the lips of any but the most ignorant heathens.

Poor Mrs Heathcote was horrified. For some time so eager were the children that they did not perceive her. Kate was the first to see her mother and the strange lady, as she was chasing a big eel close up to where they were standing.

"Oh, mamma, the punt upset and we tumbled in and got all muddy, and so I thought that it was a pity to come out, and it is such fun," she exclaimed, making a grab at the eel, and not thinking it at all necessary to appear ashamed of herself.

She probably was not aware of the very odd figure she, appeared. Miss Apsley smiled, but said nothing.

Poor little Gusty next came up, with his pockets full of the smaller fish he had managed to catch hold of. Digby was too much engaged to see anything but the fish he was chasing. Away he went, as indifferent to the dirt as any mud-larker on the banks of the Thames, floundering away after the fish, and throwing them as he caught them into the pails and baskets prepared for

their reception.

"They seem to enjoy the amusement," observed Miss Apsley at length; "I hope they will not catch cold."

Mrs Heathcote was pleased that she did not speak in a satirical tone. She thought, however, that it was high time that the amusement should come to an end, so she desired Kate and Gusty to come out of the pond, and directed John Pratt, who at length caught sight of his mistress, to tell the other boys that she wanted them. John could not help feeling that the young people who had been entrusted to his charge were not in a very presentable condition, so he thought that he ought to make the best apology in his power.

"They bees very like young frogs, I does own, Mrs Heathcote, marm," said he; "but they does take to it so kindly loike, I couldn't find it in my heart to prevent them."

I feel that I cannot do justice to worthy John's peculiar provincial phraseology. Mrs Heathcote smiled. She did not think that John had paid her children any very great compliment. At last Digby and Julian came forth from the mud, without a single white spot about them – hands and face, and hair and clothes, all covered with mud. They were not at all pleased at being told to go into the house to be cleansed, for they were not nearly tired of their sport, but Mrs Heathcote was afraid of Digby's catching cold, and was firm, though they pleaded hard to be allowed to remain.

"There mamma, there, see that huge pike," exclaimed Digby,

about to dart back again; “he’s one of the giant fellows we have been looking for all along, and thought he must have got out somewhere. I wonder you don’t feel inclined to jump in after him. There, they’ve caught him; he must be thirty pounds weight.”

Mrs Heathcote fairly laughed at the idea of her rushing into the mud in chase of a pike, but still Digby had to accompany her home. Whatever might have been his other delinquencies, he never had disobeyed her expressed wishes, for he loved her dearly. He and Julian, however, as they followed a little way behind, looked at the strange lady and thought that she had, in some way or other, something to do with their being called in. She was so ladylike and young, and nice-looking, and so different from what they had fancied the new governess was to be, that they never suspected that she was the awful and dreaded Miss Apsley.

Great was the dismay of Mrs Barker when the mud-besprinkled, or rather mud-covered children, made their appearance. Mrs Carter was summoned to give her assistance, and much soap and many tubs of hot-water were used before they were at all in their usual presentable condition. They scolded them much more severely than their mother had done. Poor little Gusty cried, and could not help fancying that he had been very naughty. When also Digby and Kate found that the lady with their mother was the new governess, and that it was owing to her arrival that they had been compelled to come in thus early, their hearts, in spite of her kind manner and nice looks, hardened

towards her, and, instigated by Julian, they resolved to put into execution the plan which Kate had concocted. Mr Heathcote dined out that day, so the parlour dinner was soon over. Mrs Heathcote was fatigued, so lay down on the sofa and fell asleep. The boys had disappeared. The summer evening was drawing to a close. Now or never was the time. Kate had scarcely seen Miss Apsley.

"Will you come and look over the old house," she said, at length, in a voice which trembled somewhat.

It was late, and getting dusk, but Miss Apsley was glad of an opportunity of having some conversation with her rather silent pupil, and consented readily.

Kate really was very much agitated, and repented of her undertaking before even she reached the picture gallery. She hurried through the other rooms; she felt that she was acting a treacherous part; she tried to talk, but her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth; still there was so much determination, or obstinacy some would have called it, in her composition, that she would not turn aside from her resolution. Miss Apsley guessed that there was something or other on her young friend's mind, but made no remark. The gallery was reached. It was a long, wide, and high passage in the centre of the house, lighted at both ends and partially from the top. The portraits reached to the very roof, and looked very grim and dark – very few of them deserved much commendation as works of art. The gallery Kate thought looked more gloomy than ever; she could scarcely bring herself to utter

a word.

"Come to the other end, marm," at last she said in a faltering voice.

She could scarcely help running away and screaming even before she got to the portraits whose faces she had so ill-treated. She got up to them; she dared not look at them; she was certain that the eyes were rolling horribly. Miss Apsley walked calmly on. Kate thought that she saw the governess look first on one side, then on the other, but she was not certain. They reached the end of the gallery; there was a fine view from the window; the rich glow of that fine summer evening still lingered in the sky. Miss Apsley seemed to enjoy it very much, as she stood contemplating it for some time, till hill, and wood, and fields became so blended as to be scarcely distinguishable.

"We will now return to the drawing-room, Kate, if you please," she said quietly.

Kate followed her. Again they reached the two portraits on the floor; there was a groan on one side, and what was meant for a sigh on the other. Kate was really frightened, and rushed off shrieking.

"Stop, stop, Kate, my dear, there is nothing to be alarmed about," said Miss Apsley, in a calm voice. "Come back and see."

As she spoke she caught hold of the nose of one of the portraits, which squeaked out "Oh, oh, oh!" Kate's fancy was tickled, and she burst into a fit of laughter; her admiration, also, was much excited for her new governess. Digby came forth from

behind the other portrait; Julian, whose nose had been caught literally in his own trap, drew it back as he did his tongue, which he had protruded as far as he could, and also came out looking very sheepish, without a word to say for himself.

Digby, however, in a manly way, at once said – "I beg pardon, Miss Apsley, I thought that we were going to play you a good trick, which would have frightened you very much; but I am glad it did not, and I am sure we are very sorry, and I hope you will forgive us."

Miss Apsley's calmness had won Digby's admiration even in a greater degree than it had Kate's.

"Yes, indeed I will," she replied, pleased at his frankness. "It was silly and wrong in you, and the consequences might, in some instances, have been serious. I am bound to tell you this that I may warn you against playing such tricks in future; but as far as I am individually concerned I most heartily forgive you, and will entirely overlook the matter."

Julian could not understand these sentiments, and thought Digby a very silly fellow to make what he called an unnecessary apology. They all went downstairs together, and then Kate took the governess to her room, and confessed that she had herself concocted the scheme which had so signally failed, and told her, indeed, all I have already described about the matter. With eager haste she undid, too, the apple-pie bed which Digby and Julian had made, and assuring her how different a person she was to what she expected, promised that she would never again attempt

to play her another trick, and that she would be answerable that Digby would not either.

"Why did you come out and show yourself, Digby?" said Julian, when they were alone together. "I don't understand your way of doing things; if you had groaned, as it was arranged, when that Miss Apsley and Kate first appeared, we should have put her to flight, and I should not have had my nose pulled – she knows how to pinch hard let me tell you."

Digby confessed that she really was so nice a person that he did not like to frighten her, and that had he not undertaken to groan, he could not have brought himself to do so at all.

Julian only sneered at this, and said no more on the subject.

It was most unfortunate for Digby that he had at that time so evil a counsellor as Julian to turn him aside from the right course, in which Miss Apsley was so anxious and so well able to direct him. Often and often have boys been warned to avoid bad companions. Let me assure my readers, that they are the emissaries of the evil one, and that their vocation is to destroy, both in body and soul, all who come under their influence.

Chapter Three

More Mischief – Julian's Bad Advice – Digby's First Tutor – How Time was Spent at Osberton – Toby Tubb and his Yarns

There was a large gathering at Bloxholme Hall, both from far and near, of most of the principal families in the county. The house was full of those acquaintances of Mr and Mrs Heathcote who lived too far off to return the same night, but numbers came who were to drive home again the same evening.

There was an archery meeting in the morning, and then a dinner and a dance afterwards. Julian and Digby voted it very slow work. It was, probably, so to them. Kate liked the archery, and especially the dancing, for gentlemen asked her to dance, and chatted with her, and she skipped about like a little fairy, as merrily as possible. The boys had not gone in to the dinner, but they had helped themselves plentifully to the good things on which they could lay hands, and Julian especially had got hold of some wine. In consequence of this, he had become very pot-valorous.

"I'll tell you what, Digby," said he, "we must do something, or I shall go to sleep. This dancing is all nonsense. Come into

the garden. I dare say I shall knock out an idea; it's seldom I fail, when I try."

That was true; but they were very bad ideas Master Julian knocked out.

Before long they found their way into the court-yard, where the carriages of the company were left standing by themselves. The horses were in the stables, pleasantly munching their corn. The coachmen and grooms were in the servants' hall, as agreeably occupied in eating their suppers.

Julian went in and out among the carriages, and whatever rugs, or gloves, or wrappers, or halters he could find, he transferred from one carriage to the other.

"I say, Digby, it will be a capital joke," he exclaimed. "When the fat old coachmen come out, they'll all set to quarrelling. One will think that the other has stolen his things; and they will never dream that we did it."

Digby thought the joke a good one, and helped to take the articles out of some carriages and to put them into others, till it was evidently almost impossible for any one, in the dark, to regain their lost property. When this was done, and the joke, as they called it, enjoyed, the boys sat down to consider what else they could do.

"I have a notion of something," said Julian. "It is dangerous, because, if we were found out, we should get into a terrible scrape; but I should like to try it."

"What is it?" asked Digby, eagerly. "As for the scrape, I don't

mind that; I rather like the risk."

"Well, young 'un, that's according to fancy," said Julian. "I like to take care of myself, but still I like fun. My notion is, that if we were to take the linch-pins out of the carriages we should see a scene not often beheld. As soon as they begin to move, the wheels will go spinning off in every direction, and the people will be spilt right and left into the road. Wouldn't it be fun?"

Digby did not think so. He could scarcely fancy that Julian was in earnest. "Why, some of the coachmen might be killed," he exclaimed; "and the people inside would certainly be hurt."

"Oh, nonsense," answered Julian. "You are qualmish. I'll do it. You just stand by and see. Look, they are out in a minute. Just untwist the wire. Here's somebody's chaise; I suspect it is the parson's. There, he'll get a spill. Now, then, this old family coach; it belongs to those old frumps the Fullers. Lord, what fun, to see them all sprawling out into the road."

Thus Julian went on, Digby felt very much inclined to stop him, and to entreat him to replace the linch-pins; but Julian rattled away, and was so amusing, that his first feeling of the wrong to which he was a party wore off. It never occurred to him that, if he could not stop Julian, his wisest course would have been to tell the coachmen to look to their linch-pins. Fortunately, many of the carriages had been built in London, and were supplied with patent boxes, so that they escaped the contemplated mischief.

While the boys were thus engaged they heard some footsteps,

and they guessed that the coachmen were returning from their suppers to look after their horses. They therefore beat a precipitate retreat through the gate which led into the garden, and quickly made their way into the ball-room.

Mr Bowdler was walking about the room, speaking a kindly word whenever he had an opportunity, both to young and old, of those among whom he had come to live, and whom he was anxious to instruct, and endeavouring, as he felt it most important to do, to win the confidence of all, when he saw the two boys return. Their hair was disordered, their shoes were far from clean, and there were thin lines of dust or mud on their jackets. Julian looked flushed, and Digby had a sheepish abashed manner, very different from that which usually distinguished him. He was very certain that they had been about something they should not, but the question as to what they had been doing he did not think fit to ask. It was already getting later than the hour which he liked to be away from home, so, wishing Mr and Mrs Heathcote good-night, in that pleasant cordial manner which had already gained him their good-will, he walked out to get ready his own carriage. The glass door of the house which led into the garden was open, and so was that which led from the garden into the court-yard. Near his own carriage he saw something shining on the ground. He stooped down, and picked up a clasp knife which he himself had given to Digby a few days before. A groom came and brought out his horse and harnessed it to his carriage. When, however, the man led it out to be clear of the other carriages, in

crossing a shallow open drain, first one wheel came off, and then, to his surprise, another followed. As the carriage was moving very slowly, and no one was in it, there was little harm done.

Mr Bowdler said nothing. "That was a cruel trick of those thoughtless boys," he uttered to himself. "They could scarcely have wished to injure me, but I fear they are the guilty ones."

He and the groom hunted about till they found the linch-pins and the wires which kept them in, and, having examined the other wheels, he got in and drove off.

The groom, of course, wondered how it could have happened, but it did not occur to him to accuse the young gentlemen.

Soon after this, Mrs Fuller's coach was ordered. The fat coachman put the horses to, and drove slowly up to the front door. She and four daughters, and two young sons, came down the steps, the first got in, and the latter got up outside, while Digby and Julian stood in the hall looking on. Digby nearly bit off the thumb of his glove in his eagerness, and hesitation and regret, as he watched for the catastrophe he expected. Julian, fancying that they were secure from detection, stood more in front, highly amused at the thoughts of seeing the fat coachman tumble off into the dust.

Just as they were starting, a carriage was heard coming rapidly along the road. The fat coachman thought that he ought to move out of the way, so he whipped on his horses and away they trotted. A stone had been cast on to the carriage-way – the old family coach bumped over it – off flew a wheel – over went the carriage,

the coachman and the two lads were thrown off with no little violence, right and left, greatly to Julian's delight, and the ladies screamed.

Fortunately the windows had not been drawn up, and no one was cut, but being stout people and closely packed, they were very much jammed together. The poor coachman was the most hurt, and the young men had their coats spoilt. They were on their legs in a moment, and while one helped up the coachman the other ran to the horses' heads. The next thing was to get out the ladies, who, trembling and alarmed, reentered the hall. Grooms, and servants, and gentlemen, assembled from all quarters.

"Look at the other wheels," said a voice.

It was that of Mr Bowdler. His mind had misgiven him that the trick which he had discovered might have been played to other carriages, and he had driven back. He returned to the coach-yard and warned the coachmen of what he suspected. He found them in a state of great commotion, all crying out for the things they had lost, one accusing the other of having appropriated them. Their anger was still further increased when, in accordance with Mr Bowdler's advice, they discovered the linch-pins had been abstracted from several of the carriages, and that the necks of some of them had narrowly escaped being broken. They were loud in their threats of vengeance on the heads of the unknown ragamuffins who had committed the atrocious act.

"It's they gipsies," said one; "they've done it to rob the ladies as we drove along."

"It's some on old Dame Marlow's tricks. I don't think az how any one could a come in here to play zick a prank," observed another, a believer in the Dame's powers.

Some, however, ventured to suggest that as there were young gentlemen at the Hall, and young gentlemen did play very bad tricks at times, they might have done it. Opinion was setting very much in this direction, when John Pratt appeared, and was highly indignant that any such reflection should be cast on his young master.

Mr Bowdler having assured himself that no more harm was likely to occur, drove away again.

"I am not justified in allowing the boys to go on in this way," he said to himself. "I must inform Mr Heathcote of what has occurred, and get them sent to where they will be properly looked after; I should like to get them separated; one will learn no good from the other."

Meantime the disturbance in the coach-yard increased, and John Pratt had at last to summon his master from the ball-room to quell it. Mr Heathcote's voice was now heard inquiring what was the matter, when a dozen people tried to give their own versions of the state of affairs.

"Very well, my friends," said Mr Heathcote, after listening to them patiently, "keep the peace among yourselves for the present, and if the culprits can be discovered, I will take care, I promise you, that they shall be properly punished. And John Pratt, get more lanterns, and have all the things in the carriages

collected, and distributed to the proper owners as they are claimed."

Having said this, the master of the house returned to his guests. Julian and Digby, when they heard what Mr Heathcote had said, were in a great fright. Digby knew very well that what his father said he would do – that he assuredly would do. He had no hope of escaping detection, and was certain that he should be punished. Of course, he remembered that he had not actually taken the linch-pins out of the carriages, but he had stood by, if not aiding and abetting, at all events not making any strenuous effort to prevent the deed. He, therefore, never for a moment dreamed of sheltering himself under the plea that he had not touched the linch-pins. It scarcely occurred to him that Julian might have exonerated him in a great degree by generously declaring that he himself had proposed the trick and had carried it out. Had he been in Julian's place, that is what he would have done; but he did not ask Julian to act thus for him, and he made up his mind to abide the consequences. He felt that any excuse he could offer for himself would throw more blame on Julian, and it did occur to him that even then his word might be doubted.

In the meantime Mrs Fuller's carriage was put to rights, the coachman mounted on his box, the ladies were handed in, and the young gentlemen got up once more on the rumble, all of them very angry and annoyed, as well they might be, and some not a little bruised. Mr Heathcote assured them of his vexation at what had occurred, and promised them, as he had the coachmen, that

he would get the culprits properly punished.

The party at length separated, and Digby, more unhappy and discontented with himself than he had been for a long time, went to bed and cried with very vexation till he fell asleep. It was a pity that his repentance was not of a more permanent nature.

The next morning he arose refreshed, and though he felt an unusual weight at his heart, yet he looked at things in a brighter light. Julian looked immaterial (as Kate called his expression of countenance) when he came down to breakfast, and had evidently made up his mind to brazen out the affair, should suspicion fall on him. The event of the evening naturally, however, became the subject of conversation, and Digby felt conscious that he was blushing, while he dared not meet the eye of any one present. He eat away perseveringly at his breakfast, and bolted so hot a cup of tea, that he scalded his mouth, and was about to make his escape, when his father's eye fell on him. Digby knew it, though he did not dare to look up, and Mr Heathcote felt very nearly certain that the culprit was his own son. Had he doubted it much, he would have asked him, in joke, if he could tell how the affair happened; but he was silent, and felt sad and annoyed. He was sorry to suppose that Digby had been guilty of so foolish and really wicked an act, and his pride too, of which he had a good deal, was hurt at the thought of having, in accordance with his word, publicly to punish him.

All doubts were at an end when, in a short time, Mr Bowdler appeared, mentioned what he had ascertained, and

firmly recommended the course he thought ought to be pursued.

"You are right," answered Mr Heathcote, "but he is such a child – it seems to me but the other day that he was a baby. Let me see, how old is he? Ah, to be sure, I went to school at an earlier age. Old or young, I am bound to punish him, however. Yet stay, we have no right to condemn him unheard."

Mr Heathcote rang the bell, and ordered the servant to send in Master Digby to him. He felt very like that Roman father we read about, who condemned his own son to death.

"Digby," said Mr Heathcote, when his son and heir stood before him, "did you take the linch-pins out of the carriages last night?"

Digby thought a moment.

"No, I did not," he answered firmly.

"Do you know anything about the matter," said Mr Heathcote, somewhat astonished but firmly believing the assertion. Oh what a blessed thing is that perfect confidence in the honour and truthfulness of those connected with us.

"Do you say that I must answer that question, papa?" said Digby.

"I do not wish to force you to say anything," remarked Mr Heathcote, "but I do wish to ascertain how the circumstance occurred."

Digby thought for some time, while his father sat looking at him.

"I should like to know how you intend to punish the person

who committed the mischief," he said at last.

"If you had done it, I should probably have flogged you, and have sent you off to school, as soon as I could find a suitable one. That would have been a lenient punishment for you. A poor boy would be flogged and sent to the house of correction."

"Then you must send me to school, papa, though I should be glad if you would omit the flogging," replied Digby, frankly. "I will not say who played the trick; but, as I see somebody ought to be punished, I'm ready to suffer, as I think I ought."

Mr Bowdler was very much interested in hearing this conversation, and certainly thought very much better of Digby than he had before been inclined to do. "There is a great deal in that boy which may bring forth good fruit, if it is properly developed," he said to himself. It made him very anxious that Digby should go to some school where the moral as well as intellectual qualities of the boys were attended to.

Mr Heathcote did not wish to press the matter further on his son. He was convinced that he was innocent of the act committed, and he had no doubt of the real delinquent. Still he was very unwilling to have to punish Julian, and he wished to pass the matter over, unless the boy was positively accused before him of the crime. Digby was told that he might go back to the schoolroom and prepare for Mr Crammer.

Mr Bowdler had heard Mr Nugent, Mrs Heathcote's brother, very highly spoken of, and he recommended that Digby should be placed under him till a good school could be found.

Mr Heathcote liked the notion. He could not bear the idea of having Digby far separated from him. Not that he saw much of the boy, but he liked to feel and know that he was near him. He fancied that he was getting on very well with Mr Crammer, and, now that so excellent a governess had come to instruct him, he thought that his education would be well provided for. He promised Mr Bowdler, therefore, that he would ride over to Osberton and get his brother-in-law to take charge of Digby.

Mr Bowdler, on his part, undertook to make inquiries for a good school for the boy.

"I will send young Julian home," said Mr Heathcote. "I see no particular harm in him. He seems a quiet, inoffensive lad; but, as you think it advisable, it will be a good excuse for separating the two."

"Yes, a very good excuse," said Mr Bowdler.

Julian had been with Digby when the footman summoned him into his father's presence. He waited anxiously for his return.

"You've not peached, I hope, Digby?" said he.

"No, indeed," answered Digby, rather proudly. "I wasn't going to tell a story, either. Your name wasn't mentioned, so you need not be afraid."

"That's jolly," exclaimed Julian, brightening up. "I was afraid that you would be letting the cat out of the bag."

"I don't know exactly what that means," answered Digby; "I said that if some one was to be punished I was ready to suffer, and so I'm to be sent off to school, and that's not very pleasant, let me

tell you. Not that I mind the idea of school. It may be a very good sort of place; but I don't like to have to leave so many pleasant things behind me. What will my poor dear old dog Tomboy do without me? And there's my pretty pony Juniper, which papa only bought last spring for me, and which I've taught to know me and follow me about the field like a dog. How many pleasant rides I expected to have on him; and he will have forgotten all about me when I come back. Then I was to have gone out shooting with John Pratt in September; and I'm pretty certain papa would have got me a small gun, for I know he would like to see me a good shot; he's a first-rate one himself. John says he'll back me up to kill a brace of partridges within a week after I get my gun; but all that's come to an end. Then we were to have had such capital fishing. John has been getting my tackle ready for me, and has made me a prime rod, much better than can be bought in the shops. Trap and ball, and hoops, and cricket, and marbles – not that I ever can endure marbles – and rounders, and prisoner's base, and all those sort of games, can be had at school even better than at home, with the fellows one may pick up; so that won't make any difference. But, as far as I can make out, they don't let one go out birds'-nesting, or ferreting, or cross-bow shooting, or badger hunting, or any of those sort of things which John Pratt is up to. Schools must be very slow places, that's my opinion. I don't suppose we might even blow up a wasps' nest, if we were to find one. If John Pratt might go and live near, and take me out every day, and have some fun or other, I shouldn't mind it.

Then, you see, I don't like leaving Kate and little Gusty. What Kate will do without me I do not know at all. I hope Miss Apsley will treat her kindly; if he don't I'll – " and Digby looked very fierce, but said nothing more.

"If you don't like school, all you've to do is to run away," said Julian, ever ready to offer evil counsel. "That's what I would do, I know; or, if you don't like the idea of going there, run away before. Send to me, and I'll help you; I'm always ready to help a friend in need."

"Thank you," said Digby; "oh, I know you would be, but I promised my father that I would go willingly if he wished to send me; so go I must."

Julian might have urged that promises were like piecrust, as the vulgar saying runs, made to be broken: but he already knew enough of Digby to be aware that such an opinion would have no response in his bosom, so he only said, "Well, when you get there, and change your mind, only let me know, and I will help you if I ran."

Julian, two days after this, to his astonishment found that his things were packed, and his father's carriage coming to the door, he was told that after he had had some luncheon he was to go home. Mr and Mrs Heathcote, however, wished him good-bye very kindly, and so did the Miss Heathcotes, and of course Digby did, so he began to hope that nothing had been discovered. No one, however, said that they hoped soon to see him again. He went away smiling in very good humour with himself, and

tolerably so with the rest of the world. The next day Digby was sent off to Mr Nugent's; this he did not at all like; he would rather have gone to school at once. He recollected how very slow he had always thought the life there – the hours were so regular and early, and he had no field-sports of any kind to indulge in. Kate, however, promised to keep up a constant correspondence with him, and to tell him all that went forward at home. He undertook to write long letters to her in return, at which she smiled, for hitherto he decidedly had not exhibited any proficiency either in orthography or calligraphy, indeed it required a considerable amount of patience and ingenuity to decipher his epistles. Digby loved his father and mother well, though I have not said so; he had an affectionate parting from them. John Pratt drove him over to Osberton. His uncle received him in a very kind way; he did not allude in the slightest way to any of his late misdemeanors. There were four or five other boys there as pupils, considerably older than he was. They seemed very quiet, well-behaved lads, and perfectly happy and contented with their lot. Mr Nugent, though strict in insisting on his directions being obeyed, evidently ruled by love rather than by fear. Mrs Nugent was also a very amiable, kind person, who took a warm interest in the lads committed to her husband's charge. Digby had before seen very little of his aunt. Before he had been there many days he felt that he liked her very much. Really the time was much more pleasantly spent than he expected. Mr Nugent was never idle for a moment; when out of doors he was always moving about visiting his parishioners;

in the house, he was superintending the studies of his pupils, or writing or reading himself. In an evening he would always read some interesting book to them – he never failed to select one with which they were anxious to go on; he encouraged those who could draw, or net, or make models of wood, or pasteboard, to go on at the same time with their manual occupations. Digby could do nothing of the sort. His notion of drawing was very limited indeed; however, his aunt undertook to teach him. By learning how to hold his pencil properly, and to move his hand freely, he was surprised to find what rapid progress he made; he first had very simple sketches to copy – houses and barns, the greater number of the lines in which were perpendicular or horizontal. She would not let him have any other sketches till he had learned to draw what he called the up and down, and the along lines properly.

"You must do that again, Digby," she used to say in her laughing, kind tone. "I make my houses stand upright, and I cannot allow you to let them tumble down. Till you have learned to build up a barn or a cottage you must not attempt to erect a church or a castle. See, you will be able, if you persevere, to do drawings like these."

And she showed him some very attractive coloured sketches, well calculated to excite his ambition to equal them. The books, too, his uncle read, or which he allowed one of the other boys to read, were frequently very amusing, though instructive fictions – accounts of the adventures and travels of lads, just

such as boys like; sometimes history was read, and always once in the week some very interesting book on religious subjects. It is a great mistake to suppose that such subjects cannot be made interesting, independent of their vast, their unspeakable importance. Altogether Digby found the evenings pass much more pleasantly than he had when he spent them in the idle, do-nothing way to which he had been accustomed at home. What numbers and numbers of valuable hours are thrown away – not even spent in amusement, but literally in doing nothing, and in being discontented, and sleepy, and stupid, which might and ought to be employed in so profitable and interesting a manner. Mr Nugent frequently spoke to his pupils on the subject of the proper employment of their time, and although many had come to him as accustomed to idle and waste it, as was Digby, they very soon, from experiencing the pleasure and advantages it afforded them, began to wish to spend it profitably. He used to remark – "Never suppose that you are doing no harm when you are idle. Remember, in the first place, that 'Satan finds some evil still for idle hands to do;' so you are voluntarily exposing yourself to his temptations. In that alone you are wrong; but also understand that time is given us to be employed aright; that is tilt tenure, so to speak, on which we hold our existence; our intellects, our talents, our strength, our faculties of mind and body, were bestowed on us for that object. Boys and young people, and even grown men and women, fancy they were sent into the world only to amuse themselves. If they have wealth at their disposal they think that

they are at liberty to spend their time in as pleasant a way as possible, and as for reckoning up each day what good thing they have done in the world, and saying how have I employed the talent entrusted by my Maker to my charge, such an idea never comes into their heads; but, my boys, I want it to come into your heads and hearts, and to fix it there firmly. If you have wealth at your disposal, consider, and reflect, and pray, that you may be guided how to employ it aright; if you are compelled to labour for your existence, work away with a willing heart and hand, always remembering that you are labouring in the sight of God, and that he approves of those who are doing their best to perform their duty in that state of life into which he has called them." Digby listened to these remarks; they were quite new to him, and he did not entirely understand them; but they made an impression, and got stowed away somewhere in the crannies of his mind and heart, and in after years found their way to the surface to some effect. Digby got on much better with his lessons than he had done with Mr Crammer. All that gentleman seemed to aim at was to make him *say* a lesson; he learnt to say his Latin grammar glibly enough, and to answer set questions in geography and history; and as to his comprehension of what he was repeating, no inquiries were made. The consequences may be supposed, and poor Digby, with fair natural abilities, possessed the very smallest modicum of the information which the books he had read were capable of affording. Mr Nugent, on the contrary, cared little how a pupil said his lessons from a

book; his object was to put information into his head, and not only to make it stay there, but to show him how to employ it profitably when required. He used to explain that dictionaries, and grammars, and delectuses, and graduses, and pens, and ink, and paper, and the art of reading, were only so many mechanical contrivances for acquiring knowledge. The first thing to be done is to learn to use them to the best advantage.

(Note: a Gradus is a textbook used to train people learning Latin in the art of writing Latin verse, especially hexameters and pentameters.)

"Now, Marshall and Digby, take those two Latin dictionaries, and find me out the meaning of the words *Luna circum terram movetur*."

Marshall placed his dictionary well before him, rapidly turning over the leaves with the thumb of one hand, while he held them fast with the other: as his quick eye caught sight of them, he wrote them down on a piece of paper by his side.

Digby fumbled away awkwardly, going backwards and forwards, showing clearly that he did not know how to handle a dictionary. "What were the words you said, Uncle?" he asked at last.

Marshall had looked out and written all his down and poor Digby had actually forgotten them before he had been able to find one of them out.

"The moon moves, or is moved, round the earth," said Marshall, quietly.

"Now you see, Digby, the advantage of being able to turn over the leaves of a dictionary rapidly," said Mr Nugent. "Of two people with equal talents, the one who possesses that simple mechanical power to the greatest perfection will beat the other, in as far as he will gain the information for which he is seeking in so much less time. A rapid, clear writer, and a person with a quick observant eye, has a great advantage over those who do not possess those qualifications."

Digby very well understood these observations, and set to work to practise turning over the leaves of his dictionary and in looking out words, till, with no little triumph, he proved that he could find out a word almost as quickly as Marshall.

It was not, however, all work and no play at Mr Nugent's. He was near a river as well as near the sea, and, though he did not wish to give the boys a taste for a naval life, yet he was anxious that they should be instructed in rowing and sailing a boat, and in swimming. Digby had prided himself in being a proficient for his age in all manly sports, but he found that he was very inferior to his fellow-pupils with regard to those connected with the water. It was satisfactory, however, to find from Marshall, who became his chief friend, that when they first came they were no better than he was. They were mostly as ignorant, and accustomed to be idle, and knew nothing of aquatic amusements. Mr Nugent, who was very fond of boating, though he had little time to spend in it, occasionally went out with them; but on other occasions they were committed to the charge of an old seaman, Tobias Tubb

by name. Of course he was always called Toby Tubb, or still more familiarly spoken of as Toby. Toby had served in all sorts of craft, from a line-of-battle ship to a collier, and, report said, at one time in a smuggling lugger; but he had good reasons for not wishing that circumstance to be alluded to. He was loquacious enough, however, with regard to all the other events of his life, which he pumped up from time to time from the depths of his memory, and sent them flowing forth in a rich stream for the benefit of his hearers. He was a great favourite with the boys, who delighted to listen to his yarns; and he took an interest in his young charges, and was equally pleased to describe the events of his nautical career. His boat was a fine wholesome craft, eighteen feet long, with good beam. She had a spritsail, jib, foresail, and mizen. Never did he appear so happy as when he had them all on board for an afternoon's sail. Tubb was a very appropriate name for him. He was somewhat stout and short, with a round, ruddy, good-natured countenance, a bald forehead, and white hair on either side of it. He was all roundness. His head was round, and his face was round, and his eyes, and his nose, and his mouth were round. His nose was like a very funny little round button; but it looked so good-natured, and cocked up so quaintly, that the boys declared that they would not have it changed on any account for the first Roman nose in existence. No more, probably, would Toby, who had been very well contented with it for full sixty years, it having, as he said, served him many a good turn during that period. "No, no; we should never be ashamed of old friends

who have been faithful and true, and wish to exchange them for finer folk," he used to remark, when, as was sometimes the case, his fellow-boatmen humorously twitted him about his lose.

The first day that Digby went out in the John Dory, as Toby called his boat, he discovered his ignorance of nautical affairs. He had day after day been on the ponds at Bloxholme, but then John Pratt had rowed him about, and he had never thought of learning to row himself.

The river was wide at the mouth, and, as there were deep sheltered bays, it was a good place for rowing. When sailing, however, it was necessary to be careful, for gusts often came down suddenly between the cliffs, and had frequently upset boats the people in which had not been ready to let go the sheets in an instant. There was no wind this day.

"Now, young gen'man," said Toby, looking at Digby, "you'll just take an oar and pull with the rest?"

"Oh yes," answered Digby, who was always ready to undertake any manual exercise, "I'll row."

Marshall and the other boys got out the oars. Toby eyed Digby, and guessed, by the way he handled his oar the state of the case. However, Digby persevered in silence.

The boat slowly receded from the shore, Toby steering. Digby, who sat about midships, looked at Marshall, and Easton, and Power, who sat further astern, and tried to imitate their movements. He did so very fairly. He thought that he was performing his part wonderfully well.

Toby's nose curled more than usual as he looked at him.

"Give way, my lads, give way," he sung out.

The other boys instantly bent to their oars, and made much more rapid strokes than before. Digby had not the slightest notion what "giving way" meant. He only knew, to his cost, that he gave way, for his oar caught in the water, and over he toppled on his back to the bottom of the boat.

"Caught a crab, caught a crab," sung out the other boys, laughing.

Digby jumped up immediately, full of eagerness, not minding his bruises a bit.

"Have I? Where is he? where is he? Let me see him," he exclaimed.

This made the rest laugh still more.

"It's only the sort of crab most young ge'men catches when first they begins to learn to row," said Toby; "jump up and take your oar, and you'll soon catch another, I warrant."

So Digby found, but he was not a boy to be beat by such an occurrence. Each time he jumped up as quickly as he could, and grasping his oar, went on pulling as before.

"What do you mean by 'Give way?'" he asked, when he discovered that these words invariably produced the unpleasant results.

"I means much the same as the soldier officers does when they says 'Double quick march.'"

"Oh, I see, we are to make the boat go as fast as we can,"

observed Digby.

After that he caught fewer crabs, Toby having also advised him not to dip the blade of his oar so deeply in the water. In a few days he learned how to feather his oar, that is, when lifting the blade out of the water, to turn it, so as to keep it almost horizontal with the surface. This is done that it may not hold wind, and in a rough sea, that it may be less likely to be struck by a wave, or if it is, that it may cut through the top. He also learned to keep time with the rest, a very essential requisite in rowing.

"You've done capitally," said Marshall, after they landed the first day, "many fellows have been here for some time before they have done as well."

This praise encouraged Digby, and he determined to learn to be a good boatman. He expressed his intentions to Toby. The old man laughed.

"You'll be good enough in time, I've no doubt, master, but it will take you some years before you are fit to be trusted. There's nothing but experience will make a sailor. You must be out in gales of wind, and have all your sails blown away, and your masts carried over the side, and find yourself on a lee shore on a dark night, with rocks close aboard, and no room to wear, and the wind blowing great guns and small arms, and a strong current running here and there, and setting you on to the coast; and then, if you find means to save the ship, I'll allow that you're something of a sailor."

Digby did not know what all this meant, but he thought the

description very dreadful, and certainly he had no notion how he should act. As, however, he had no wish to become a real sailor, that did not trouble him. Easton, however, took in every word that was said. He had set his heart on going to sea, and none of the descriptions of shipwrecks and disasters in which the old man indulged had any terrors for him. They only the more excited his ardour, and he longed to encounter and overcome them.

When Toby Tubb saw that Digby could row fairly, he began to teach him to sail a boat.

"First you have to learn how to steer, Master Digby," he observed; "look over the stern, you see how the rudder is, now put your hand in the same line above it. Now I press against your hand, the water is pressing just in the same way against the rudder. If you keep your arm stiff, I should make you turn round. Now, the rudder is stiff as long as you don't let the tiller move, and so the water turns the boat round. Now put the tiller over on the opposite side, then you see the boat also turns the opposite way. You understand, to steer you must be going on, or, what's the same thing, a current must be running past you. If there is no movement in the water, you may wriggle the tiller about as much as you please, and you can't turn the boat's head. Just understand, too, that the water is a thing that presses. It will give way, certainly. It is not like a rock, but still it presses all around you. That's the reason why a vessel sails stem first, that is to say, she cuts the water with the sharpest part, if the sails are trimmed properly to make her do so. You may trim the sails to

make her sail stern first, or if there's a gale of wind right abeam, she goes partly ahead, but also drives before it with her side, that's what we call making lee way. Now as to the sails, you see, we have to balance them, or to trim them, as we call it. Once, I'm told, ships were only made to sail right before the wind. Funny voyages they must have been, I'm thinking. What a time they must have been about them, waiting for a fair wind; no wonder they didn't get round the world in those days. Now, you see, we can sail not only with the wind abeam as close, as four and a half points to the wind in fore and after craft. Still if we want to get where the wind blows from, we could never do it if we couldn't tack ship, and sail away four and a half points on the other side of the wind. That's what we call working a traverse. Away a ship sails, zig-zagging along if there isn't too much wind to blow her back, every tack making good some ground till she reaches the port to which she's bound. That's what I calls the *philusfy* of navigation. But I haven't yet told you how the sails act on the vessel. You see the wind presses on them, just as the water does on the hull. The better you can get the wind to blow on them at what they calls a right angle, the greater force it has. So in a square-rigged ship, if you can bring the wind a little on the quarter, so that every sail, studden-sails, alow and aloft, can be made to draw, you'll have the greatest pressure on the sails, and send the ship on the fastest. But we come to balancing, when a ship is on a wind. If all the sail was set forward, it would turn her head round, or if all was set aft it would turn her stern round.

So we set some forward, and some aft, and some amidships, and then we trim them together properly, and away she goes in the direction we put her head. Then, you see, if we want to turn her head round we shake the wind out of her after sails, or trice them up, and if we want her stem to go round, we do the same with her head sails, and that, Master Heathcote, is what I calls the theory of sailing. There's a good deal more for you to learn before you will be fit to be trusted in a boat by yourself, but if you keeps close to those principles, you can't be far wrong in the long run."

Such was Digby's first lesson in seamanship. He did not take in all that was said to him; indeed he was rather young for comprehending the subject, but it made him think and inquire further; and Toby Tubb was perfectly satisfied that his lessons were not thrown away.

"It's very strange," soliloquised Toby, "the fathers and mothers of these young ge'men pays lots of money to have 'em taught to ride and dance, and to speak Latin and French, and all sorts of gimcrack nonsense, and not one in a thousand ever thinks of making them learn how to knot, and splice, and reef, and steer, and to take an observation, or work a day's work, which to my mind is likely to be far more useful to 'em when they comes to take care of themselves in the world. As for me, I don't know what I should have done without the first, though the shooting the sun and the navigation was above me a good way."

"There's nothing like leather." Toby would have said, there is nothing like hemp, and pitch, and tar, and heart of oak. It is quite

as well that different people should have different opinions. Thus the world is prevented from stagnating.

Chapter Four

Digby Gains a Knowledge of Boating and other Manly Employments – The Wonders of the Sea-Side – A Shipwreck – Digby Proves himself a Hero – How he gained a Friend

Digby, as he became more practised in the arts, gained a keen relish for boating, not mere pulling, but for sailing – the harder it blew, the better pleased he was. In this he was joined by Easton, who was always delighted when old Toby would take them out on a stormy day. Marshall and the others confessed that they liked fine weather sailing.

"But, suppose the boat was capsized, what would you do?" said Marshall to Digby.

"Hold on to her, I suppose," was the answer.

"But very likely you would be thrown to a distance, what then?"

"Why I should try and catch what was nearest to me," replied Digby.

"But suppose there was nothing near you," remarked his friend.

"Then, I suppose I should – . Let me see, I scarcely know

what I should do – I should try to swim," said Digby, after some hesitation.

"That is just what I wanted to bring you to," said Marshall. "You have not learned to swim, you know, and you assuredly would not then swim for the first time, so that if no one was near to help you, you would inevitably be drowned. Take my advice – learn to swim forthwith; Toby will teach you. If you were to go to Eton, you would not be allowed to go in the boats till you had learnt. Everybody should know how to swim, both for their own sakes and for the benefit of their fellow-creatures. It is really disgraceful for an English boy not to know how to do what even savages can do so well."

Marshall went on in this style till Digby felt perfectly ashamed of himself, and resolved to learn as soon as possible if Toby would teach him. He was manly enough, as has been seen, in disposition, but all his knowledge of manly exercises he had acquired from John Pratt, except riding, which his father had taken a pride in teaching him. Swimming was not among John Pratt's accomplishments, and so Digby had remained ignorant of it. There are many boys like him, brought up at home or at small private schools, who are even worse off. In many instances their education is very carefully attended to, but for fear of accidents they are not allowed to bathe, or climb trees, or to shoot. Numbers have suffered from this mistake when they have had to go out into the world and take care of themselves – they have been drowned, when, had they been able to swim, their lives

would have been saved; had they been accustomed to climb, they might have scaped from a burning house, a wrecked ship, or a wild beast, while they have been called upon to use fire-arms before they know how to load a gun.

"Toby," said Digby, "I want to learn how to swim."

"Then come along, master," replied the old man, and they rowed across to a quiet little bay, with a sandy shore, sheltered by rocks, on the side of the river opposite the town. "Pull off your clothes, master," said Toby, as they were still some little way from the shore.

Digby did as he was bid.

"Now, jump overboard," added Toby.

Digby stood up, but as he looked into the water and could see no bottom, he shuddered at the thought of plunging in. Toby passed a band round his waist with a rope to it, but Digby scarcely perceived this – he felt himself pushed, and over he went, heels over head, under the water.

"Oh, I'm drowning, I'm drowning," he cried out when he came to the surface.

"Oh no, you're not, master, you're all right," said the old man. "Strike out for the shore, and try if you can't swim there."

Digby did strike out, but wildly, and not in a way that would have kept him afloat.

"That's the way you'd have done if the boat was capsized, and you'd have drowned yourself and any one who came to help you," remarked Toby; "but catch hold of this oar. Now strike away with

your feet, right astern; not out of the water, though; keep them lower down. That's the way to go ahead. Steady, though; strike both of them together. Slow, though; slower. We're in no hurry, there's plenty of time; you can learn the use of your hands another day. Draw your legs well under you. Now, as I give the word – strike out, draw up; strike out, draw up. That will do famously. If you keep steadily at it you'll learn to swim in a very few days."

Digby felt rather tired when he and the boat at length reached the shore. He had some notion that he had towed her there, which he had not, though. He had learned an important part of the art of swimming. When he came out of the water, and had dressed, Toby showed him how to use his hands.

"Now, Master Heathcote, look here. Do as I do."

Toby put his hands together, with the fingers straight out and close to each other, and the palms slightly hollowed. Then he brought them up to his breast, and darting them forward, separated his hands and pressed them backwards till he brought his elbows down to the hips, close to his body, and again turned his wrists till his hands once more got back to the attitude with which he had started. He made Digby do this over and over again, till he was quite eager to jump into the water and put his knowledge into practice.

"No, no, master," said Toby, "you've had bathing enough to-day. Just do you keep on doing those movements whenever you have a spare moment, and to-morrow we'll see how well you can do them in the water."

Digby was certain that not only would he do them perfectly, but that he should be able to swim any distance.

Toby said nothing, but his nose curled up in its quiet funny way.

The next day was very fine, and all the boys came down to bathe, and to see Digby swim, as he boasted he could do perfectly well. They crossed over to the bay, all of them getting ready for a plunge.

"Now, Digby," cried Marshall, when they got near the shore, "overboard we go."

"All right," cried Digby, putting his hands into the scientific attitude, as far as he could recollect it; and, with great courage, he jumped into the water.

Somehow or other, he could not tell why, down he went some way under the surface, and when he came up he had forgotten all about the way to strike out which Toby had taught him. Instead of that, he flung about his arms and kicked his legs out in the wildest manner, and would have gone down again had not Marshall swam up alongside him, and, putting his hand under his chin, told him to keep perfectly quiet till he had collected his senses. He had resolution enough to do this, and was surprised to find himself floating on the surface of the water with so little support.

"Bravo, Master Marshall," cried Toby. "Now strike out, Master Heathcote, as I showed you."

The recollection of how to strike came back to Digby, and, to his great delight, he found himself making some progress

towards the shore, his friend still holding him up by the chin.

"Let me go, I am sure I can swim alone," he cried.

Marshall did so, but, after a few strokes, down he went, and again he forgot what he had done so satisfactorily on dry land. His feet, however, touched the bottom, and, hopping on one leg, he went on striking out with his hands, and fancying that he was swimming, till he reached the shore. His companions, of course, laughed at him, but he did not mind that, and, running in again, he made one or two more successful attempts, but he forbore boasting any more of the distance he was going to swim. When once again he had gone out till the water reached his chin, he found the boat close to him.

"Don't be swimming any more, Master Heathcote, but give me your hand," said Toby, taking it. "There, now throw yourself on your back, stick your legs out, put your head back as far as it will go, lift up your chest, now don't move, let your arms hang down. There, I'll hold you steady; a feather would do it. Now you feel how the water keeps you up. There, you might stay there for an hour, or a dozen hours for that matter, if it wasn't for the cold, in smooth water. You'll learn to swim in a very few days now, I see, without your clothes, and then you must learn with your clothes on. If I couldn't have done that I should not have been here; I should have been drownded long ago."

Thus discoursing, the old man let Digby float by the side of the boat till he had been long enough in the water, and then he helped him out and made him dress quickly.

The other boys then got in, and consulted together how they should spend the remainder of the afternoon. Power, who was the chief fisherman of the party, voted for going outside and trying to catch some mackerel. No objections were made. Toby consented: he had lines and hooks in the boat.

They pulled down to the mouth of the river, and were very soon in the open sea. There was scarcely any wind, the sea was blue and bright, the coast was picturesque, with rocky headlands, and white sandy bay; and green downs above, and cliffs on which numberless wildfowl had taken up their habitations. As they pulled close under the rocks, numbers of gulls flew out, screaming loudly at the intruders on their domains.

"I have often thought, when I have heard people talking of their ancient families and their ancient homes, how much more ancient are the families and the abodes of those white-coated gentry," observed Marshall. "Up there, now, perhaps, the ancestors of those birds have lived, from generation to generation, since the flood. They witnessed the first peopling of our tight little island by the painted savages, who were as barbarous as the New Zealanders or the Fejee Islanders of the present century; the landing of Julius Caesar and his warriors, the battles of the Norsemen, the Danes, and the Saxons, and the defeat of the Spanish armada. I wish that they could tell us all the interesting things they have seen."

Easton liked the idea. Digby did not understand it, for his knowledge of history was very limited.

"I know what they've seen," observed Toby. "They've seen many a cargo of smuggled silks, and teas, and brandies run hereabouts, in days gone by."

"Oh, those smugglers are jolly fellows!" exclaimed Digby. "I should like to see something of their fun. I can't fancy any finer sport than landing a cargo and having to run the gauntlet among a whole posse of revenue officers."

"Something like prisoners' base, you would say," observed Marshall, "only, I suspect, with a greater chance of being caught and shut up for a longer time than would be pleasant."

"I'll tell you what it is, young gentlemen," said Toby, who had been listening in silence to Digby's and the other boys' thoughtless remarks, "smuggling is a very bad business, let me tell you. I've seen something of it, and I know what it is. I've seen money made by it, I'll allow, just as I've seen money made by other evil practices; but I've seen very many fine fellows brought to a bad end by it, and have never known any to prosper long at it. Laws were made for the good of all, and no man has a right to break them for his own advantage or pleasure. Though I'm only a poor boatman I've found that out, and it's my duty to make others understand the truth, as well as I can."

The boys confessed that they had never before seen the matter in that light. They had thought smugglers, and pirates, and bandits, and highwaymen, and outlaws of all descriptions very fine fellows; and it had never occurred to them that they should be looked upon as base scoundrels, who deserved to be hung, or

severely punished in some other way.

"Now let us have out the lines," exclaimed Power, who was eager to begin fishing. Two of the party paddled the boat on, relieving each other, at the rate of about two miles an hour.

Toby produced four long, thin lines, wound up on wooden reels. The lines were considerably slighter than log-lines. Five hooks were fastened to each, about a yard apart.

"But where is the bait?" asked Digby. "You cannot catch fish without bait."

"Oh, mackerel are in no ways particular," answered Toby; "a bit of tin or white rag will attract them; but see, I have some hooks with some capital bait. It is called a white cock's hackle. The feathers are fastened on to the butt, and project an inch or more beyond the bend, so as to cover the barb. This is certain to catch any fish which see it."

The lines were thrown overboard, one on each side, and one over each quarter. Toby assisted Digby to manage his.

Digby was quite delighted when he felt a sharp tug at the end of his line.

"Haul in, haul in; you've got him," said Toby.

Digby hauled away, and soon he saw a fish skimming and jumping along on the smooth surface of the blue water, leaving a thin wake behind him, while his bright scales glistened in the sun. Digby shouted with glee, – "I've the first, I've the first. Huzza!"

He almost tumbled overboard in his eagerness to catch hold of the fine mackerel which came with what he called a hop, skip,

and a jump alongside. He lifted the fish in. The poor mackerel, with his dark back and white belly, did not look nearly so bright out of the water as he had done in it. Digby thought it a very elegant-looking fish, and very unlike any he had ever before caught with John Pratt.

"Now we shall catch a plenty," said Toby, as, to Digby's dismay, he took the fish, and, cutting it up into strips, baited each of the hooks with it. "These mackerel like nothing better than their own kind."

Two or three dozen mackerel were quickly caught, of which Digby hauled up several.

"But have we no chance of catching any carp, or tench, or perch?" he asked, seriously. "I should have thought that there must be plenty about here."

His companions laughed heartily.

"What is the taste of the water alongside?" asked Marshall.

"Salt," said Digby, tasting it.

"Do you think freshwater fish will live in salt-water?" observed his friend.

"Oh, you fine sportsman! You laugh at us for not knowing so much about dogs, and horses, and shooting, and racing, and hunting as you pretend to do, and yet you are ignorant of far more important, and just as interesting matters."

"Still, young gentlemen, I'm thinking that every man shines most in his own element, as the mackerel would say, if they could speak, and would rather be left there," observed Toby, who was

a great philosopher in many respects, although no man could be much more prejudiced with regard to his own calling of a sailor than he was. Such is often the ease. When judging of the opinion of others, we should always try to discover whether we are not prejudiced too much in favour of our own.

The boys had a capital evening's sport, and Digby learned much more about conger-eels, and whiting, and bass, and mullet, and turbot, and plaice, and John Dories, and brill, and other salt-water fish, than he had ever known before. He was daily discovering, by practical experience, that there are many things in creation "of which he had never before dreamed in his philosophy." In other words, he began to suspect, that though he was a very fine fellow, daring to do anything, and ready to fight any boy of his age, he was in reality a remarkably ignorant young gentleman. This, to a lad of Digby's disposition, was a very important discovery. He was, I hope, on the high road to improvement. There is a saying, that "Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise;" but depend on it, the moment the ignorance is suspected, it is much greater folly not to set strenuously to work to correct it.

When the lads got home, they recounted with great glee their adventures, and offered, with much satisfaction, their baskets of fish to Mrs Nugent. They were served up fresh for breakfast and dinner the next day, and for two or three days afterwards, cut open and salted.

Digby heard Mr Nugent speaking of the wonders of the deep.

"What, uncle, are there any things besides fish in the sea?" he asked with, what the other boys thought, an almost incredible amount of simplicity.

One of the few recreations Mr Nugent allowed himself, was a fishing expedition on board a trawler. Not that he cared much for the fish which the trawl caught, but his delight was to examine the numberless specimens of animal marine life which came up at the same time. Digby heard his uncle and Marshall talking about Noctilucae, and Medusae, and Cydippi Actiniae, and Asterias, and Echini, and Terebellae, and Nereides, and Cirripedes, and Solens, and Gastropods, and numberless other creatures with hard names, which he thought that he could never recollect, and about which he was persuaded he could not understand.

"And are all these animals found in the sea near here?" he asked.

"Yes, and thousands more," answered his uncle; "it would take a lifetime to catch and note the habits of those found on this coast alone. Each person can only hope to add a little to the stock of knowledge which others have obtained, and to ascertain what has been discovered by others. Still, the pursuit of that knowledge is so delightful, as is, indeed, the study of all God's works, that those occupied in it find themselves amply repaid for all the physical and mental exertion they have to take to attain it."

"Are the things you speak of like horses, and dogs, and cats, or more like fish?" asked Digby, seriously. "I should think with such curious names they must be very curious looking things."

Marshall and Power laughed heartily, and even his uncle could not help smiling as he replied:

"Curious and wonderful, indeed, they are, but they are not fish in appearance, and still less like terrestrial quadrupeds. Some have their heads at the end of their feet, and their eyes at the extremities of their arms. Some walk on their heads, and others have their arms growing from the top of their heads. Some, too, can turn themselves inside out, and others of their own accord, break themselves to pieces, and then, what is more wonderful still, like one of the tricks to be seen at a pantomime, the bits send forth arms, and legs, and heads, and tails, and become perfect animals again."

Digby listened with mute astonishment. He knew that his uncle would not tell him an untruth, and yet he fancied that, somehow or other, he must be laughing at him. The account he had heard, however, made him look forward eagerly to the promised trawling expedition.

The day approached, but Digby was doomed to be disappointed. A heavy gale of wind sprung up in the evening, and blew with great violence during the night.

The next day was Saturday, and was a half-holiday. Just as the boys had finished their lessons, a servant-girl came running in, exclaiming:

"Oh, sir, they say that there is a big ship driving on the shore, and that all the poor souls in her will be lost. Oh, it's very dreadful! oh dear! oh dear!"

Mr Nugent seized his hat and stick, and the boys prepared to follow him.

"Stay, we will take a brandy-flask, and any rope to be had – a long pole may be useful."

These articles being quickly found, the boys carrying them, they hurried out to the beach.

Not the eighth of a mile from the shore was a dismasted vessel, rolling and tumbling about in the most fearful manner. The crew were trying to get up jury-masts, or sheers rather, which are formed of two spars, the butt ends resting against the sides of the ship, and the others joined together. The sheers were got up, and then an endeavour was made to hoist a sail on them, to beat the ship off the shore. It was utterly useless. The sail was blown to ribbons, and the sheers blown away. The last resource was to anchor. This was done, and the ship rode head to wind, plunging, however, even more violently than before. Toby Tubb just then joined Mr Nugent and his pupils.

"There's no use in it. There's no ground here will hold an anchor ten minutes together." His prediction proved too true. On drove the hapless ship. She had parted from her anchors, no human power could avert the expected catastrophe. The only hope that any of those on board could be saved, would be that the ship might drive into the sandy cove in which they were standing. If she struck on the dark ledges of rock outside, not a person on board, it was thought, could be saved. The sea was breaking with tremendous violence over them, creating sheets of foam, which

were driven towards the shore, almost blinding the lookers-on.

Digby thought he could almost hear the shrieks of the unfortunate people on board. He could see them, clearly, throwing up their arms, as if imploring aid from their fellow-men, who were utterly unable to afford it.

"Could no boat go off to them?" asked Mr Nugent, eagerly.

"No, sir, no boat would live a second in that sea, alongside those rocks," answered Toby; "what men can do we will do, when the time comes; more is unpossible."

"I have a rope and some poles, you see," said Mr Nugent; "they may be useful."

"So have I, sir, but two ropes may be better than one," was Toby's reply. "Now, lads, be ready to do what I tells you; follow me."

He addressed a party of seamen and fishermen, not all very young though, who were standing near with their hands in their pockets, exhibiting, apparently, very little interest in what was going forward. The ill-fated ship rose on the top of the huge waves which rolled onward towards the shore. Now it appeared that she would be engulphed between them. No further effort was made on board to save her. Such would have been hopeless. Each person was intent on making preparations for his own safety. Digby gazed with horror; he felt inclined to shriek out himself, as he saw the danger of the poor fellows on board. He would gladly have run away and forgotten all about it, but yet he could not tear himself from the spot, or his eyes from the driving ship. A few

minutes more, and her fate would be sealed.

"Follow me, lads," suddenly exclaimed old Toby, and led the way towards a ledge of rocks which jutted out into the sea, and formed one side of the bay of which I have spoken.

In a moment the fishermen had their hands out of their pockets, and were all life and activity. Carrying some long spars and several coils of rope, they hurried after Toby to the end of the reef. Toby was seen to stop. Digby and his companions held their breath – well they might. It seemed as if the ship must strike the very end of that black reef, over which the sea was breaking with violence so fearful that it must have shattered to fragments the stoutest ship that ever floated. On she came; there was a pause it seemed; a cross-sea struck her, and amidst a deluge of foam she was hurled past the point, and driven in towards the bay. Another sea lifted her up, and then down she came on the beach, still far out among the breakers, with a tremendous crash, which seemed to shake the very shore. Now was the moment of greatest peril to those on board – the seas meeting with a resistance they had not hitherto found, dashed furiously over the hull, carrying away the bulwarks, and the boats, and caboose, and everything still remaining on deck. The crew clung to ropes made fast to the stumps of the masts, or to ring-bolts in the decks, but the strength of many of them could not withstand the fury of the seas. One after the other was torn from his hold, and hurled among the boiling breakers. In vain the poor fellows struck out; the receding waves dashed them against the side of the ship, or carried them

struggling hopelessly far out to sea, where they were lost to sight among the foam.

While this was going forward, Toby and his companions were trying every means they could think of to get a rope carried to the wreck. Unfortunately they were unprovided with Captain Manby's apparatus, or any other contrivance for throwing a shot with a line attached to it over a wreck, so that by the line a hawser might be hauled on shore. There were none of those excellent inventions – life-boats – in the neighbourhood, which are now, happily, stationed all along the British coast, and have been the means of saving the lives of numbers of human beings; even the coastguard officer and most of his men had gone that morning to a distance. Toby had, therefore, to trust to his own resources. The crew seemed utterly unable to make any effort to save themselves; indeed they saw that should they let go their hold, any moment they might be washed overboard and drowned. Toby had got a small keg, to which he fastened a line, and seemed to hope that it might be carried out by the receding wave towards the wreck, but though it went some way, another wave came in before it got far enough to be of any use, and sent it rolling back again with a coil of seaweed, mixed with sand and foam, on the beach. Toby next fastened a rope round his own waist, and seemed to contemplate the possibility of swimming off himself to the wreck, but the men round him held him back, persuading him that the risk was too great. He stood, evidently seeing that there was very little chance of success. Now another huge wave

came foaming up. The crew turned their heads with a gaze of horror and alarm as they watched its approach. On it came, roaring loudly. All on board grasped with a gripe, in which the force of every sinew and muscle was exerted to the utmost, the masts and ropes to which they were holding. The wave struck the ship, shaking her huge hull to the keel, and driving her still further on the beach. One poor fellow must have had a less secure gripe than the rest, or else its fury must have been concentrated on him. It tore him from his hold, lifted him up, and as it passed over, he was seen struggling in the water. He struck out boldly. Now the roaring hissing sea carried him onward, then back again, now a side wave took him and drove him in the direction of the spot where Toby and his companions were standing. Toby signed to the men to hold the rope, and plunging in amid the foam, struck out towards the struggling seaman. Now they were separated, now they were brought nearer together. Now it seemed as if the stranger would be carried out, as had been the others, by the receding wave. But the brave fellow still struggled on. It was too evident, however, that his efforts were growing weaker and weaker. Toby sung out to him to encourage him to persevere. Toby got close to him, but just then a hissing wave went rolling back, the stranger threw up his arms in despair, and was buried beneath the foam. Toby darted forward and disappeared beneath the water.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.